

ZEN MASTERS AT PLAY AND ON PLAY:
A TAKE ON KOANS AND KOAN PRACTICE

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by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	iv
Chapter 1. Introduction and the Question “What is Play?”	1
Chapter 2. The Koan Tradition and Koan Training	14
Chapter 3. Zen Masters At Play in the Koan Tradition	21
Chapter 4. Zen Doctrine	36
Chapter 5. Zen Masters On Play	45
 Note on the Layout of Appendixes	 79
APPENDIX 1. Seventy-fourth Koan of the <i>Blue Cliff Record</i> : “Jinniu’s Rice Pail”	80
APPENDIX 2. Ninty-third Koan of the <i>Blue Cliff Record</i> : “Daguang Does a Dance”	85
 BIBLIOGRAPHY	 89

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*On the same path, chanting in harmony,
Through the marvelous mystery . . .*

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND THE QUESTION “WHAT IS PLAY?”

The most celebrated dialogues of Zen teachers are collected in koans.¹ When encountering these teachings, one may be compelled to ask, “Why do these masters play these games?” If these gentlemen are bearers of truth, then why do they behave so, when dealing with those who come to them in earnest to be taught and thereby saved? To answer this question is the ultimate goal of this paper. There are, however, several questions that must be asked on the way.

First, the question is based on the supposition that they are in fact playing. But, what is play? Rather than construct a concept of play, I will limit myself to looking into the construction that we already have, such that the analysis will not contradict our shared experience of the word and of the phenomena to which we apply it. Rather than making

¹ My policy regarding terms and names is as follows: (1) In the body of the text I shall use English translations of terms whenever appropriate and commonly accepted ones exist. (2) When they do not, preference shall be given for the Asian term most recognizable to Anglophones somewhat familiar with the tradition. More often than not, this will be a Japanese term: “Zen” instead of “Chan,” for example. (3) Asian terms that have been absorbed into the English language in recent decades shall not be italicized. (4) The Pinyin system of Chinese romanization shall be used rather than the Wade-Giles system. (5) For the sake of consistency, all non-English terms in quotes shall appear in the preferred version even if they do not appear so in my sources, without the use of disruptive brackets. (6) Historical figures will be referred to in the modern version of their own language. This is also done without the use of disruptive brackets. (7) A footnote shall be appended to the first instance of a term or name that will list the Sanskrit version of the term, the Chinese characters for the term (traditional rather than simplified), then the Pinyin and Wade-Giles romanizations of the Chinese pronunciation, and lastly, the romanization of the Japanese pronunciation of that term or name where applicable. Thus for the sentence to which this footnote is appended: *Dhyāna* (Sk), 禪 *Chan* (PY), *Ch’an* (WG), *Zen* (J); 公案 *gongan* (PY), *kung-an* (WG), *kōan* (J).

nonsense of the term, the goal is a deeper sense of the meaning of “play.” This is the subject of the next section of this chapter.

Next, I will examine the Zen practices and texts in question by asking, “What are koans and what role do they play in Zen?” in Chapter 2, “The Koan Tradition and Koan Training.” The term *koan* may now be part of the English language, but it seems that its meaning is in need of some clarification. There are several existing models by which to consider koans, as well as some misconceptions about them. Throughout the paper, those of the *Blue Cliff Record* shall be the focus.²

With fleshed out understandings of both “play” and “koan,” I will ask, “Is koan practice a species of play?” Does the question “Why do these guys play this game?” make sense? Whereas Chapter 1 looks at the label “play” through characteristics that are common to the phenomena to which it is applied, and Chapter 2 looks at koan events, Chapter 3, “Zen Masters at Play in the Koan Tradition,” attempts to construe these events in terms of the characteristics of play, thereby rendering the application of the term to the Zen practice reasonable.

To discover why they play so, I will first discuss some of their beliefs in Chapter 4, “Zen Doctrine.” Finally, in Chapter 5, “Zen Masters on Play,” I will attempt to explain why Zen doctrine allows for, or perhaps even encourages, such playful behavior.

² 碧巖錄 *Biyānlǔ* (PY); *Pi yan lu* (WG); *Hekiganroku* (J). In the text and in the notes, *The Blue Cliff Record* shall be abbreviated *BCR*. Unless otherwise noted, all material from *BCR* will be the translation by Cleary and Cleary, as published in one volume (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1992). Thomas Cleary’s *Secrets of the Blue Cliff Record* contains all of the koans of *BCR* with commentary on the cases by Hakuin Ekaku (1685-1768) and Tenkei Denson (1648-1735), both eminent masters of Japan. *Secrets of the Blue Cliff Record* is abbreviated as *SBCR*, and “Hakuin, *SBCR* koan 74” should be taken as “Hakuin’s commentary on *BCR* koan 74, as it appears in *Secrets of the Blue Cliff Record*.” Koans of the 無門關 *Wumenguan* ([PY]; *Wu-men kuan* [WG]; *Mumonkan* [J]) are also frequently cited. Translations by Cleary, Aitken, Sekida, Kapleau, and Reps are listed in the bibliography

Before proceeding, I must articulate some limits and methodological presuppositions of this study, as well as the biases of its author. First, Zen beliefs are taken up only to the extent that they aid the answering of the guiding question. Rather than being taken up as issues in themselves, they are granted as valid within Zen, the law of their land. That the behavior is inconsistent with the beliefs of any outsider who would entertain the guiding question, is evident in the very fact of its being posed. But the question also expresses a lack of understanding and a desire to resolve it. Should the practice be successfully defended as consistent with the beliefs, then an outsider may be granted some insight into Zen.

Second, this paper revolves around a term. If philosophy's recent preoccupation with language has taught us anything, it is, perhaps, that precise and concise definition is not an easy thing to accomplish. This is especially so with "play," a term that has a very diverse range of phenomena to which it is applied. Therefore, I make no claim regarding its essence (if it has one). I have failed to achieve certainty regarding any necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of the term, and failed to find an algorithm for definite inclusion or exclusion of a phenomenon in the class of phenomena so named.

Nevertheless, since we all know what it means, one can unpack implications from various senses of "play" in an attempt to find commonalities and semantic centers of gravity under this umbrella term. Hence, in what follows, I offer a spectrum of characteristics of the phenomena to which it is applied. At one end of the spectrum are characteristics which seem to be relatively essential. That is to say that any phenomenon that is labeled so will probably exhibit such characteristics, at least in some sense. In the

middle range are characteristics that are less essential, or perhaps, less evident. At the opposite extreme are optional possibilities. For example, play can be capricious or serious.³ Naturally, the elements which I explore are those that will be of use to me in justifying the intuitive extension of the term “play” to “koan behavior.”

What is Play?

Play is *dynamic*, entailing movement and *moves*. Beyond the obvious examples of play that involve movement, we note that to “play the ace” or to “play the pawn” is to literally move it. Whereas singers sing, musical instrumentalists are said to play – and recordings are said to play - because of the physical movements required.⁴ When we speak of, say, “the play of light upon waves,” we draw attention to the rapid changes that are inherent to it. Consider also that to “play Hamlet” is to put the character (a dead potential on the page) into motion; to bring him to life.⁵ As such, play is an event by which something transpires. To say that “the movie is playing at the theater” is to say that it is happening, that it is taking place.

Fueling the sustenance of the dynamism of the happening is the fact that playing always already is *playing-with*. For every player, there is at least one thing that stands in opposition to it, something with which to be dealt. We speak of “playing with an object,”

³ While these adjectives may be used in conjunction with a host of terms other than play, I would suggest that the meaning of any term is, in part, delimited by its possibilities. That is, it is significant that a binary pair of opposites such as vertebrate and invertebrate, for example, cannot easily play a role in a taxonomy of play. I should also note that the order in which I present the elements of play is indicative of a general direction, rather than an exact sequence. These characteristics often hang together, and the proposed spectrum is merely a provisional means of organization for the conceptualization of a complex set of phenomena.

⁴ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950), 42.

⁵ The same could be said of, say, Bach, though when we say that one is “playing Bach,” we really mean that one is playing the music of Bach.

or with a playmate; of “playing an opponent” or a sonata, or a dramatic role. In order for play to happen, an interchange must take place in which something is played-with, played-along-with, played-against, and/or played-off-of.

Gadamer characterized the alternating motion between elements as the essential “to-and-fro.” Similarly, Piaget spoke of assimilation and accommodation.⁶ Taking their cues, we note that, on the one hand, play involves *adapting* to conditions and acting upon the basis of *givens*. Though we often hear of “free play,” it is only relatively so. Fields of play and play spaces have their *limits and rules* which, in contrast to the dynamic elements, are relatively static. They may be explicit, clearly delineated and absolutely binding, or implicit and flexible over time. A ball is “in play” when it is within prescribed physical bounds. To “play fair” or “play the game” is to act in accord with the rules; that is, to conduct oneself in a way that does not ruin the game and disrupt the play-world. That which is played-with is also given. When a child “plays pretend” and proclaims a frisbee to be a steering wheel, they accept, and submit their imagination to, its roundness. When musicians play together, they must listen to each other, spontaneously adjusting their playing. In games, to “play opponent x” is to first heed their playing, and to move according to it. Similarly, “playing down to an audience (or opponent)” is a species of co-operative playing-along. To “play shortstop” or to “play Macbeth” is to submit to the characterizing limits of the role. To “play a sonata” is to execute the production of sound within limits prescribed by the instrument and the composer. To

⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (NY: Crossroad Publishing, 1989), 103. Jean Piaget, *Science of Education and the Psychology of the Child*, trans. Derek Coltman (New York: Orion Press, 1970), 153-8. The reader should note that I am only appropriating terminology, and not presenting the ideas of these men. Piaget would most definitely disagree with my thesis that play is constituted by *both* assimilation and accommodation.

“play dumb,” to “play it smart,” or to “play it cool” is to act in a way already specified by others. Finally, to be a player is to, in part, give oneself over to an event. Accepting the hand dealt, and committing to play it before it is dealt, the player *submits* to the playing-out. They voluntarily sacrifice some autonomy and control over to the parameters of the particular playing, and over to the play as it unfolds.

Having been thrown by oneself into a play-world, and thereby having subjected oneself to what is there thrown, a player, nevertheless, must personally *respond* to be so called. To “play a role” (in theater or in anything) is to act. Play requires both deference and friction. In reaction to a situation and within the parameters of possibility, to “make a play” is to do something; to “make a move” is to exercise the freedoms accorded the particular player in the particular play. To “play it safe” is to select a possibility to actualize. In contest, playing-against is *exertion* on the playing-out, in opposition to certain co-players. It is reacting to what has played-out, in order to influence what will be played-out. To “play with a plaything” is not only to accept it, but also to take what it is lightly, *to impose* upon it, to act upon it. It is saying, “No. This *is not* a frisbee. It *is* a steering wheel.” Likewise, “playing off of” another is not only taking what they give, but also accommodating it to one’s own personal playing, appropriating it as one’s own plaything, often with some degree of dissonance. “Playing someone for a fool,” “playing on their feelings,” “playing politics,” “playing a prank,” “playing up” or “playing down” a situation – these are all exertions of an agent. It is partly because of such willing that we associate play with freedom, and say that for a wheel to move, there must be sufficient

“play in the bearings.” Still, play is always free re-action within prescribed limits. To be a player is to be both thrown (at) and to throw; to be both master of, and slave to, the play.

In contrast to purposive labor, however, play has been characterized (most notably by Gadamer) as lacking a *telos*, or as being *autotelic* – done for its own sake. As there is no logical, metaphysical, or biological necessity, play is *optional*. When we say that someone is “just playing around,” or tell someone to “stop playing and get to work” we allude to the autotelic dimension. Especially within the practical sphere, “play” is synonymous with abstinence from work and purposive behavior. A “playboy” behaves in an irresponsible manner, as do children, who are afforded the luxury of play in high quantities, and do so without a reason. In the adult mind, play is mere amusement, frivolous recreation that is not to be taken seriously, as it has no product, nor purpose, outside of a diversion from purposiveness. In play, even functional objects may be divorced from their ends and become open-ended, as when a broom is a horse.

To discuss this autotelic component is not, however, to deny that play may serve biological, psychological, developmental, financial, and social purposes in the wider sphere. No act of playing is autotelic in every aspect. One may play soccer *for* exercise; another, *for* money. A six year old may be forced to play Mozart *to* insure good scores on college entrance exams. In spite of their ultimate intent, we still say that they are playing. Like Aristotle’s noble deed, play may be done for its own sake and may also have further, beneficial effects. I would suggest, however, that the degree to which such people are playing for a goal that is not intrinsic to the particular playing, is the degree to which they are not playing, but rather, exercising their body, or their mind, or working as

entertainers, for example. To dwell on external reasons for playing is to abstain from the immediacy of play. In order to truly engage, such concerns must be set aside, as they have no meaning in the play-sphere. Nothing that happens within the game/play serves any of these peripheral functions. Taken away, the play itself would subsist unchanged. Nevertheless, forms of play do have their particular goals, often quite literally. Still, such targets are only provisional *ends* that exist within the play-world only as *means* to give it shape. For example, there is no intrinsic value to putting a ball in a basket. Such an act has significance imparted only within the game of basketball, the direction and definition of which is a matter of convention and somewhat arbitrary. Furthermore, if the point of basketball was to get the ball in the basket, then all parties involved would simply get out a ladder and do it. The goal is to put it in the basket within the unnecessary rules. That is, the game is absurd and impractical in that it makes its own goals more difficult to achieve. When play is useful, it is distinguished from other useful activities by such autotelic components. Hence, the means – ends framework is of limited application to play. Also falling short is the suggestion that one tries to put a ball in a basket under certain restrictions *in order to* play basketball. Rather, trying to do so *is* playing basketball. But aside from any intentions of a playing subject, ultimately, the goal of basketball itself is basketball; the goal of a sonata, a sonata.⁷

Though the “goal” is clear in such cases, and elements of any athletic or artistic performance are predetermined, as play, there is a certain degree of *indeterminacy*.

⁷ “[M]usic has . . . no goal. . . . [W]hen it goes somewhere (for example, in sonata-form development) it is not for the sake of getting there but for the sake of the going there” (David Loy, “Indra’s Postmodern Net,” *Philosophy East and West* 43, no. 3 [July 1993]: 498).

Phrases like “playing cards,” “playing the horses,” and “playing the stock market” highlight the uncertainty (and often, concomitant risk) of play. Though the game is defined and determined by its static elements, taken together, they circumscribe a closed but vast infinity of possible ways in which any particular engagement may move and be played-out. Though to “run a play” (as in football) is to perform an established sequence, its choice at that particular time is a surprise, the reaction of one’s opponents remains to be seen, as is whether or not it will in the end be executed. While the playing of a musical piece or of a dramatic role may seem to be free of chance, the actual performance is not solely determined by the marks on the page. Furthermore, as a live event, failure always looms as a possibility. In fact, some music derives much of its energy from the seeming improbability of successful execution. Here a performance is, ironically, all the more live for the audience if they thoroughly know the piece beforehand. But beyond the question of whether or not a performance will transpire as prescribed, is the question of exactly how it will do so. Although most of the individual contingent elements may be too numerous, fleeting and subtle for much of an audience to perceive, they do perceive the stream of contingency, that is, the immediacy of the event. Consider also the play of light upon waves – it is unmistakable as such, yet at any given instant, one cannot predict the precise arrangement of the glistening surface in the next instant. Yet even when a sequence of phenomena is absolutely determined, as is the case with a recording,⁸ its playing may be utterly live and immediate if the engagement between what is played and those that play it, is open-ended.

⁸ Consider especially the case of a digital recording which literally involves the chopping up of phenomena into bits, measuring it, and representing the information as raw data.

Clearly, a realm in which indeterminacy, unnecessary complications, and lack of purpose reign, is a realm *not ordinary*. All play spaces are “temporary worlds within the ordinary world.”⁹ To step into one is to experience a different order, a different nexus of meaning.¹⁰ In certain worlds, a can is not a means to keep food from perishing; it signifies and is something entirely different: something to be kicked. In other worlds, silence may be deafening; movement may be more than a matter of spatial coordinates; words may be something other than conduits of information. To accept and enter into such an extraordinary frame of reference is to be a player. It is for this very reason that these “temporary worlds” are valued “within the ordinary world” – as ordinary conceptions of play make clear, to be a player is to step out of the ordinary role of purposive worker; to indulge in setting aside the necessary for the optional.

Within such worlds, actuality, if not an outright hindrance, may not be so important. Many forms of play involve pretending, or involve taking possibility *as if* it were actuality. This is so when children “play house,” or “play teacher,” or when an actor “plays a role.” In such cases, something is passed off as something else, as when playing-down, -up, or -as. The “playboy,” or in contemporary urban parlance the “player,” deals in artifice. All illusion (from *in-ludere*) is a form of playful “as if-ing.”¹¹ It would be incorrect, however, to suggest that only an audience or opponent is duped. Dramatic performance, for example, “is a dangerous game verging on self-deception-accepted-as-

⁹ See Huizinga, 10.

¹⁰ Here, we think of the validity of the phrase, “the kingdom of childhood.”

¹¹ Richard Schechner, “Magnitudes of Performance,” in *By Means of Performance: Intercultural Studies of Theater and Ritual*, ed. Richard Schechner and Willa Appel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 41.

truth.”¹² To “play with possibilities” is to take them up as real and imagine them playing out. In sports, players play as if the goal of the game is the only thing that matters, as if the rules are metaphysical axioms; best friends play as if enemies.

Through such “as if-ing,” the game/play is brought into being, is *realized*. Prescriptions for play (structures, rules, scripts, scores, etc.) outline regions of possibility, but any play is actualized only in its being played. Elements of the play come into being as well. We say, “Hamlet is (present) at stage right.” We do not say, “The guy representing Hamlet is at stage right.” A child playing house may say, “I *am* the mommy;” not, “I am going to pretend that I am the mommy.” For those that forget the degree of seriousness with which such provisional truths are held, or who may suspect that the normal wording is simply more temporally efficient, consider that to “play shortstop” is to be a shortstop; to play second fiddle is to be second fiddle. Hence, in play, there may be a *movement between ‘what is’ and ‘what is not’*. This is especially true with the play of children that is an open-ended exploration of possibility. “A frisbee. It is round. It is not a frisbee. It is a steering wheel. It is this big. It is not a steering wheel. It is a hat.” Thus, a hat is brought into being. Thus, the physical matter that was a frisbee is seen *anew*.

For the player “in play,” such things may be taken quite *seriously*, for the play-world entered truly is their reality. In spite of senses of play as something light and capricious, when one is fully engaged, the implicit “mere” that precedes “play” is dropped and one is “really playing,” or “playing for keeps.” That is, one truly commits to

¹² Schechner, “Magnitudes of Performance,” 41.

and submits to the play, and puts ones self completely in its space. Therein, one is fully given over to (or taken up in) the illusion of the play-world: that the provisional objectives matter; that the rules of the play are absolutely binding; that the roles played are essential. Especially children set aside the fact that it is only a game. And while play may be taken seriously, that which is serious (or dull) in the ordinary, wider sphere of “real consequence” may, of course, be taken up playfully; that is, may be approached with extraordinary levity. Aside from a subjective comportment, however, “real consequences” may be intrinsic to some forms of play which are anything but trivial. Consider: “playing for stakes,” “playing with fire,” “playing Russian roulette,” swordplay, gladiator games, or the games of the ancient Maya. In such cases, loss is not limited to the field of play. As one’s very being may literally be on the line, seriousness is insured in these types of play.

If one enters into a play-world and takes what transpires there seriously, they may “really play.” That is, deliberation and exertion, as well as consciousness of self, of other, and of time, may also be set aside in *peak engagement*, to the effect that such a player not only submits, but is absorbed in the immediacy of play. Again, children are especially prone to play in such a way that blurs the boundaries between player, played-with and play. So too, with those that are extraordinary within the extraordinary realm. Play-worlds may have their elite – those that are not only distinguished from spectators by being “in play,” but are also distinguished from other players by being *masters of the game*. With sufficient commitment, seriousness and engagement over time, one may be

able to spontaneously heed the to-and-fro, while steering the playing-out towards their chosen ends.

To recapitulate, play is a dynamic happening in which something transpires through an interchange between player and played-with. To play involves submitting to and adapting to the givens of the play-world, which include its rules and limits, as well as the indeterminate playing-out. Nevertheless, a player is one who exerts within the freedoms afforded in the particular game, appropriating what is thrown and responding with a throw. Participation in such extra-ordinary events is optional, and while one may do so for a reason, the play itself is autotelic, done for its own sake, done to be realized. To some degree, all play involves “as if-ing” and a movement between what is and what is not, often with the result that something is seen anew. It may be taken quite seriously and peak engagement may follow, as may mastery.

CHAPTER 2

THE KOAN TRADITION AND KOAN TRAINING

On the path to answering the guiding question, it is necessary to determine both what a koan is and is not, as well as its role in the religious life of a Zennist. But before I go any further, I must briefly situate this inquiry within the history of koan scholarship in the West. One camp, under the influence of D.T. Suzuki and other early proponents, focuses on koan practice as a method to attain enlightenment. The central theme is that a koan is a tool for frustrating the intellect. It is not without good reason that this conception has endured, and it is not the aim of this paper to invalidate it. A second, later, approach has been characterized as “hermeneutic.”¹³ Focusing on koans as venerated texts for engagement, this camp has provided the much needed scholarship regarding how the koan tradition plays off of Zen’s historical contingencies. While I do not deny the first approach, I have drawn greatly from and taken cues from the second, offering not a hypothesis to compete with either, but rather yet another way of looking at koan practice.¹⁴ Far from being an attempt at a final perspective on this religious practice, my intention, in addition to addressing the questions of this inquiry, is to see what we can learn about Zen and about play by looking at the koan tradition through the lens of play.

¹³ A representative sampling of this approach is contained in the collection edited by Heine and Wright.

¹⁴ This schema of koan scholarship was put forth by Barry Stephenson, who offers his own alternative perspective in “The Kōan as Ritual Performance,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 73, no. 2 (June 2005): 475-96.

Though they certainly frustrate the discursive intellect, koans are not simply riddles designed to do so.¹⁵ First and foremost, they are recorded interactions of the masters of old. At the time that Zen began to use the term, “koan” referred to “public cases” constituting legal precedents.¹⁶ Over time, authoritative prosaic and poetic elucidations accrued, and came to be considered part of the koans themselves.¹⁷ As “authoritative standards for judging spiritual attainment,”¹⁸ they “regulate the Zen school as a whole.”¹⁹

The Blue Cliff Record is a classic collection that is based upon *Master Xuedou's Verses on One Hundred Old Cases*.²⁰ In addition to Xuedou's poetic “footnotes,”²¹ the dialogues are sometimes interspersed by his comments or “capping phrases.”²² Beyond the voices of those in the story and that of Xuedou himself, the highly symbolic language

¹⁵ See Michel Mohr, “Emerging from Nonduality: Kōan Practice in the Rinzai Tradition since Hakuin,” in *The Kōan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism*, ed. Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 261, and Albert Low, *Zen and the Sutras* (Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 2000), 22. The notion of a koan as an antinomial device designed to make the intellect crumble has been promoted in the West by many of the early proponents of Zen there, most notably D.T. Suzuki.

¹⁶ This appropriation happened in the twelfth century (see Dale S. Wright, “Kōan History: Transformative Language in Chinese Buddhist Thought,” in *The Kōan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism*, ed. Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000], 200-12 and T. Griffith Foulk, “The Form and Function of Koan Literature: A Historical Overview,” in *The Kōan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism*, ed. Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000], 16.). *BCR* utilizes legal terminology, speaking of “cases,” “plea[s]” (koans 54 and 56), “indictment[s]” (koans 12, 20, 22, 36, 44, 51, 67, 98), “crimes” (koans 36, 51, 67, and 98), and “convicts” (koan 15).

¹⁷ Foulk, 27.

¹⁸ Foulk, 18. See also Isshū Miura and Ruth Fuller Sasaki, *Zen Dust: The History of the Koan and Koan Study in Rinzai (Lin-chi) Zen* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966), 5. “Distinguishing between dragons and snakes” is a common metaphor for the act of judging spiritual attainment (*BCR* koan 35).

¹⁹ Koans “are not matters for individual speculation;” private understanding is invalid (Zhongfeng, quoted in Foulk, 21; see also Wright, “Kōan History,” 200).

²⁰ 雪竇 Xuedou Qiongxian (PY); Hsüeh-tou Ch'ung-hsien (WG); Setchō Jūken (J); 980-1052 C.E.

²¹ Yuanwu refers to Xuedou's contributions as “footnotes” (下注腳 xià zhù jiǎo [PY] *hsia chu chiao* [WG] *ge chū kya* [J]) in *BCR* koans 10, 44, 45, 50, 53, 55, 60, 62, and 89.

²² “Capping phrase” translates 著語 *zhuoyu* (PY); *chu-yü* (WG); *jakugo* (J). See note 45 on capping phrases and how they have been used.

alludes to classical Chinese literature and additional Zen lore.²³ Master Yuanwu added more extensive commentary to create *The Blue Cliff Record* in 1125.²⁴ His contributions include (1) an introductory “pointer”²⁵ before the precedent, to give hints as to its meaning; (2) line-by-line interjections on the original dialogue, as well as on Xuedou’s capping phrases;²⁶ (3) prose commentary on the event that often cites other events, other comments, or material from Zen and Chinese literature; (4) interjections on Xuedou’s verse; and (5) prose commentary on Xuedou’s verse with citations as in the case commentary, thus creating an eight part structure for each koan in which multiple voices speak.²⁷ For a sense of the structure and style of *BCR* koans, see Appendixes 1 and 2, where koans 74 and 93 are presented in full.

Each level of commentary is an engagement that replicates the structure of the original engagement, in that each is an attempt at a personal demonstration of “enlightened” authority, “scolding the Buddhas and reviling the Patriarchs” in the iconoclastic “game of Zen one-upmanship.”²⁸ Each locution represents a link between the past and the future of the tradition. However, in accordance with the rules of Zen expression, while the layers added may grant some elucidation, any gain made by the novice reader is, more often than not, made only in exchange for more questions, to the

²³ *BCR* koan 34, for example.

²⁴ 圓悟克勤 Yuanwu Keqin (PY); Yuan-wu K’o-ch’in (WG); Engo Kokugon(J); 1063 – 1135 C.E.

²⁵ The introductory “pointers” are called 垂示 *chui sui* (PY); *ch’ui-shih* (WG); *sui ji* (J).

²⁶ The interjections are called 下語 *xiayu* (PY); *hsia-yu* (WG); *agyo* (J); literally, “below words” or “following words.”

²⁷ I count eleven named and unnamed voices in *BCR* koan 74 (Appendix 1) and fifteen in koan 93 (Appendix 2).

²⁸ *BCR* koan 4; G. Victor Sōgen Hori, *Zen Sand: The Book of Capping Phrases for Kōan Practice* (Honolulu : University of Hawai’i, 2003), 35. See also Foulk, 31, and Miura and Sasaki, 5.

effect that elements of the commentary may be treated as separate koans.²⁹ Thus, additional layers are added over time by teachers, creating a commentarial tradition.³⁰ In koan practice, student and master are added to the polyphony, the latter joining in with Yuanwu's explicit challenges to the present audience.³¹

Generally speaking, teachers advise to work on koans “with the belly, and not with the head,”³² to “take the koan and wrestle with it, . . . until such a time as he and it become one,” which may take years.³³ Whatever these directions indicate, it is clear that they suggest engagement on a level held to be more basic than that of the intellect.³⁴ While one cannot begin to scratch the surface of a koan without some interpretation of the complex symbolism employed, one “cannot ‘solve’ a koan just by coming up with an interpretation more profound” than one that the ordinary perspective might offer.³⁵ One should not “vainly calculate” and get “stuck in verbal explanations,” only to end up “producing intellectual interpretations.”³⁶ All such behavior is “washing a clod of earth in the mud”³⁷ and is held to be the death of Zen.³⁸ To truly understand a koan, one must, at

²⁹ Hori, *Zen Sand*, 42. See also *BCR* koan 76: “This can’t be explained to you: just go sit quietly and inquire into his lines and see.”

³⁰ Cleary, *Secrets of the Blue Cliff Record*, x.

³¹ For example, I count twenty instructions or questions directly addressed to the audience in *BCR* koan 74 (Appendix 1).

³² Hakuin, quoted in Mohr, 258; Miura and Sasaki, 11. See also Mohr, 257.

³³ Miura and Sasaki, 11. See also Robert Aitken, trans. and commentator, *The Gateless Barrier: The Wu-men Kuan (Mumonkan)* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), 10; and Hakuin, *SBCR* koan 11.

³⁴ See, for example, *BCR* koan 37.

³⁵ G. Victor Sōgen Hori, “Kōan and *Kenshō* in the Rinzai Zen Curriculum,” in *The Kōan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism*, ed. Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 303.

³⁶ *BCR* koans 74 (Appendix 1), 51, and 4, respectively.

³⁷ *BCR* koan 78 (see also koans 14, 15, 20, 21, 31, 36, 90, etc.). In the same comment, Yuanwu admonishes Xuedou, saying, “Don’t come and shit on the clean ground!” In general, dirt, mud, sand, and the like is associated with the mundane realm and language in particular.

least temporarily, break the deeply ingrained habit of interpretation that serves us so well elsewhere.³⁹ When this happens, conditions are ripe for a first-hand, mystical experience of the Zen variety, whereby one purportedly shares in the insight common to all of the authorities of the tradition, and instantly understands the koan “with distinct clarity.”⁴⁰

Throughout training, one’s insight is regularly checked by their master in private meetings.⁴¹ Though a response to a koan should be as spontaneous and personal as the expressions of those that appear in koans,⁴² it need not be entirely original. While quotation and mimicry are permissible, a master will deem a response correct only if genuine Zen insight is behind it.⁴³ Otherwise, authority often will respond to mere fakery – often indicated by hesitation or signs of calculation – with a curt dismissal.⁴⁴

³⁸ “If we interpreted meanings this way . . . [Zen] would have been wiped off the face of the earth. . . . If you construct such views you have destroyed the old adept, Jinniu” (*BCR* koan 74 [Appendix 1]). See also Tenkei, *SBCR* koan 37.

³⁹ Hakuin: “You have cut away the totality of myriad forms . . . the complications of confusion, the complications of enlightenment, the complications of Buddhist doctrines, the complications of Zen records” (*SBCR* koan 74 [Appendix 1]). As for the layers of the *BCR* itself, Hakuin says, “Never mind the capping phrases; . . . [even] the commentary gets in the way, and Xuedou’s intention is obscured” (*SBCR* koan 97). I say “under-stand” to draw attention to the submissive component of this understanding, in contrast to an understanding that could connote mastery *over* the understood. See notes 263 and 376.

⁴⁰ Tenkei, *SBCR* koan 74 (Appendix 1). “Only those on the same path know” (*BCR* koan 23). “[Y]our own mind and those of the Buddhas and Founding Teachers do not differ from one another” (臨濟 Linji [PY]; Lin-chi [WG]; Rinzai [J], quoted in Aitken, *Wu-men kuan*, 36).

⁴¹ These meetings are called 獨參 *dusan* [PY]; *tu-san* [WG]; *dokusan* [J]; “individual consultation.”

⁴² “When serving the master, you cannot use leftovers” (Hori, *Zen Sand*, 279). This is a standard Zen capping phrase.

⁴³ “In Zen, people are tested . . . in order to see whether they are deep or shallow . . . facing forward or backward.” (*BCR* koan 23).

⁴⁴ Often, as in *BCR* koan 93 (Appendix 2), a fake is called a “wild fox spirit” and empty imitation is clearly prohibited. See *BCR* koans 10, 11, 21, 63, and 93 (Appendix 2); Cleary and Cleary, 573; and Burton Watson, trans., *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi: A Translation of the Lin-Chi Lu* (Boston: Shambhala, 1993), 53 and 61.

Beyond a correct response, a capping phrase may be required,⁴⁵ or a teacher may choose to ask “checking questions” that may deal with finer points of the koan or may pose alternative scenarios.⁴⁶ Advanced practitioners may be required to demonstrate their understanding through “written analysis,” or the composition of verse, in which the koan is “handle[d] playfully” in the indirect style of the compilers.⁴⁷ Through all of these forms of “playback,” the master monitors the monk’s insight, further determines its depth, or even deepens it.⁴⁸

Though one cannot overstate the significance of a first breakthrough, it is only the beginning, and, for several reasons, formal koan training generally lasts a dozen or more years.⁴⁹ First, the “odor of enlightenment” must be eradicated.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the

⁴⁵ The orthodox account holds that in the beginning, students would spontaneously compose their own capping phrases and verses. In time, citation of classical Chinese and Zen verse came to be accepted and collections arose, allowing monks to amass a reservoir of literature from which a correct response may arise. Were selections passed off as one’s own and were failure in quote selection not a possibility, Faure’s suggestion that institutionalized “plagiarism” in Zen is a means to “speak without speaking” – that is, without putting one’s neck out – would have more validity (Bernard Faure, *Chan Insights and Oversights: An Epistemological Critique of the Chan Tradition* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993], 197n). Furthermore, the original cases themselves often include quotation. As collections contain thousands of phrases, this practice is not a reduction of koan study to a multiple choice test of Zen clichés. What is important is that student demonstrate true understanding of the koan by drawing a subtle connection between it and the imagery of the verse, be it original or otherwise. And for the purposes of this paper, both quotation games and spontaneous wordplay are species of play.

⁴⁶ “Checking questions” translates 拶所 *zasuo* [PY]; *tsa-so* [WG]; *sassho* [J]. See *BCR* koan 93 (Appendix 2) for an example of a checking question in a case. See also Hori, *Zen Sand*, 17 and Hori, “Kōan and *Kenshō*,” 290-1.

⁴⁷ Hori, *Zen Sand*, 38. Hori translates 拈弄 *niannong* (PY); *nien-nung* (WG); *nenro* (J); “handle playfully” as “deft play.” In his context, it describes an aspect of formal koan training. In the five places that the phrase occur in the narrative of the *BCR*, Cleary and Cleary translate it as “picked it up and played with it.”

⁴⁸ Voicing approval of a master’s checking question, Yuanwu says, “He still should press him; it’s necessary to be discriminating” (*BCR* koan 93 [Appendix 2]; see also Hakuin’s comments). See also Hori, *Zen Sand*, 31.

⁴⁹ Foulk, 42. It is said that all 1,700 koans must be mastered (Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism [Second Series]* [London: Luzac and Company, 1933], 2). Thus the saying, “Atop the mountain, another mountain” (quoted in Hori, *Zen Sand*, 26). Furthermore, a breakthrough with any particular koan is not the end of one’s grappling with it. See Hakuin’s comments in *SBCR* koan 40.

⁵⁰ “Odor of enlightenment” is a common Zen idiom, as is “cave of enlightenment.”

extended curriculum also insures that students do not fall back into “routine mind.”⁵¹ Yet, also prohibited is a quietistic state of permanent detachment from the world, dwelling in the “cave of enlightenment.” The ability to preserve transcendental insight *and* “harmonize enlightenment to deal with people” must be cultivated.⁵² Lastly, while maintaining this delicate balance, enlightenment must be continually deepened. When enough koans are passed and other requirements are met, institutional credentials are granted, and one is an official bearer of authentic Zen.⁵³

⁵¹ BCR koan 84.

⁵² Thomas Cleary, *The Sutra of Hui-neng, Grand Master of Zen with Hui-neng's Commentary on the Diamond Sutra* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1998), 38.

⁵³ BCR koan 74 (Appendix 1).

CHAPTER 3

ZEN MASTERS AT PLAY IN THE KOAN TRADITION

Do Zennists play in and with koans? Having outlined the tradition, I now, with additional details, will explain how it may be taken as playful, based on my analysis of play from Chapter 1. First, there are a number of things that are being played with in the to-and-fro of *The Blue Cliff Record*. In the original “encounter dialogues” or “*dharma* battles,”⁵⁴ there is a responsive “thrust and parry,”⁵⁵ which blossoms and multiplies as subsequent players enter the fray. Xuedou and Yuanwu “picked . . . up and played with” the material of the past,⁵⁶ entering into action – mostly directly through their interlinear, play-by-play remarks – while recruiting others for their “moves.”⁵⁷ Though the ancestors are revered, they are fair game, to be played with, roughly or otherwise. Nevertheless,

⁵⁴ “Encounter dialogue” translates 問答 *wenda* (PY); *wen-ta* (WG); *mondo* (J); “question [and] answer” [literally]. “*Dharma* battle” translates 法戰 *fazhan* (PY); *fā-chan* (WG); *hossen* (J). *Dharma* ([S]; 法 *fa* [PY, WG]; *hō* or *datsuma* [J]) is a multifaceted term with an extremely wide range of meanings in Buddhism. It is a term appropriated from earlier Indian thought, where it means, in part, the ultimate, underlying order or cosmic *law* that undergirds and upholds existence. In Buddhism, its initial association is with the *teaching* of the historical Buddha. Thus, a *dharma* battle is a contest in, with, and over the teaching. As Buddha is assumed to be a perfect mirror of reality, his teaching is the *ultimate truth*. But even truer than the words that describe reality is *reality itself*. Thus, *dharma* may refer to the entire cosmos and all of the *individual phenomena* therein (individual “*dharms*”). Especially in Asia, it is thought that human behavior should harmonize with the cosmic order, and so *dharma* also means earthly law or norm. For examples of the use of the military metaphor, see *BCR* koans 4, 10, 31, and 34. See also Hori, *Zen Sand*, 35 and 54; and Shibayama Zenkei as quoted in Faure, 213.

⁵⁵ Hori, *Zen Sand*, 43.

⁵⁶ *BCR* koan 44: “[Xuedou]. . . picked it up and played with it.” See also koans 22, 85, and 89: “Xuedou can play with a phrase reviving” it.

⁵⁷ See Hori, *Zen Sand*, 43. *BCR* koans 2, 26, 38, 59 and 76, for example, speak of “moves.”

the commentaries oscillate between condemnation and adoration, between affirmation and flat denial of Buddhist doctrine and its purveyors. Of course, by saying yes *and* no, and by “[g]iving ten answers to one question,”⁵⁸ a master plays with the rules of language and logic.⁵⁹ Lastly, social convention, monastic order and traditional ritual may be put in play, as witnessed in *BCR* koan 74 (Appendix 1).⁶⁰

Serious koan “study” prohibits passive spectating. Though the men of old are long dead, one is “face to face a thousand miles apart.”⁶¹ This is insured by the presence of a person held to be a living embodiment of the tradition – the master with whom one “toss[es] the Buddha *Dharma* about.”⁶² As the novice enters the arena with lineage holders past and present, he brings with him his culture, his language, his logic, his Buddhism, and his beliefs about the way things are.⁶³ To the extent that these may be changed by engagement with the competing voices, he is putting himself in play as well.⁶⁴

The validity of an attempt to describe these encounters in terms of play is augmented by the fact that the events are described as contests in the literature⁶⁵ and by

⁵⁸ *BCR* koan 27. “He applies pure ghee and poison at the same time – and he’s right!” (*BCR* koan 74 [Appendix 1]).

⁵⁹ “At midnight the sun comes out, at noonday the midnight watch is sounded” (*BCR* koan 86). Yuanwu will often refer to a particularly excellent and ungraspable expression as a “hammer without a handle hole” and will praise a master’s execution of the impossible as “a square peg stuck into a round hole” (koan 48).

⁶⁰ For the most famous example of disregard for social standards, see *BCR* koan 1, where Bodhidharma gives Emperor Wu the Zen runaround, refusing to answer his questions. Zen masters also distinguish themselves amongst religious figures by their indulgence in a fair amount of “potty-talk,” most notably in *BCR* koans 78, 79, 83 and 96, *Wumenguan* koan 21, and Watson, *Lin-chi lu*, passim.

⁶¹ A capping phrase from Hori, *Zen Sand*, 205. See also Hakuin, *SBCR* koan 7.

⁶² Aitken, *Wu-men kuan*, 55. See also Steven Heine, “Kōans in the Dōgen Tradition: How and Why Dōgen Does What He Does with Kōans,” *Philosophy East and West* 54, no. 1 (January 2004): 3.

⁶³ For examples of doctrinal issues being discussed in *BCR*, see koans 21, 26, 39, 40, 45, 73, 78, and 82.

⁶⁴ “Without following in your former tracks, try to say something for me to see” (*BCR* koan 22).

⁶⁵ The idea that there are winners and losers in these events is common. See *BCR* koan 38 and note 54, for example. Some koans are simply records of explicit contests, such as *Wumenguan* koan 40. Further

the fact that there are rules. Those that I have culled⁶⁶ are as follows: (1) No matter how mundane or meaningless the discourse appears, all koans, *as koans*, are about “ultimate matters.”⁶⁷ (2) “Never tell too plainly;”⁶⁸ a “good talk should not explain everything.”⁶⁹ “Leaking and tarrying” is generally held to be a mistake.⁷⁰ Expression should be allusive; its meaning should be elusive, appearing only “in disguise.” The clear and distinct utterances at which we aim in the West, are held to drag the discourse down to the level of ordinary speech and are either in poor taste in the presence of one who can play the game, or an indication that oneself cannot. (3) Use of the extraordinary, technical language of Buddhism is eschewed in favor of the poetic and extraordinary use of ordinary language.⁷¹ In some circumstances, non sequitur or gesture may be better than

supporting the idea of koan as contest, Hori compellingly “advances the hypothesis that one of the parents of the kōan is the Chinese literary game[s]” that were popular long before the arrival of Zen in China. See his *Zen Sand*, Chapter 4.

⁶⁶ Rules may be explicit or implicit. See Foulk, 41; Faure, 215; and John R. McRae, “The Antecedents of Encounter Dialogue in Chinese Ch’an Buddhism,” in *The Kōan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism*, ed. Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 47. These rules may reflect most of all upon the thinking of the koan compilers who choose the exemplars and who also follow the rules in their dealings with the stories. So too may my list reflect my intentions. Thus, I make no claim to completeness.

⁶⁷ In *BCR* koan 76, for example, Danxia (丹霞 Tan-hsia [WG]; Tanka [J]) asks, “Have you eaten yet or not?” It is clear that this has nothing to do with food (cf. *BCR* koan 7, *Wumenguan* koan 7, and Tenkei, *SBCR* koan 34). Other common, seemingly ordinary questions include, “Where have you just come from?” (*BCR* koans 10, 34, 35, 54, etc.), “What is your name?” (*BCR* koan 68), and “What is this / that / it?” (*BCR* koans 51, 53). See also Foulk, 40.

⁶⁸ Youru Wang, *Linguistic Strategies in Daoist Zhuangzi and Chan Buddhism* (NY: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 161. Yuanwu says, “Everyone knows. Just avoid saying so” (*BCR* koan 30).

⁶⁹ A capping phrase in Hori, *Zen Sand*, 233.

⁷⁰ *BCR* koan 74 (Appendix 1). See also koan 21, or koan 28 where the master says, “I’ve already spoken too much for you.” Yuanwu often criticizes Xuedou for this. See koans 16, 21, 44, 53, and 89, for example.

⁷¹ Ultimate matters should be discussed “covertly [with] literary color” (Hakuin, *SBCR* koan 27). A question that monks ask in at least one-hundred and eighteen koans is, “What is the meaning/intention/point of Bodhidharma’s coming [to China] from the west [India]?” (Hori, *Zen Sand*, 644; see *BCR* koans 17 and 20, for example). Put coarsely, this question is paramount to saying, “Zen is founded on and unified by an insight ‘outside of words’ (*BCR* koan 74 [Appendix 1]). What is it? Give me the mystic message.” See below for more on this question. See also Hori, “Kōan and *Kenshō*,” 310 and

poetic expression.⁷² (4) Disguise your intentions and the nature of the encounter.⁷³ While playing (at not playing), one should not “tip their hand;” it is better “to hide a spear within a smile.”⁷⁴ Often the dialogue begins with a question or challenge cleverly posed to test the depth of a student’s understanding.⁷⁵ Often, a master’s understanding is tactfully tested in such a way.⁷⁶ (5) A “good win” is achieved through “surprise, deception, and ‘reversing the other’s spear.’”⁷⁷ (6) Setting up traps and avoiding traps takes skill and wins praise; to fall into a trap is to lose with shame. The trap metaphor is common in the literature,⁷⁸ including the literal meaning trap,⁷⁹ the interpretation trap, the imitation trap,⁸⁰ and the trap(ping) of Zennish or technical language.⁸¹ (7) Moves should be exceedingly “appropriate to the moment,” and hence, “fresh and new” in at least this

Hori, *Zen Sand*, 14. For examples of doctrinal issues being discussed in *BCR*, see koans 21, 26, 39, 40, 45, 78, and 82.

⁷² Take, for example, Daguang’s dance in *BCR* koan 93 (Appendix 2). See also koans 19, 22, and 67. The most celebrated koans involve a seemingly absurd, highly metaphorical, or performative response by a master to a question posed at the literal or technical level. See *BCR* koans 7, 12, 14, 39, 44, 45, 47, 50, and 57 or the much discussed *Wumenguan* koan 1, known as “Zhaozhou’s Dog,” “Mu,” or “Wu.”

⁷³ Of Jinniu’s behavior in *BCR* koan 74 (Appendix 1), Yuanwu says, “In his laugh there’s a knife.” Xuedou says, “Though he acted like this, Jinniu was not good-hearted.”

⁷⁴ See Hakuin’s comments, *SBCR* koan 37 and Miura and Sasaki, 88, respectively.

⁷⁵ This is often likened to using a “probing pole” to test the depth of water, as in *BCR* koan 10.

⁷⁶ This is called “a question to test the host” or “an intentional question” (*BCR* koans 9 and 15, for example; see note 92 on hosts). See also *BCR* koans 9, 15, 30, 41, and 93 (Appendix 2).

⁷⁷ Hori, *Zen Sand*, 55. This ability is praised in *BCR* koans 35, 38, and 46 (to name a few), as is “mounting the bandits horse to pursue him” in koans 15, 27, and 59.

⁷⁸ “We meet a living man! He has entangled every [Zen] monk in the world, and makes them unable to get a hold; he entangles you too” (*BCR* koan 93 [Appendix 2]; see also koans 42, 53, and 62). A master’s move is referred to as a “pitfall to catch a tiger” in *BCR* koans 10, 13, 66 and elsewhere. Though they set traps they also grant the possibility of liberation: “Daguang was well able to help others; in his phrases there is a road along which to get oneself out” (*BCR* koan 93 [Appendix 2]). “He opens a route for you” (*BCR* koan 86).

⁷⁹ See *BCR* koan 76 and note that the dialogue makes perfect sense at the literal level.

⁸⁰ See *BCR* koan 93 (Appendix 2) for an excellent example.

⁸¹ “To say the word ‘Buddha’ is trailing mud and dripping water; to say the word ‘Zen’ is a face full of shame” (*BCR* koan 2; cf. koan 42). See also Watson, *Lin-chi lu*, 69).

sense.⁸² (8) Spontaneity, brevity, freedom from calculation and, as in all performative play, basically “playing it cool” and making it look easy and natural are the signs of mastery.⁸³ (9) Hierarchies, rules and rituals of the monastic arena must be taken into account.⁸⁴ In short, as the rules of a game define it, and in contrast to what we think of as teaching, the koan game is one of hide and seek in which unexplainable and unpredictable moves enable ungraspable and “wily adept[s]”⁸⁵ to evade students, rather than waiting for them to catch up.

To enter into this practice is to submit to these rules and the rituals of the game, but there are other acts of submission. The final “rule” to which a serious practitioner submits is the rule of the koan itself. Put succinctly, one’s life is given over to the koan at hand.⁸⁶ To throw oneself into such a difficult program is “to lie down in the tiger’s mouth,”⁸⁷ to submit oneself to doubt, frustration, scrutiny, humiliation, and perhaps the infamous beatings, all while abstaining from an overarching “Why?” Meanwhile, though a master may “batter the student around with words,”⁸⁸ ideally he submits as well. Whether a student is feigning ignorance or is actually ignorant, his prompts are a challenge to which the teacher respond. A true master “acts according to the imperative”

⁸² *BCR* koans 38 and 3 (see also koan 55). Your “words [must] leave the old clichés” (*BCR* koan 72). “He sizes up the audience to give his order” (*BCR* koan 74 [Appendix 1]).

⁸³ See, for example, *BCR* koans 25, 26, 38, 41, 45, 54, 55, 74 (Appendix 1), 75, and 79.

⁸⁴ This is not to say that convention must be absolutely upheld. Rather, rule-breaking must be an instance of putting rules and hierarchies in play. Rules of ritual can be put into play and altered, as in the case of Jinniu’s ritual in *BCR* koan 74 (Appendix 1; see especially Hakuin’s comments). The hierarchy of master and student can be inverted in an iconoclastic interchange of “host” and “guest” (*BCR* koan 50; see notes 92 and 263). To do so successfully, however, requires a sufficient degree of insight (See *BCR* koan 79, for example).

⁸⁵ Hakuin, *SBCR* koan 93 (Appendix 2).

⁸⁶ See Miura and Sasaki, xv-xvi and 11.

⁸⁷ *BCR* koan 75. See also koan 22.

⁸⁸ Watson, *Lin-chi lu*, 51.

of the situation,⁸⁹ “sizes up [his] audience”⁹⁰ and, like a good “host,” painstakingly attends to the needs of his “guests”⁹¹ by assigning the appropriate koan, by maintaining internal patience,⁹² and by playing along or playing against, as the situation requires. Furthermore, he also continues to submit his teaching to that of tradition and play the game by its rules.⁹³

While both parties submit to these determinate aspects of training events, they also submit to the indeterminacy of exactly how the student’s level of realization will be determined, of how the process will play out. The lack of predictability that is present to some degree in all human interaction is heightened here by the fact that the determinate record of Zen is taken as a “living record” of indeterminate meaning.⁹⁴ Throughout *The Blue Cliff Record*, Yuanwu and Xuedou draw attention to the uncertainty present in “the melee of spiritual encounter”⁹⁵ by asking, “What will [he] say?” or “What will he do?”⁹⁶ Such a sense of suspense is demanded by the rules that favor vagueness, spontaneity,

⁸⁹ BCR koans 54, 76, and 80, for example.

⁹⁰ BCR koan 74 (Appendix 1).

⁹¹ References to the dynamic of “host and guest” (主賓 *zhubin* [PY]; *chu-pin* [WG]; *shuhin* [J]) appear throughout BCR. A host is the master of a house, the person in control because he knows and is comfortable in his domain. When receiving a guest, it is his obligation to lead the visit, to guide the guest through the realm and through the events. A good guest follows along and submits to what the well-meaning host has to offer. In Zen, the host is the one qualified to lead an engagement and the guest is the one who is less at home. Of course, host and guest can change roles within a Zen engagement (see note 262).

⁹² Jinniu did his ritual “every day for twenty years” (BCR koan 74 [Appendix 1]). Reportedly, Master Yunmen (雲門 *Yün-men* [WG]; Ummon [J]) asked his attendant, “What is this?” every day for eighteen years (Katsuki Sekida, trans., *Two Zen Classics: The Gateless Gate and The Blue Cliff Records* [Boston: Shambhala, 2005], 192).

⁹³ Dale S. Wright, “Rethinking Transcendence: The Role of Language in Zen Experience,” *Philosophy East and West* 42, no. 1 (January 1992): 124 and 134.

⁹⁴ Taizan Maezumi Roshi, “Forward” to Cleary and Cleary, *Blue Cliff Record*, xiii. See also Hori, *Zen Sand*, 29.

⁹⁵ Hakuin, *SBCR* koan 26.

⁹⁶ BCR koan 74 (Appendix 1) and Sekida’s translation on the same koan in *Two Zen Classics*. Often, Yuanwu asks, “What will you do?”

originality, and the element of surprise. Moves may be seemingly straight forward,⁹⁷ intellectually jarring, absurd, silent, shouted, gestural,⁹⁸ humorous, rude, uncouth or even physically violent. While theoretically there is only one Zen and only one enlightened perspective judging whether or not an individual shares in this perspective, the ways in which the Dharma can be played and made manifest is theoretically infinite;⁹⁹ hence, there is no one correct answer to a koan, but rather only a correct response – to act from that perspective.

Submission to the determinate and indeterminate aspects may be compared to similar relationships in the performing arts. One plays a koan as a musician may improvise upon a melody or chord progression. To be on “the same path but not in the same groove” is to be true to and play along with the exemplars of old, while adding a personal contribution to the tradition.¹⁰⁰ As should be expected, however, “correct answers” to koans became known and circulated.¹⁰¹ While some consider this to be a corruption of the koan tradition – lacking as it does the imprint of the student – there is still something to be said for a good performance, which cannot take place without true under-standing of a script or score, nor, as a live and immediate presentation, without the

⁹⁷ See note 68.

⁹⁸ For examples, see *BCR* koans 19, 22, 67, and 93 (Appendix 2).

⁹⁹ “Even a tongue vast enough to hang the universe on could not fully express it; even if the polar mountain were a pen and the oceans ink, writing for a million aeons, there is an infinite meaning that still cannot be written out.” (Tenkei, *SBCR* 36).

¹⁰⁰ *BCR* koans 2 and 26. See McRae, “Antecedents of Encounter Dialogue,” 71; Hori, *Zen Sand*, 54; and Stephenson, 483.

¹⁰¹ For historical details, see Ishikawa Rikizan, “Transmission of *Kirigami* (Secret Initiation Documents): A Sōtō Practice in Medieval Japan,” in *The Kōan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism*, ed. Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). For criticism see Faure, 215. For a defense, see Stephenson, “The Kōan as Ritual Performance.”

possibility of failure. “Connoisseurs” can tell the difference:¹⁰² taking *BCR* koans 74 and 93 together (Appendixes 1 and 2), Daguang’s dance is both *his* dance *and* is a bona fide reenactment of the dance of Jinniu (or a dance with him) while that of the monk is seen through as second-hand, as superficial fakery.¹⁰³ Thus, even with a script, cheating is not possible with an authentic master. Based on these points alone, I conclude with Stephenson that such a mode of koan performance is not a “devolution” of the tradition, but is rather, one way to authentically “establish and participate” in it.¹⁰⁴

Koan behavior is also performative in the theatrical sense in that while superficial fakery is condemned, skillful fakery by an enlightened actor is applauded.¹⁰⁵ Though sometimes the acting is melodramatic,¹⁰⁶ more often than not, a teacher “sets his devices in motion” and pulls the strings of his audience, using “his power to deceive people” with a convincing performance.¹⁰⁷ While fellow masters of the art can tell (and appreciate) when an actor is in character,¹⁰⁸ unwitting co-stars are played upon and “take the bait.”¹⁰⁹

Furthermore, the testing aspect of the koan tradition is very much like an audition, and the training aspect is not unlike training for an audition – an audition to be one of those extraordinary individuals who perform in this extraordinary play space: Zen

¹⁰² *BCR* koan 37 (see also koans 88 and 64). See Hori, *Zen Sand*, 56-7 on “connoisseurs of sounds.”

¹⁰³ 大光 Daguang (PY); Ta Kuang (WG); Taiko (J). 金牛 Jinniu (PY); Chin Niu (WG); Kin-gyū (J).

¹⁰⁴ Stephenson, 493. See also Hori, *Zen Sand*, 29

¹⁰⁵ The clearest case in which naïve imitation is condemned is *BCR* koan 19 / *Wumenguan* koan 3, “Judi’s One-Finger Zen.”

¹⁰⁶ For example see *BCR* koan 22. See also Watson, *Lin-chi lu*, 85-7.

¹⁰⁷ *BCR* koans 54 and 5, respectively.

¹⁰⁸ In *BCR* koan 74 (Appendix 1), for example, Xuedou says, “Though he acted like this, Jinniu was not good-hearted” and Yuanwu in turn comments, “This is a thief recognizing a thief, a spirit recognizing a spirit.”

¹⁰⁹ *BCR* koan 38. For other examples of fishing metaphors, see *BCR* koans 10, 33, 42, 74 [Appendix 1], 75, and 82. See also Tenkei, *SBCR* koans 2 and 52.

masters.¹¹⁰ By “extraordinary,” not only do I mean “amazing,” but even more so, “not ordinary” in the sense of set off from the daily, mundane life and its concerns.¹¹¹ The Zen monastery is a training arena of intense focus, a contrived and “constructed” world, isolated from the “bustling marketplace.” Koan practice is, likewise, an extra-ordinary mode of exchange.¹¹² As such a life is optional¹¹³ and removed to a special location in which ordinary concerns are set aside, in spite of all the hardship and sacrifices involved, it is, in the sense of an unnecessary “luxury,” a life of play.

Still, as for those running these training centers, it is “clear to everyone” involved that they are not ordinary.¹¹⁴ To be one is to be a highly skilled performer in a strange game. Those of yore are endlessly played up as infallible figures¹¹⁵ that “performed all these complicated skills” with “exceptionally outstanding timely action,”¹¹⁶ doing the impossible and dominating any situation with ease.¹¹⁷ Those who are sufficiently mystified by such behavior and believe that Zen can deliver such “great faculties,”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁰ See, for example *BCR* koans 13, 17, 22, 26, 33, 39, 49, 54, 66, 92, and 99.

¹¹¹ *BCR* koan 11. It “is beyond all mundane measurements” and “beyond conventional patterns” (Tenkei, *SBCR* koans 2 and 22).

¹¹² “Provisionally, the hermit sets up an illusory city (to teach)” (*BCR* koan 25). See also Cleary and Cleary, xvi and Hakuin, *SBCR* koan 26. *BCR* koans 11, 38, 68, 87, and 95 speak of “the bustling marketplace.”

¹¹³ “Any who refuse to believe may leave” (Cleary, *Sutra of Hui-neng*, 49).

¹¹⁴ Wright, “Kōan History,” 201. “[M]onks must always function outside of patterns before they can be called genuine Masters of our school.” (*BCR* koan 74 [Appendix 1]). See also koan 25.

¹¹⁵ See, for example, *BCR* koans 25, 45, 53, 62, and 93 (Appendix 2).

¹¹⁶ Tenkei, *SBCR* koan 74 (Appendix 1); Tenkei, *SBCR* koan 26. For characterizations of “outstanding timely action,” see *BCR* koans 25, 26 (and Hakuin, *SBCR* koan 26), 34, 41, 42, 45, 55, 80 (and Tenkei, *SBCR* 80), and 92. See also Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, trans., *Lankavatara Sutra* (London: Routledge and Sons, 1932; repr., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1999), 64 and 119. For characterizations of action that is not, see *BCR* koans 4, 42, 48, 55, 64, and 91.

¹¹⁷ Having “pass[ed] through the impenetrables,” they are “in the know wherever” they are (Hakuin, *SBCR* koan 74 [Appendix 1]). “[E]ven when their eyes are asleep” (Hakuin, *SBCR* 37) they can perceive the moves of their opponents before they move, can see “deception from three thousand miles away,” (*BCR* koan 74 [Appendix 1]) and swiftly respond without flinching (*BCR* koans 38 and 75), without “hav[ing] to use the least bit of effort” (*BCR* koan 74 [Appendix 1]).

¹¹⁸ *BCR* koan 17. See also Foulk, 38.

enter into training, “match[ing] tallies with the buddhas and patriarchs,”¹¹⁹ until becoming a master of the art themselves. Yet beyond that, a Zen master is held to be a master of reality,¹²⁰ as he has understanding of the ultimate, “hidden meaning” of Buddha’s teaching, that is intended for the “few.”¹²¹ Regarding this anti-egalitarian strain, some Zen language does indeed suggest that the tradition is not unlike an elite boys’ club that, in a clubhouse which is closed off from the multitudes, initiates members through indoctrination into peculiar means of interaction, speaking in code, the sharing of secrets and inside jokes,¹²² and a good deal of hazing. In the Zen scheme, there are those who can play, those who are learning to play, and those not ready to learn how to play.

To be ready is to be serious. Koan practice, at least initially, is nothing like the free and easy play of children. Rather, it is like the training of world-class athletes or performing artists, requiring years of dedication and single-mindedness.¹²³ Performance in this game requires full engagement, “twenty-four hours a day, from moment to moment,”¹²⁴ to the extent that – in terms similar to those reported by other types of peak players – the trainee “become[s] one with” the koan at hand.¹²⁵ As one’s whole being is

¹¹⁹ Master Zhongfeng (中峰 Chung-feng [WG]; Chûhō [J]) in Foulk, 22.

¹²⁰ “When you pass through the impenetrables, you are in the know wherever you are” (Hakuin, *SBCR* koan 74 [Appendix 1]), you are “a master of the environment . . . [which] takes ten thousand different shapes” (Watson, *Lin-chi lu*, 40-1).

¹²¹ Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, 207 (see also *ibid.*, 237); *BCR* koan 74 (Appendix 1). See also koan 99. The “mystic message” (Cleary, *Sutra of Hui-neng*, 49; see also Tenkei, *SBCR* koan 22) “needs an adept to understand it” (*BCR* koan 66) and is not suitable for those of lesser accomplishment (Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, 207-8).

¹²² In addition to the idea of a “hidden meaning,” the “Zen kōan shares with Chinese poetry the rich abundance of literary allusion . . . [A]ll allusion has the character of an inside joke” (Hori, *Zen Sand*, 43-7).

¹²³ Hakuin: “My own toil has extended over these thirty years. Do not take this to be an easy task!” (Hori, *Zen Sand*, 65). “One has to be quite a resolute character full of spirit” (Dahui [大慧 Ta-hui (WG); Daie (J)] in Suzuki, *Essays in Zen [Second Series]*, 16).

¹²⁴ *BCR* koan 74 (Appendix 1).

¹²⁵ See Hori, “Kōan and *Kenshō*,” 288. See also Miura and Sasaki, 11.

thrown into this arena of dangerous pitfalls, and one's whole being is on the line, the stakes are high. Yet, "if you don't enter the tiger's den, how can you catch a tiger cub?"¹²⁶

Clearly, whatever "becoming one with a koan" entails, it is not a static state of oneness. The koan program is a dynamic one that requires "a lifetime of reshaping" by "the hammer and tongs . . . the forge and bellows of an adept."¹²⁷ A monk cannot "stagnat[e] in the unique principle of [enlightenment]"¹²⁸ any more than a violinist can dwell on a note out of satisfaction over hitting it, nor any more than one can rest after successfully executing a pass in soccer. Any thoughts of arrival are cut off by a good teacher, who is likened to a "thief"¹²⁹ or a killer of egos. Even in the event of a correct performance, there are the checking questions, the capping phrase requirement, other requirements, the master's response, and hundreds more koans. Thus, those in the koan game "must first be beyond patterns,"¹³⁰ must be flexible and capable of "[s]ubtly responding to myriad conditions,"¹³¹ must be continually in motion and be continually ready for an indeterminate future.

While continually adapting to new challenges in the koan game, the student is also being prepared for returning to the old "game" anew. Just as playtime does not go on

¹²⁶ BCR koan 15; see also koan 26.

¹²⁷ Wright, "Rethinking Transcendence," 128; BCR koan 43. See also koan 39, and the original preface to the *Linjilu*, which says, "He took away the person, took away the environment, molding and fashioning first-rate disciples. . . . pounded and shaped the monks" (Watson, *Lin-chi lu*, 3).

¹²⁸ Mohr, 262.

¹²⁹ See BCR koans 4, 5, 8, 10, 33, 41, 74 (Appendix 1), 93 (Appendix 2), for a few examples.

¹³⁰ BCR koan 74 (Appendix 1).

¹³¹ Zhaozhou (趙州 Chao-chou [WG]; Joshu [J]), quoted by Hakuin in SBCR koan 80.

indefinitely, so too does koan practice “return to the marketplace.”¹³² With sufficient training, monks return to the “Buddhist marketplace” of *sutras* and commentaries which, for the first time, make sense,¹³³ allowing for correct interpretation, in the conventional sense.¹³⁴ Furthermore, upon the completion of formal training, monks traditionally left the monastic arena and returned to the actual marketplace of ordinary life amongst the folks.¹³⁵ Though outside the arena “one wears clothes and eats food” as before, “one’s state is secure within,”¹³⁶ and, since “the senses are [now] sagely,” “myriad things are all renewed” - “even horse manure and weasel droppings radiate light.”¹³⁷

Indeed, some of the promised goods of this training program may be collectively characterized as a return to naturalness or a second childhood, having mastered reality to the point that one “is free, purified, and at ease” “all day with nothing to do.”¹³⁸ In contrast to the scholastic Buddhism of the day, Zen celebrates the alleged illiteracy and innocent simplicity of the Sixth Patriarch, “Workman Lu.”¹³⁹ In contrast to its own serious side as expressed in the legend and portraits of the First Patriarch, it offers the

¹³² “The ten directions, a common gathering - / Everyone studies not-doing. / This is the place where Buddhas are chosen - / Minds empty, they return successful.” Ruth Fuller Sasaki, Yoshitaka Iriya, and Dana R. Fraser, *The Recorded Sayings of Layman P’ang: A Ninth Century Zen Classic* (NY: Weatherhill, 1971), 42. See also Philip Kapleau, ed. and trans., *The Three Pillars of Zen: Teaching, Practice and Enlightenment* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 301.

¹³³ As a master advises, just “attain a little before you open your mouth” (*BCR* koan 21). “If there are discrepancies with the *sūtras* and commentaries, [it signifies that] your comprehension is not only biased and dried up, but also shallow and sketchy!” (Master Torei quoted in Mohr, 263). The idea of a “Buddhist marketplace” of ideas is mine.

¹³⁴ See page 19.

¹³⁵ True masters “don’t remain in radiance and spirituality” (*BCR* koan 53). It is traditionally held that this period of living among the ordinary may last in excess of thirty years. See Hori, *Zen Sand*, 27-9.

¹³⁶ *BCR* koan 74 (Appendix 1).

¹³⁷ McRae, “Antecedents of Encounter Dialogue,” 62 (see also Miura and Sasaki, 265); *BCR* koan 44; Hakuin, *SBCR* koan 31.

¹³⁸ *BCR* koan 44; Sasaki, Iriya, and Fraser, 78. See also *BCR* koan 1.

¹³⁹ *BCR* koan 25. 慧能 Huineng (Hui-neng [WG]; Eno [J]) was a mere kitchen laborer in the monastery of the Fifth Patriarch. See his “Platform Sutra” (Cleary, *The Sutra of Hui-neng: Grand Master of Zen*).

comic self-portraits of Hakuin, the silly grin of Pudai, the roaring laughter of Yangshan,¹⁴⁰ the giggling of Hanshan and Shide, the buffoonery of Puhua, the potty-talk of Dongshan, the innocent smile of Kashyapa, and the dancing of Jinniu and Daguang¹⁴¹ – to name a few “venerables” that defy convention by behaving with the freedom of children. In Zen, as in the kingdom of childhood, disregard for the rules of language, logic and propriety, lack of respect for icons and hierarchy, the equality of fact and fiction, and the primacy of laughter are the rule. Certainly, this brand of salvation on earth has its appeal and plays well for many audiences: “If you genuinely penetrate it, then the seventeen hundred koans are giant cookies,” and your “spiritual powers wander at play.”¹⁴²

If this is so, then a reasonable observer must ask: If one is ultimately, in a sense, headed backwards with the koan program, then why go through all of the hardship and frustration of trying to go forward on a path that seems to be one of spiritual maturation? While questioning may be the mother of all thought, in Zen, such a “Why?” has no place (at least out in the open). “Any who refuse to believe may leave.”¹⁴³ In spite of any function that they may serve, the correct attitude with which to approach koans is an autotelic one. The authorities resoundingly assure us that in order to “succeed” in the

¹⁴⁰ See Miura and Sasaki, and Conrad Hyers, *The Laughing Buddha: Zen and the Comic Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1989); 布袋Budai (P’u-tai [WG]; Hotei [J]; the so-called Laughing Buddha); 仰山Yangshan (Yang-shan [WG]; Kyozan [J]) appears in *BCR* koan 68.

¹⁴¹ 寒山Hanshan (PY); Han-shan (WG); Kanzan (J) and 拾得Shide (PY) Shih-te (WG) Jittoku (J). Read of 普化Puhua ([PY]; P’u-hua [WG]; Fuke [J]) in Watson, *Lin-chi lu*, 85-7; 洞山Dongshan (Tung-shan [WG]; Tozan [J]) in *BCR* koan 96 (See also *Linjilu*, passim and *Wumenguan* koan 21 for more potty-talk); Kashyapa is in *Wumenguan* koan 6; Jinniu and Daguang dance in *BCR* koans 74 and 93 (Appendixes 1 and 2).

¹⁴² Hakuin, *SBCR* koan 40; *BCR* koan 74 (Appendix 1). See also note 298.

¹⁴³ Cleary, *The Sutra of Hui-neng*, 49.

program, one must set aside all thoughts of success, of meanings, of answers, of Enlightenment, of Nirvana, of goals, and of ends.¹⁴⁴ The more one is attached to such things, the less one is attending to the koan-event at hand. In this game that favors surprise and playing-with, one must have faith that whatever is supposed to happen, will happen; one must let the koan be and let the engagement play out.¹⁴⁵

While the player is endless in this sense, so too should his playing be temporally endless if he is to remain a player. First, formal koan training must seem practically eternal,¹⁴⁶ and this must be partly in the minds of masters when they suggest the autotelic outlook. However, even once one has mastered all seventeen hundred koans,¹⁴⁷ and as such, is an eminent master in his own right, they are not set aside as played-out, but rather are endlessly re-enacted, and kept in play.¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, traditionally, at the end of practice in the controlled context of one's monastery, as one visits other adepts, one must perform in dharma contests. Then, should one take up their own disciples, they will incur the challenges outlined above. Such "a lifetime of reshaping," of continually "going beyond," is what prevents the atrophy of Zen flexibility and the death of living insight.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ See *BCR* koan 37; Linji in Hyers, 125; Cleary, *Hui-neng's Commentary*, 92; Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, 116; and Watson, *Lin-chi lu*, 47.

¹⁴⁵ As National Teacher Wuxiang 無相 (Wu-hsiang [WG]; Muso [J]) advised: "If a student has any seeking for enlightenment in his mind, he is not really keeping a koan before him" (Cleary and Cleary [Pranja Press edition], xii). See also Sekida, *Two Zen Classics*, 17.

¹⁴⁶ "[T]he roots of your false conceptions are deep, and after all are hard to pull out all at once" (*BCR* koan 93 [Appendix 2]).

¹⁴⁷ Suzuki, *Essays in Zen [Second Series]*, 2. "Seventeen hundred" is the standard number of koans in Zen. See Hakuin, *SBCR* koan 40.

¹⁴⁸ "Each time it's brought up it's brand new" (*BCR* koan 30). "Study for thirty more years!" "After thirty years you'll finally get it" (*BCR* koans 30 and 96; see also koans 4, 20 and 73). Hakuin had new insights into the *BCR* even after thirty years of lecturing on it (*SBCR*, xxxvii-xxxviii). Aitken Roshi states that "passing all the koans is only a good beginning" (Aitken, *Wu-men kuan*, 15-17).

¹⁴⁹ Wright, "Rethinking Transcendence," 128; Hakuin, in Mohr, 264. Accomplished masters, free from notions of a final arrival, will tend to refer to themselves as "old monk" or "mountain monk."

In Chapter 5, I will take up the issue of whether or not koan practice is autotelic in itself, aside from the comportment of a practicing subject. For the moment, I have shown that in koan study, one is put into play, going to-and-fro amongst the antiphonal voices of the Zen arena that play with and play against each other. Submitting to this game is submitting to its determinate and indeterminate components and submitting to its rules which favor hiddenness, disguise and surprise. Through prolonged and serious engagement in this extraordinary play, one purportedly becomes an extraordinary player with uncanny skills and limitless flexibility, “do[ing] so many tricks,”¹⁵⁰ and correctly responding to any situation that may arise. With such a level of mastery and the ability to perform the assigned role correctly, life is play and the world is continually as fresh and as new as it is for a child.

¹⁵⁰ *BCR* koan 74 (Appendix 1).

CHAPTER 4

ZEN DOCTRINE

Having characterized the koan tradition as a playful one, I now turn towards Zen's internal rationale for this. But in order to do this, I must briefly present some of the Zen doctrine that lies beneath the surface of Zen expressions.¹⁵¹ Though these beliefs may be extremely challenging to common sense, the inquiry as a whole is limited to the connection between Zen thought and koan practice so construed, and in general, will not submit doctrine to critique that does not elucidate such a connection. Thus, in this chapter and the next, I play the role of an advocate, defending Zen. But rather than defend its tenets against the charge of absurdity, I will defend its playful practice against the possible charge of being inconsistent with its beliefs.

Certainly in the West, no Buddhist notion has been played around with more than that of 'emptiness'.¹⁵² As put in *BCR* koan 37, "There is nothing in the world."¹⁵³ In stark contrast to all who have followed Aristotle, this means that reality is empty of any independent, lasting substance or essence that is "clothed" in appearance, or of which

¹⁵¹ "At the back of this anti-intellectualism of Zen there is a clearly delineated philosophy" (Toshihiko Izutsu, *Toward a Philosophy of Zen Buddhism* [Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1977], 151).

¹⁵² "Emptiness" translates *śūnyatā* (S); 空 *kong* (PY); *k'ung* (WG); *kū* (J).

¹⁵³ See also *BCR* koans 31 and 78, and Cleary, *Sutra of Hui-neng*, 10.

properties are predicated. There are no noumena behind the phenomena, and this applies to all beings as well as to the totality itself.¹⁵⁴ As the *Diamond Sutra* concludes,

As stars, a fault of vision, as a lamp,
A mock show, dew drops, or a bubble,
A dream, a lightning flash, or cloud,
So should one view what is conditioned [all phenomena].¹⁵⁵

Rather than delve into the depths of this most enchanting doctrine, I would like to draw attention to four points. First, it is a notion born of meditative, mystical experience and is, in part, meant to indicate what is experienced by Buddhist adepts.¹⁵⁶ As a provisional label for the Ultimate, to truly understand it *is to be* enlightened.¹⁵⁷ Second, it is meant as a catalyst for enlightenment and “a guide for meditation.”¹⁵⁸ Thus, thirdly, like salt, emptiness is to be used in moderation, and like medicine, is to be used only as directed, and only as long as the affliction it is meant to treat is present.¹⁵⁹ The literature is clear: emptiness is a dangerous and intoxicating idea,¹⁶⁰ and one should not cling to the very reality that should encourage letting-go.¹⁶¹ Lastly, as the process of emptying is

¹⁵⁴ One of the “twelve pairs of opposites [is] matter and emptiness” (Cleary, *Sutra of Hui-neng*, 71). The *Lankavatara Sutra* speaks of the emptiness “of all things in the sense that they are unpredictable” (Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, 65). “Noumenon and phenomena are not two” (Hakuin, *SBCR* koan 62).

¹⁵⁵ Edward Conze, trans., *Buddhist Wisdom Books: The Diamond Sutra, The Heart Sutra* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1958), 68. See also Edward Conze, trans., *Selected Sayings from the Perfection of Wisdom* (London: The Buddhist Society, 1955), 96. See *ibid.*, 130-1 for the etymology of *śūnyatā*, the Sanskrit word translated as emptiness.

¹⁵⁶ Conze, *Wisdom Books*, 80.

¹⁵⁷ Suzuki *Lankavatara Sutra*, 66.

¹⁵⁸ Conze, *Selected Sayings*, 22. See also *BCR* koan 74 (Appendix 1); Tenkei, *SBCR* koan 2; and Cleary, *Sutra of Hui-neng*, 17 and 93.

¹⁵⁹ See *BCR* koans 4, 11, 20, 28, 37, etc. See also Cleary, *Hui-neng's Commentary*, 101-2; Conze, *Wisdom Books*, 35-6; and Conze, *Selected Sayings*, 22.

¹⁶⁰ As Nagarjuna says, “Emptiness wrongly seen destroys the weak-minded, like a mishandled snake or a misperformed spell” (Thomas Cleary, *No Barrier: Unlocking the Zen Koan: A New Translation of the Zen Classic Wumenguan [Mumonkan]* [NY: Bantam Books, 1993], 8). Tenkei comments on *BCR* koan 74 (Appendix 1): “[I]t is a fine tea party, but don’t drink too much irresponsibly and get poisoned. It’s important *how* you drink.”

¹⁶¹ “Voidness is lamentable” (*BCR* koan 6 [*SBCR* version]). “[Y]ou must not cling to the cold ashes of a dead fire” (*BCR* koan 25), nor stay in “the stagnant water of transcendence” (Tenkei, *SBCR*, koan 4).

thoroughgoing, emptiness itself is empty, and this notion is held to be opposed to nihilism.¹⁶²

Etymologically, *sunyata* (emptiness) also suggests the illusion of fullness.¹⁶³ It thus dovetails nicely with the “mind only” doctrine - a radical idealism the likes of which are only rarely and briefly pondered outside of the East. “Outside the mind there are no things.”¹⁶⁴ One should not, however, take “the mind” as referring to one’s own mind, but rather, as “the *one* mind, beside which nothing exists.”¹⁶⁵ From this non-dualistic scheme,¹⁶⁶ it naturally follows that Buddha, Enlightenment, and Nirvana, when conceived as objects of attainment set over against a practicing subject, are illusory.¹⁶⁷

Thus, there is discrepancy between the truths of our experience and what is held to be really real. This belief is not at all strange, but Zen’s resolution of the discrepancy is. The “doctrine of two truths” holds that both the “real” truth and the “conventional” (or “worldly”) truth have their validity in the appropriate context.¹⁶⁸ Nevertheless, as *this*

Masters must constantly “[break] through [a] monk’s simplistic . . . view that everything is void” (Tenkei, *SBCR* koan 15), getting “rid of the rust of ‘emptiness of self’ and ‘emptiness of phenomena’” (Hakuin, *SBCR* koan 39). See also Yasutani, “Commentary on the Koan ‘Mu,’” 264.

¹⁶² “It is better to cherish the notion of an ego-substance as much as [sacred] Mount Sumeru than to have a notion of emptiness derived from the self-conceived view of being and non-being” (Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, 126; bracketed material mine). Emptiness is a “middle way” between nihilism and substantialism as it denies only what I have noted and does not deny the existence of phenomena as phenomena: “When it is said that there are no things, one might shrink back, thinking it means that there is nothing at all, but what is right in front of you?” (Tenkei, *SBCR* koan 37). Furthermore, it is a positive emptiness. See Cleary, *Sutra of Hui-neng*, 65; Hakuin Yasutani, “Commentary on the Koan ‘Mu,’” in *Sitting with Koans: Essential Writings on Koan Introspection*, ed. John Daido Looi (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2006), 264; and Conze, *Selected Sayings*, 21.

¹⁶³ See note 153.

¹⁶⁴ *BCR* koan 7. See also Watson, *Lin-chi lu*, 41 and Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, 226-7.

¹⁶⁵ Huangbo 黃檗 (Huang-po [WG]; Obaku [J]) as quoted in Loy, 505 (emphasis mine).

¹⁶⁶ “The whole cannot be broken apart” (*BCR* koan 82). “In the ten directions there are no walls, on the four sides there are no gates” (*BCR* koan 60; cf. koan 36).

¹⁶⁷ See a passage from the *Prañjāpāramitā Sūtra* in Conze, *Selected Sayings*, 98.

¹⁶⁸ “Two truths translates 二諦 *satya-dvaya* (S); er di (PY); erh-ti (WG); ni tai (J). “Real” or “absolute truth” translates 勝義諦 *paramātha-satya* (S); shengyi di (PY); shēng-i-ti (WG); shōgi tai (J). “Worldly” or

dualism runs contrary to the non-dualism that underlies the mind-only and emptiness doctrines, it is held that, in spite of any apparent contradictions between the two, “the highest meaning of the holy truths” is that “there is no duality to real and conventional.” That is, there is only one truth and any contradiction between the two is itself provisional.¹⁶⁹

Clearly, any system in which two contradictory statements can both be true is one with a peculiar relationship to language. In Zen, stemming from the belief that reality is really empty of distinction and that the ultimate “meaning is outside of words,” “there is fundamentally nothing to be said.”¹⁷⁰ “A truthful man is hard to find,” in part because any attempt to grasp the ungraspable and think the unthinkable is inherently destined to fail.¹⁷¹ As language is inherently dualistic and literally articulates – in the sense of dividing – the “whole [that] cannot be broken apart,”¹⁷² “[o]pen your mouth and you’re wrong,” regardless of what you utter.¹⁷³ Even the best language does not measure up. The famous line from the *Heart Sutra*, “Form itself is emptiness, emptiness itself is form” may be the very pith of Mahayana thought, but in response, Hakuin says, “A potful of my

“conventional” or “relative truth” translates 世俗諦 *samvrtti-satya* (S); *shisudi* (PY); *shih-su-ti* (WG); *seizoku tai* (J).

¹⁶⁹ *BCR* koan 44. “You must avoid understanding them as two parts” (*BCR* koan 43); this “is the most esoteric, most abstruse point” (koan 1).

¹⁷⁰ *BCR* koan 74 and Tenkei, *SBCR* koan 74 (both in Appendix 1). See also koan 99; Watson, *Lin-chi lu*, 30; Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, 168; Conze, *Selected Sayings*, number 85; and note 276.

¹⁷¹ *BCR* koan 51. “One piece of empty solidity” (*BCR* koan 90) - “[i]mpossible for cognition to fathom” (*BCR* koan 27; see also koan 57). “Grasp it, and you lose your balance and surely enter a false path” (*BCR* koan 37). Thus, a good master “makes them unable to get a hold” (*BCR* koan 93 [Appendix 2]; see also koan 98).

¹⁷² *BCR* koan 82. “The single thread before us is perpetually unbroken” (*BCR* koans 90 and 94); “there are not so many things” (Tenkei, *SBCR* koan 74 [Appendix 1]).

¹⁷³ *BCR* koan 86 (see also koan 20). “I always say, though I were to add a phrase as sweet as honey, when properly viewed it’s just poison” (*BCR* koan 28). Commenting on something said “adds error to error” (*BCR* koans 8, 16, 28, 32, 36, 64, etc.). Thus, Yuanwu ends *BCR* by declaring it to be his “hundred-fold incompetence” (koan 100). Even in the thought that precedes articulation, there is error (Watson, *Lin-chi lu*, 58).

best stew, / Dirtied by two lumps of rat shit!”¹⁷⁴ Such a hostile stance goes beyond the belief that language is merely a substitute for the reality it aims to represent;¹⁷⁵ it holds that language may in fact distort and hide reality, distract practitioners from a direct experience of it, as well as ruin an experience of it.¹⁷⁶

But if the *Heart Sutra* is an error, why is it that Hakuin “adds error to error” with *his* verse? According to Tenkei “adding a word where there is nothing to say, . . . is transcendental strategy.”¹⁷⁷ Though language may to some degree in Zen be held as inherently false, masters “save people according to their type,” “expounding by design” through adjustment of the Teaching to students’ dispositions, employing relative truths – or perhaps we should say relative or “white” lies - as “skillful means.”¹⁷⁸ As the Buddha says,

As a king or wealthy householder, giving his children various clay-made animals, pleases them and makes them play [with the toys], but later gives them real ones; so, I, making use of various forms and images of things, instruct my sons; but the limit of reality can [only] be realized within oneself.¹⁷⁹

Yet, a teacher must not only be skillful in judging what will please his “children;” he must dispense “the living word, not the dead word.”¹⁸⁰ “Dead words” are the building

¹⁷⁴ Quoted in Hori, *Zen Sand*, 455.

¹⁷⁵ See *BCR* koans 2, 6, 13, 16, 40, 60 97 and note 100.

¹⁷⁶ See *BCR* koans 24, 25, 60, 61, 62, 80, 74 [Appendix 1] and 100.

¹⁷⁷ *SBCR* koan 38. See note 174.

¹⁷⁸ *BCR* koans 87 and 74 (Appendix 1); see also koan 88. “The Ancients provisionally established expedient methods to help people” (*BCR* koan 93 [Appendix 2]). In Sanskrit, these white lies are referred to as *upāya*. In Zen they are referred to variously. “Expounding by design” translates 提唱建立 *tichang jianli* [PY]; *t’i-ch’ang chien-li* [WG]; *teisho konryu* [J]. “Expedient devices” is the common translation of 善權 *shanquan* [PY]; *shan-ch’üan* [WG]; *zengon* [J]. Similarly with “skillful expedients”: 方便 *fangbian* [PY]; *fang-pien* [WG]; *hoben* [J]. See also Watson, *Lin-chi lu*, 9 and Heine, “Koans in the Dogen Tradition,” 3.

¹⁷⁹ Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, 77-8. See also “The Parable of the Burning House” in the *Lotus Sutra*.

¹⁸⁰ *BCR* koan 93. “Live words” translates 活句 *huoju* (PY); *huo-chü* (WG); *kakku* / *katsuku* (J). “Dead words” translates 死句 *siju* (PY); *ssu-chü* (WG); *shiku* (J). See the verse commentary in *BCR* koan 93 (Appendix 2) and Tenkei, *SBCR* koan 1.

blocks of “coarse language,” of the “cognitive language” that produces “illusory knowledge” – that is, ordinary words and language, such as the ones you now read.¹⁸¹ Operating in a closed matrix of inter-referentiality and dependency, dead words are, as I have said, employed to cut up and contain reality.¹⁸² Thus, if “you get understanding at the dead phrase, you will be unable to save yourself” and “you won’t avoid exterminating the Buddha’s race.”¹⁸³ Live words, however, are purportedly words *of* living reality that spring from it, and not upon it. A true Zen master, acting in a living context, goes “to where life springs forth, [and] immediately speaks,” manifesting “the ultimate and eternal [and ineffable] Truth in a momentary flash of words.”¹⁸⁴ When this happens, he is not just a conduit of information, but rather “[t]he actual embodiment of the *Heart Sutra*.”¹⁸⁵ Unfortunately, living words can fall on dead ears and “the supreme flavor of pure ghee is converted on encountering such people, into poison.”¹⁸⁶ Still, in spite of the inherent flaws of linguistic communication, some words spring forth from “the source outside of words” and “[d]o not deceive people completely.”¹⁸⁷ Speech may be a good thing for the right ears, and “yellow leaves” (lies) may in fact be “yellow gold” (truths) when masters

¹⁸¹ Baizhang (百丈 Pai-chang [WG]; Hyakugo [J]) in Wang, *Linguistic Strategies*, 112. On “false conceptions” and “coarse discriminating consciousness,” see *BCR* koan 93 (Appendix 2). Zen emphasizes the difference between (mere) knowledge and understanding. See *BCR* koans 1, 74 (Appendix 1), 51, and 91. See also *Wumenguan* koan 9; note 333 and note 374.

¹⁸² “When there are words within the words, these words are called dead words. When there are no words within words, these words are called living words” (Juefan Huihong in Wang, *Linguistic Strategies*, 221).

¹⁸³ *BCR* koan 39; “Original Preface to *The Blue Cliff Record*,” Cleary and Cleary, xxxiii).

¹⁸⁴ *BCR* koan 39; Izutsu, *Toward a Philosophy of Zen Buddhism*, 96 (bracketed material mine).

¹⁸⁵ A capping phrase from Hori, *Zen Sand*, 134. See also *ibid.*, 166.

¹⁸⁶ *BCR* koan 74 (Appendix 1); see also case commentary of koan 40 and verse commentary of koan 93 (Appendix 2).

¹⁸⁷ Tenkei, *SBCR* koan 74 (Appendix 1); *BCR* koan 93 (Appendix 2). See also *BCR* koan 34.

counter intuition and use “poison to counteract poison.”¹⁸⁸ Hence, the transformation of *BCR* characters from un-enlightened to enlightened upon hearing words that have the “hidden truth lurking beneath the surface” presentation.¹⁸⁹

In light of all that has been said about Zen and language in the West, a few more points should be kept in mind. First, while one cannot deny a strain of hostility towards language and doctrinal pronouncement, this has to be taken in light of the culture in which Zen arose and to which Zen is a response. The sect came to be in counterpoint to highly theoretical strains of Buddhism, within a civilization enamored with texts. Taken as audience specific teaching, the hostility is mitigated. Second, it is an exaggeration to suggest that in Zen, silence is always better than speech. Silence is often “medicine” for language and rationalization (the “disease” of us ordinary folks); language is medicine for silence and detached quietism (the “disease” of monks and self-styled mystics).¹⁹⁰ Thus, “koan language” includes speech, silence, gesture and action, as all can be expressive and valuable as moves if “appropriate to the occasion.”¹⁹¹ But in regard to language in the narrow sense, the classical texts clearly attest to the value of words – explicitly and *as revered texts*.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ Heine, “Koans in the Dogen Tradition,” 3. *BCR* koan 93 (Appendix 2) asks, “Who says yellow leaves are yellow gold?” See also Sekida, *Two Zen Classics*, 386.

¹⁸⁹ Hori, *Zen Sand*, 47. See Hakuin, *SBCR* koan 37 and Tenkei, *SBCR* koan 36. “The phrase, ‘at these words, so and so was awakened,’ is perhaps the most common in [classical Zen] literature” (Wright, “Kōan History,” 205). See *BCR* koan 7, for example.

¹⁹⁰ For examples of the medical metaphor, see *BCR* koans 4, 11, 28, 37, 55, 64, 65, 87.

¹⁹¹ *BCR* koan 8. See *BCR* koans 70-2; Hakuin, *SBCR* koans 32, 38, and 52; *Wumenguan* koan 20; and Hori, *Zen Sand*, 107.

¹⁹² “[A]lthough this matter is not in words and phrases, if not for words and phrases, it could not be distinguished” (*BCR* koan 25). This is most clearly shown in the works of Heine, Wright, and Hori, as well as others of the “hermeneutic approach” to koan scholarship as represented in the work edited by Heine and Wright.

The final doctrinal issue that I would like to discuss is the sinification of ‘Buddhahood’ and ‘Buddha-nature’ – a process that reaches radical culminations in Zen. From traditional, Indian Buddhism comes the idea of the *tathāgata-garbha* – the “seed,” “womb,” or “matrix” (*garbha*) of a particular Buddha (*tathāgata*) yet to be, that exists in all beings.¹⁹³ This image suggests that through spiritual labor one may give birth to an inner Buddha, and thereby become a Buddha. The *BCR*, no doubt, does much to support such a conception, with themes of transformation, enlightenment, and of something “hidden in the body of every being like a gem of great value” – an idea that plays well with the notion of a “hidden meaning” of Buddhism, as well as western notions of the Divine within.¹⁹⁴

In Zen, however, the operative word is “hidden,” and the hiddenness of Buddha-nature is suggested by analysis of the Chinese characters for *tathāgata-garbha*. In China, the *tathagata* is not so much made in a “womb,” as it is a treasure stolen and hidden in a “storehouse;”¹⁹⁵ not so much an oak within an acorn, as an oak in the fog. It is worth noting, however, that in contrast to what may be initially assumed from speech of “a gem” hidden in every individual (and even more readily assumed from the birth metaphor), “[w]ithin myriad forms *only one body* is revealed.”¹⁹⁶ There is only one Buddha-nature, one dharma-body,¹⁹⁷ and any apparently particular Buddha is but a manifestation of it. This, of course, follows from non-duality. But said doctrine also

¹⁹³ *Tathāgata-garbha* (S); 如來藏, *rulai zang* (PY); *ju-lai tsang* (WG); *nyorai zo* (J).

¹⁹⁴ Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, 68-9. See also *BCR* koan 62.

¹⁹⁵ *BCR* koan 95.

¹⁹⁶ *BCR* koan 6; emphasis mine.

¹⁹⁷ *Dharmakāya* (S); 法身 *fǎ shēn* (PY); *fa-shen* (WG); *hō shin* (J).

negates any duality between Buddha and “non-Buddha.” If Buddha is a hidden abundance, and Buddha(hood) is not a product, it follows that “there is no one on earth that does not sit at this table” of enlightened beings.¹⁹⁸ “Buddhas and sentient beings – fundamentally there is no difference between them;” “[e]ach and every one – they’re all complete.”¹⁹⁹ There is “nothing to be attained.”²⁰⁰ Put differently, if the duality between “the hidden” and “the hidden-by,” as well as that between that which has and the had, are invalid, then the “whole world does not hide it, and it is perfectly manifest everywhere.”²⁰¹ This is so because, ultimately, it is not a question of being able to produce it, nor of finding a hidden treasure externally or internally. “You don’t need to go to heaven to look for it. You don’t have to seek it” anywhere at all. “You are it” and “there’s nothing that’s not it.”²⁰² The “whole world does not hide it” because the whole world and all of its contents are and always have been “it.” Such a belief in ‘original Buddha-nature’ points beyond our guiding question of “Why Zen-play?” to a larger question that will be perennially present in the background – “Why Zen at all?”²⁰³

¹⁹⁸ Tenkei, *SBCR* koan 74 (Appendix 1).

¹⁹⁹ *BCR* koans 60 and 23. See also Cleary, *Hui-neng’s Commentary*, 100.

²⁰⁰ This is a literal translation of an idiom (*Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*, s.v. “無所得 wú suǒ dé” [article by C. Muller], <http://buddhism-dict.net/ddb> [accessed February 7, 2009]) that appears in *BCR* koan 78. Cleary and Cleary translate the sentence in which it appears as “Absence of attainment is true wisdom.”

²⁰¹ *BCR* koan 53.

²⁰² *BCR* koans 90, 96, and 7. See also koan 19.

²⁰³ “[W]hatever you pick up, there is nothing that’s not it. But tell me, what is attained [in Zen] that is so extraordinary?” (*BCR* koan 7; bracketed material mine).

CHAPTER 5

ZEN MASTERS ON PLAY

If the advertised ‘mind-to-mind transmission’ of Ultimate Truth is possible, and if salvation of all sentient beings is the goal of Buddhism, then why do the bearers of Zen insight play these elusive games with their students? – this, again, is the guiding question. Having laid-out some core Zen beliefs, I now turn to the playful characteristics of koan behavior and, intentionally taking on a sympathetic tone, attempt to ground them in these beliefs that I have baldly presented without the apology that reasonable people are compelled to demand.

In light of the view that reality is empty of duality, one may ask how any playing-with is possible. The answer that strains reason is that while emptiness is the ultimate truth, the multivalent truth structure validates the reality that we ordinarily experience, with all of its myriad phenomena. Thus, once one exits the cave of enlightenment – and they must – there are people with whom to interact. Zen folk play along with the “dream” in which they find themselves – one in which there is language, culture, and a rich literary heritage. As these things are all ultimately empty, they can be “handled playfully,”²⁰⁴ and masters play with, play along with, and play against what their monks bring. This usually includes ideas about Buddhism and Zen and veneration for historical figures and their locutions. Once monks begin to really play with such givens, rather than

²⁰⁴ See note 47.

consume and spectate upon them, they realize that their ideas are empty “ghosts in front of the skull” to which they are attached.²⁰⁵ Then, rather than being limited to the realm of thought, they will be “intimate with the whole of reality.”²⁰⁶ Then, the Buddhism of the past will, in a sense, have no advantage over the living truth of Buddhism in the practitioner’s here and now.

In the koan tradition, no aspect of established culture and psychology is played with as much as language, logic and thought itself. Even the words of the Patriarchs, as empty words, fall short of grasping the universal and of being universally applicable.²⁰⁷ Since the “last word [always] is, as it were, a sitting duck” there is “the game of Zen one-upmanship”²⁰⁸ in which enlightened persons contradict each other on the level of phenomenal truth, even though they share in the enlightened perspective, which in Zen, is empty of duality, let alone contradiction. Zen students need to let go of language by experiencing its fluidity as evidenced in the masters' playful handling. Once the faith in graspable utterance and ideas as bedrock is undermined, they may gain footing on reality itself, while acknowledging that a facet of that reality is the myriad utterances of the culture in which they find themselves.²⁰⁹ Once emptied of their substantiality, Zen words

²⁰⁵ *BCR* koan 42; see also koan 40 and Hakuin, *SBCR* koan 52.

²⁰⁶ *BCR* koan 55. “Mountains and rivers and one’s own self – how could there be any distinction?” (*BCR* koan 60).

²⁰⁷ “If your whole body were a mouth, you still wouldn’t be able to speak of it” (*BCR* koan 89). See also note 100.

²⁰⁸ Foulk, 35; Hori, *Zen Sand*, 35. Of course, some words are less flawed than others. When a master is a “storehouse of the true *Dharma* eye” (*BCR* koans 6, 49, 60, etc), his “error is profound” (*BCR* koan 76) and he “[does] not deceive people completely” (*BCR* koan 93 [Appendix 2]).

²⁰⁹ “Manifold appearances and myriad forms, and all spoken words, each should be turned and returned to oneself and made to turn freely” (*BCR* koan 39). The image of a wheel comes to mind: without some play in the bearings, the wheel will not turn. See also Zenkei Shibayama, “Nansen (Nanquan) Kills a Cat,” in *Sitting with Koans: Essential Writings on Koan Introspection*, ed. John Daido Looi (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2006), 258.

are “balls of mud” which are “tossed about,” and Zen culture is, in this sense, “just a bunch of fellows playing with [lumps] of mud.”²¹⁰

This is not to say, however, that koan practice is some sort of light entertainment. On the contrary, in a sense, the student’s real opponent and the thing that is being played with the most is the student himself in this game of total transformation.²¹¹ It “requires you have the bottom fall out of your bucket.”²¹² Practically speaking, this ironically requires the tradition that is “[n]ot founded on words” and “directly point[s] at the ultimate” to do so with a high degree of complexity and a high word count,²¹³ lest the contest between what one is and what one could be have an inauspicious outcome.

This draws attention to the fact that there are several ways in which a to-and-fro motion is manifest. For one, the field of play and the rules of play must be honored, or at least, acknowledged. Again, that the ultimate truth is the emptiness of all things does not invalidate provisional truth which includes the contingent, somewhat arbitrary, rules of a culture in which one finds himself – or in the case of the koan arena, into which one enters.²¹⁴ Many koans deal with this issue. The social order may merely be a matter of convention and a mental construction. If a novice plays the emptiness card and steps out of bounds with his superior, however, the empty beating he may receive may not seem so

²¹⁰ *BCR* koan 93 (Appendix 2), for example; Yunmen, in Miura and Sasaki, 53; *BCR* koan 69.

²¹¹ See *BCR* koan 57.

²¹² *BCR* koan 33. Compare Schechner, 41.

²¹³ Hori, “Koan and *Kensho*,” 296, and “Original Preface to *The Blue Cliff Record*,” Cleary and Cleary, xxxiii. The tradition is aware of this irony: “Youji’s arrow shoots the monkey [behind the tree]: / Circling the tree, how exceedingly direct!” (*BCR* koan 69).

²¹⁴ The “realm of Zen mastery” (*BCR* koan 26) is “the battlefield of spiritual encounter . . . the arena of projecting constructed teaching methods” (Hakuin, *SBCR* koan 26). Compare Conze, *Wisdom Books*, 46-7.

illusory.²¹⁵ Nevertheless, with sufficient understanding of the subtleties of the field of emptiness, that which is given - including the rules of the field, the participants, the tradition, its past locutions and language itself – can be played. This play oscillates between hiding and revealing, going against and going with, giving and taking away, between “humbly listening”²¹⁶ and throwing in one’s two cents, playing along and playing against. Though one may expect oppressive tendencies from the opposition of these components, the result of the “back and forth” is positive friction by which something happens.²¹⁷ In *BCR* koan 74 (Appendix 1), Jinniu accepts parameters of meal time while asserting his insight into the ritual, compassionately using skilful means to draw his disciples’ attention to their original Buddha-nature (the higher truth), while mocking them for not realizing it (the lower truth), applying “pure ghee and poison at the same time.”²¹⁸

This suggests a to-and-fro component of Zen doctrine itself. The emptiness and mind-only doctrines are endlessly played up as the true reality behind illusory phenomenal existence. Nevertheless, taking non-duality and the doctrine of two *truths* seriously leads to a conclusion that runs contrary to the very spirit of mainstream western thought: illusions are real, have their own validity and value, and are to be dealt with, rather than discarded. Hence, I put forth the suggestion that the koan game is in large part played out on the field of “real illusions,” where the implicit “mere” in “illusion” or

²¹⁵ See *BCR* koan 79 and Hakuin, *SBCR* koan 39, for example.

²¹⁶ *BCR* koans 1 and 21. See also koan 62.

²¹⁷ *BCR* koan 41. See Wang, *Linguistic Strategies*, 165 and Faure, 240

²¹⁸ Here, Jinniu is like another master who is “not fettered by the rules of conduct” (Aitken, *Wu-men kuan*, 41).

“appearance” can be dropped.²¹⁹ Though “[o]utside the mind there are no things – Blue mountains fill the eyes.”²²⁰ In *BCR* 40, Nanquan laments,²²¹ “People these days see this flower as a dream;” that is, as an illusion, and hence, as a distraction from reality. The things we take to be real are said to be emptied of their reality in initial enlightenment experiences. Those who really go beyond,²²² however, truly understand the ultimate truth of non-duality are not attached to either standpoint, and are able to alternate between the two. They can set “aside both reality and falsehood” and can play along with appearances.²²³ And “although they are dreaming, they are having a good dream.”²²⁴ Thus, while Xuedou points out the “mistake” of Jinniu in *BCR* 74 (Appendix 1), Yuanwu asks “Where was the deception? Blind men!”

As the barriers between true and false, real and illusion have no hold on the enlightened player, neither does the root dualism: “the double barrier” of ‘is’ and ‘is not’. “When ‘is’ and ‘is not’ are left behind,” when “you shoot through this double barrier with one arrow, the world becomes wider.”²²⁵ The master is free to move to-and-fro between

²¹⁹ “Each and every one – they’re all real” (*BCR* koan 23); “sound and form [phenomena] are purely real” (koan 35); “the empty body of illusion is identical to the body of reality” (koan 62); “[e]verywhere is completely real” (koan 36). “Fundamentally there is . . . no illusions or dreams” (*BCR* koan 21), “this blindness is not really blind” (*BCR* koan 88). [T]he illusory is itself the real. There is no other real to enter” (Miura and Sasaki, 183). See also Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, 109; Hakuin, *SBCR* koans 62 and 74 [Appendix 1]; and Tenkei, *SBCR* koan 37.

²²⁰ *BCR* koan 7.

²²¹ 南泉 Nan-ch’üan (WG); Nansen (J). See also note 163.

²²² *BCR* koan 44.

²²³ Cleary, *Sutra of Hui-neng*, 39. “The false and the true are one suchness, the real and the illusory are one monolith; there is no boundary between them” (Hakuin, *SBCR* koan 35). See also Conze, *Wisdom Books*, 55 and Loy, 490.

²²⁴ *BCR* koan 40. See also Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Studies in the Lankavatara Sutra*, Vol. 2 of *Kegan Paul Library of Religion and Mysticism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1930; repr., London: Kegan Paul International, 2000), 118-9.

²²⁵ *BCR* koan 84; Hakuin, *SBCR* koan 29. See also *BCR* koans 43, 51 and 65; Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, 93 and 126; Miura and Sasaki, 71-2; and Katsuki Sekida, *Zen Training: Methods and Philosophy* (NY: Weatherhill, 1975), 246.

‘A is A’ and ‘A is-not A’ and ‘A is not-A’.²²⁶ Zhaozhou can “say” that a sandal is a hat²²⁷ and Hakuin can ask about the sound of one hand clapping. It is because this particular to-and-fro movement is allowed in Zen discourse that all of the famous Zen tautology, absurdity and contradiction ensues.²²⁸ Yet it is not a mere exercise of freedom. Such behavior is a direct presentation of emptiness, which “lies somewhere *between* affirmation and negation, *between* ‘is’ and ‘is not.’”²²⁹

These demonstrations are performed for students who, paradoxically, do not exist.²³⁰ In so doing, a teacher plays along with his own illusions as well as theirs, freely choosing to exercise his skills in the worldly arena.²³¹ Yet to say that a such a free being *is* here in samsara and *is-not* in nirvana is not entirely true. It is more accurate to say that,

²²⁶ “When a marsh is wide it can contain a mountain; a cat can subdue a leopard” (*BCR* koan 38). “Water poured on cannot wet, / Wind blowing cannot enter” (*BCR* koan 59); an iron tree blooms with flowers” (*BCR* case 40); Masters play the “flute with no holes” (*BCR* koans 41, 51, 82, etc.).

²²⁷ *BCR* koan 64.

²²⁸ See note 377 below. For an example of Zen circularity, I offer an interpretation of the sequence of events that are recorded in the original cases of *BCR* 74 and 93 (Appendixes 1 and 2). Jinniu’s dance begins as a self-contained and complete event (A is A). It is then taken as “joyful celebration” (A is B; A is-not-just A). Later a monk asks, “What is ‘joyful celebration?’” (What is B?). Daguang did a dance (B is A). Thus, the monk gains no new information. Nevertheless he “says,” “Oh I get it,” and does a dance (A is A). Daguang replies, “No, you fake. That’s ‘C.’ You are not in the circle.” Taking a different interpretive route, note that to take a dance as “joyful celebration” is not much of an interpretive stretch; that particular B is an inherent (and obvious) possibility of that particular A, and ‘A already is B.’ In as much as this is true, Chaquang’s response, “joyful celebration” is paramount to ‘A is A; a dance is a dance.’ Note that this type of Zen teaching counteracts the ‘A is-not-just A’ tendency in humans (that is, semiosis and interpretation), which has a tendency to put ‘A is A’ - that is, the ‘A-ness of A,’ it’s being what it is, its ‘suchness’ (*tathatā*; see note 377) – in the realm of the forgotten, so long as one is chasing B. Of course, with one swing of the pendulum of Zen training, the doctrine of emptiness dictates that A is-not A; but nor is it B, nor is it at all. When the pendulum swings the other way and the cycle is complete, ‘A is A’ and ‘A is-not A’ – to deny one or the other is to be at odds with Zen teaching.

²²⁹ Conze, *Wisdom Books*, 34. When a master moves so, he is the “actual embodiment of the *Heart Sutra*” (Hori, *Zen Sand*, 134) in which “Form is [its opposite:] emptiness, emptiness is form.”

²³⁰ “A Bodhisattva is a being compounded of the two contradictory forces of wisdom and compassion. In his wisdom, he sees no persons; in his compassion he is resolved to save them” (Edward Conze, *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development* [New York: Harper and Row, 1959],

130). “Out of compassion for living beings, he suffers an empty affliction” (*BCR* koan 84).

²³¹ A Zen master has the “freedom to appear or disappear” (*BCR* koan 38), is “free to arise in the east and sink in the west, to go against or to go with, in any and all directions, free to give or to take away” (*BCR* koan 1), “sometimes entering into the domain of Buddhas, sometimes entering into the domain of demons” (Hakuin, *SBCR* koan 74 [Appendix 1]; see also, Miura and Sasaki, 58).

inasmuch as there are two realms, “sporting spiritual powers,” he freely oscillates between them, to the effect that he may enjoy “simultaneous arrival in the absolute and the relative.”²³² Practically, for a master this means “coming and going . . . back and forth” between the quiet cave of enlightenment and the bustling marketplace of engagement, between two realities and two truths, “[l]eaving the weeds, entering the weeds” as the circumstances require.²³³ And within the weeds, he maintains his phenomenal to-and-fro as part of his bag of tricks, eluding through alternation between assimilation and accommodation, between coercion and deference.²³⁴

Not unlike the game of hide-n-seek, the koan game is one in which seekers seek, and bearers of insight play along. According to the Zen conception of language in its shortcomings and its conception of the ultimate, it naturally follows that the former hides the latter. Original Buddha-nature is also hidden by these and related human tendencies,²³⁵ such as the preference for the graspable. Yet as for the quarry in this game “there will be no one who can grasp it;”²³⁶ no one will become enlightened unless he plays this endless game, “accepts the elusiveness of the *Dharma*” and lets the mystery of this “formless truth” remain mysterious.²³⁷

As a master cannot grasp it, he cannot readily hand it over either. He must remain as vague as reality, must hide the “pearl in a worn-out cloth pouch,” to the extent that, in

²³² Hakuin, *SBCR* koan 74 (Appendix 1). See Linji in Miura and Sasaki, 71.

²³³ *BCR* koan 41; *BCR* koan 34. A standard capping phrase runs: “Becoming a dragon, he rises to the sky; turning into a snake, he enters the grass” (Hori, *Zen Sand*, 362). See also note 288.

²³⁴ This to-and-fro motion is expressed by a variety of metaphors. See, for example, *BCR* koans 4, 14, 16, 22, 26, 46, and 75.

²³⁵ See Cleary, *Sutra of Hui-neng*, 41 and Suzuki, *Studies in the Lankavatara Sutra*, 105.

²³⁶ Conze, *Selected Sayings*, 99. See also note 172.

²³⁷ Conze, *Selected Sayings*, 98; Cleary, *Hui-neng’s Commentary*, 92. One cannot “demand rational calculations here of the mysterious and wondrous” (*BCR* koan 50).

addition to most of us, even “the gods cannot fathom” him.²³⁸ Nevertheless, though the game is apparently a contest against one’s teacher for a prize that he holds, a master is more like a coach or “a good friend” that “hides his body but reveals his shadow.”²³⁹ This is “the hidden ploy of a Zen teacher” – to leave “trailing vines,” to lower a “fishing line,” to grant hints by which a disciple may get his own prize.²⁴⁰ Thus, though his words and actions hide the ultimate truth, “all these are indications of the absolute,” and the inherent fallacy of what is spoken may be converted into a manifest layer of the Dharma²⁴¹ if the student can “penetrate through words, . . . [and] pass through meanings.”²⁴²

To do so, he must make a conceptual leap and realize that “consciousness is like a mock show”²⁴³ that “creates an objective world which is like a stage.”²⁴⁴ As with what we normally call theater, some members of the audience, while experiencing the reality of the performance before them, maintain knowledge of its unreality in the background of awareness, while others do not.²⁴⁵ Within the theater of reality is the koan theater, where Zen masters put on a baffling yet intriguing act, knowingly exerting influence upon their audience while hiding behind the face that they present. The radical stance that all phenomena are illusory, and the consequent stance that all performances are, in a sense, fake, grant them the license to manipulate the truth for dramatic effect. Yet since this is

²³⁸ Hakuin, *SBCR* koan 37; *BCR* koan 84. “No one on earth can get a grasp on him” (*BCR* koan 75); “he’s a hammerhead without a hole” (*BCR* koan 91).

²³⁹ *BCR* koan 93 (Appendix 2); *BCR* koans 28, 43, and 73.

²⁴⁰ Tenkei, *SBCR* koan 4; *BCR* koan 32 (for example); see notes 110 and 375.

²⁴¹ Yunmen, quoted in *BCR* koan 44.

²⁴² *BCR* koan 21. See also Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, 168.

²⁴³ Conze, *Selected Sayings*, 96. See also related passages in *ibid.*, 96-7, as well as the closing of the *Diamond Sutra* (Conze, *Wisdom Books*, 68) cited above.

²⁴⁴ Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, 193.

²⁴⁵ See Yasutani, 264; Conze, *Selected Sayings*, 20; and Hyers, 112.

held to be an act of compassion, out of the vast possibilities open to them,²⁴⁶ they create good illusions,²⁴⁷ a “mock show” that not only hides but also reveals. While “this extraordinary truth” cannot be hidden,²⁴⁸ neither can it exactly be shown to an expecting audience, like some object or document. Thus emptiness must be presented in character, in costume.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁶ “Like an actor [the *Tathāgata-garbha*] takes on a variety of forms” (Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, 190). In his commentary on the *Diamond Sutra*, Huineng says, “All natures have limitations, so they cannot be called great; buddha-nature” being empty of determinations, “has no limitations, so it is called great” (Cleary, *Hui-neng’s Commentary*, 97).

²⁴⁷ A Bodhisattva “obtains the Samādhi known as Māyā-like [“illusion-like”] . . . he gains a body which exhibits various powers . . . which moves as quickly as a flower opens up” (Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, 119; bracketed material mine). In Chapter 24, the *Lotus Sutra* mentions “The Samadhi of Playful Roaming of Spiritual Penetrations” which, according to Master Hsuan Hua, entails using depth of understanding “to teach and transform living beings as one roams and plays . . . It’s like an illusion, like putting on a play” (Buddhist Text Translation Society, *The Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra: A Simple Explanation by the Venerable Master Hsuan Hua* [Burlingame, CA: Buddhist Text Translation Society, 1998], 14:189).

²⁴⁸ *BCR* koans 98 and 41 (see also koans 75 and 74 [Appendix 1]).

²⁴⁹ “He exposes or transforms according to the occasion” (*BCR* koan 60), “sport[ing] devil eyes” if the situation calls for it (*BCR* koan 5). “These sounds, names, words, phrases are all nothing but changes of robe” (Watson, *Lin-chi lu*, 60). Linji explains that when students come to him they cannot re-cognize the true, naked him – which is, emptiness. Thus, according to their varied dispositions, he puts on various robes by which they get to know him before eventually cognizing the ultimate, which he embodies. See also *BCR* koans 4, 5, 49, and 87.

Nevertheless, while in one sense a koan performer is *in* character and is-not his character, we have seen that in this strange realm, the distinction between is and is-not is permeable, and appearances are real. That is, he is a character, and is the reality which he is presenting.²⁵⁰ Ideally, the actor's "acting" – in the sense of pretending – stops, and all involved focus on the reality of the performance. When this is the case he "completely fools everyone" and his audience "reduced to dumbfounded amazement."²⁵¹ If they come to understand the play, he will, in part, have shown them what fools they were by making them "play the fool" in his "mock show."

While koan collections may be thought of as albums of great performances, a master actor needs something to play off of, something worthy of his exertion. Koan play requires such an exertion, and a koan is not unlike a cinematic screen upon which a showing is projected, something to play upon.²⁵² The purported inherent fallacy of all phenomena, including performances of the venerables, permits the iconoclastic flair of the strong characters that play in (and direct) the koan show. Though the singular understanding that is held to be shared by all true lineage holders is ungraspable and incommunicable, when played upon a koan-screen, an audience can be granted an intimation of it.²⁵³ But in addition to sensing "it," they come to know the actor by their acting. When a master gives "play to his spirit," he "present[s] his understanding" such

²⁵⁰ "Their personal projections are not apart from their own nature" (Cleary, *Sutra of Hui-neng*, 62).

²⁵¹ BCR koan 31; Watson, *Lin-chi lu*, 59. See also BCR koans 43, 47 and 51.

²⁵² See Mohr, 246.

²⁵³ "[O]nly thus can you see the grasp of the patchrobed monk" (BCR koan 93 [Appendix 2]). See note 286.

that students come to know their master's personal and unique perspective by witnessing a performance of it.²⁵⁴

The exertion flows both ways, however. That upon which a koan actor expresses his understanding is not so much a flat characterless screen as it is like a set that fills the empty stage and determines possible actions, or a script that determines possible alternatives to silence and stillness. Functionally, koans are not only transcriptions of live events in which the truth was revealed with license in an exemplary fashion. They are also prescriptions for new live performances; that with which a performer's presentation must be reckoned and by which it is disciplined.²⁵⁵ Contrary to the way things may seem, the koan theater is not an anarchic venue in which anything goes: though all illusions are illusory, a Zennist's personal understanding must somehow accord with the particular truth of the koan at hand. If correct understanding of the "script" is achieved, the performance is more than an indulgent exercise of a mind upon those of people past and present in order to create a reality.²⁵⁶ Standing on the same stage, it is a true re-presentation by which the original event is kept alive and through which "the light shines again."²⁵⁷

Serving the script does not, however, exhaust the deferential dimension of koan performances. Emptied of self-serving intentions, a master reflects the circumstances,

²⁵⁴ BCR koan 17; see also koans 1, 22, 60, 64, 67, 69, 81, 86, and 99. "Understand the person by means of his words" (Yunmen in Cleary and Cleary, 574).

²⁵⁵ Even "Buddha acted out a complex play" (*Wumenguan* koan 42 [Cleary translation]). Also note that a Zen actor is also disciplined by the koan performance "genre." See Wright, "Rethinking Transcendence," 125.

²⁵⁶ See Foulk, 21 and Chung-feng Ming-peng, "The Definition of a Koan," in *Sitting with Koans: Essential Writings on Koan Introspection*, ed. John Daido Loori (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2006), 14.

²⁵⁷ BCR koan 93 (Appendix 2). "There's an echo in his words" (BCR koan 75). "Xuedou can play with a phrase, reviving" it (BCR koan 89). "Two mouths, one tongue" (Hori, *Zen Sand*, 175).

taking on the illusory distinctions held by his discriminating audience.²⁵⁸ Playing his role like “a puppet pulled on strings,”²⁵⁹ he submits to the dynamic Dharma,²⁶⁰ and is “tossed about in the ebb and flow” of this ungraspable truth²⁶¹ which is under-stood to the extent that he *is* this truth made manifest.²⁶² Those that accompany are tossed about with him,²⁶³

²⁵⁸ The true meaning of “doing by not doing” (不行而行 *bu xing er xing* [PY]; *pu-hsing erh hsing* [WG]; *fu gyo ni gyo* [J]) is acting “like the mysterious gem that reflects varieties of colors” (Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, 64; see also *ibid.*, 196). As an empty stage can host *Macbeth* or *Hansel and Gretel*, and an empty actor can be *Macbeth* or *Hansel*, a master koan performer will, in accordance with the circumstances, draw upon the theoretically vast possibilities of his repertoire and play to, or play along with, his audience. “[W]hen a foreigner comes, a foreigner is reflected; when a native comes, a native is reflected” (*BCR* koan 97). The unitary, empty reality held to be known to masters is obscured by the distinctions of ordinary minds the way the depths of water are obscured by surface disturbances, or the way the same surface distorts that which is reflected in it. Zen acting is “going along with the ripples, following the waves,” (Yunmen in Cleary and Cleary, 574), playing along as if distinctions are real, “acting as masters . . . scattering sand. . . how can this be avoided?” (*BCR* koan 41). Throughout *BCR*, “scattering sand” is another metaphor for propagating illusions and obscuring the ultimate truth, as sand in the eyes obscures vision. It cannot be avoided, and thus, the play of light on the waves.

²⁵⁹ A “puppet pulled on strings . . . connote[s] the no-self of Zen,” a noble state (Hori, *Zen Sand*, 723-4). The third of Linji’s “Three Profundities” that must be inherent in a good utterance reads, “Just observe the playing of puppets on the stage: the pulling of the strings depends on the man behind the scenes” (cited by Yuanwu in *BCR* koan 38; see also *Wumenguan* koan 13).

²⁶⁰ “But say, at such a time, whose actions are these?” (*BCR* koan 1; see also koan 38 and notes 334 and 360). This, in part, is what is meant by the Zen state of ‘no-mind’: there is no subject submitting reality to thought. Rather, with the dualism between an individual mind and the only Mind-Reality negated, ‘no-mind’ represents the self-surrender to the vague flux itself by itself. See Izutsu, 157.

²⁶¹ Yunmen in Miura and Sasaki, 53. See also Hori, *Zen Sand*, 106.

²⁶² To say that it is ‘under-stood’ is to say that it is experienced directly and truly engaged, to the extent that one’s being is submitted to it (cf. Wright, “Kōan History,” 201-2, and notes 39 and 376). On the phenomenal level of truth, koan acting is the presentation of creative interpretations that are “indications of the absolute” (*BCR* koan 44). On the ultimate level - where the distinctions and gaps between indication and indicated, between mask and masked, between actor, character, and play are empty - the absolute is not just represented, but rather, is truly re-presented and the ineffable Dharma is manifest. “In the context of koan training, . . . the opposite of intellectual explanation is the thing itself. When the monk *demonstrates* through performance *his oneness* in some particular act” he is a successful koan actor (Hori, “Kōan and *Kenshō*,” 294; see also *ibid.*, 307). Similar terms are used to describe *Noh* acting (Elizabeth A. Behnke, “The Dimensions of Nothingness: Space and Time in the Japanese *Noh* Theater,” *Main Currents* 30 [1974]: 99) and Chinese painting technique (Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* [Kyoto: Eastern Buddhist Society, 1938; repr., Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970], 31). Hopefully, koan players are what they play and what they play *is*, in a live presentation of it, as Bach *is*, in his being played and Hamlet *is*, in his being acted.

²⁶³ “Now *my* words conduct and carry the crucial theme, now *you* play a counterpoint. Host and guest, parent and child, we switch roles and have fun, bringing forth the music of the stars” (Aitken, *Wu-men kuan*, 99). See note 92 on the dynamic of host and guest.

following his moves,²⁶⁴ oscillating to-and-fro between the provisional presentation at hand, those of the past, their own understanding, and the hidden, ineffable truth behind the entire event. They engage to the extent that they “let go” and give themselves over to the venture, allowing it to play out and allowing their own selves to be put in play.²⁶⁵

Emptied of illusions and acted upon, Buddha-nature spontaneously shines forth a bit brighter. Though the “extraordinary truth” is everywhere under the noses of us all, ordinary people benefit from a performance of it in a Zen theater where reality is framed and highlighted by its theatrical context and heightened by its players.²⁶⁶ Deferentially sharing this common ground, the interchange is harmonious²⁶⁷ and is a live event in tune with the highest truth, with the cast instantaneously responding to it and each other as when balls are “toss[ed] . . . on swift flowing water.”²⁶⁸ All of this can happen because nothing *is*, in the sense of *is-and-must-always-be*.²⁶⁹

Thus, from the fluidity and possibilities of emptiness, the indeterminacy of koan-play follows. As with balls tossed on swift flowing water, “see how they flow right away,

²⁶⁴ “[H]e is free to arise in the east and sink in the west, to go against or to go with, in any and all directions, free to give or to take away” (*BCR* koan 1).

²⁶⁵ “Let go and become clean and at ease” (*BCR* koan 20). “No place is grasped or rejected, / Nowhere do I go for or against” (Layman Pang, *BCR* koan 42). See also Wang, *Linguistic Strategies*, 77 and Thomas Cleary, *Shōbōgenzō: Zen Essays by Dōgen* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), 122-3.

²⁶⁶ “The great meaning of this is to show that everyone is fully endowed, each individual is perfectly complete” (*BCR* koan 62; see also koan 6). Strictly speaking, it is not the case that Buddha-nature is hidden. Rather it is the *fact of Buddha-nature* that is hidden and the *experience of it* that is stolen. See *BCR* koan 91 and Cleary, *Sutra of Hui-neng*, 16, 20, and 41.

²⁶⁷ “[M]ind to mind in mutual accord, each phrase harmonizing with each other” (*BCR* koan 50; see also koans 16, 22, 24, 64, 92). Tenkei evokes the flexibility of water: “[T]he white clouds and the flowing water form a tune by the subtleties of their interplay” (*SBCR* koan 37). See also Cleary, *Sutra of Hui-neng*, 29.

²⁶⁸ See *BCR* koan 80. See also *BCR* koans 5, 7, and 16; Cleary, *Sutra of Hui-neng*, 134; Izutsu, 108.

²⁶⁹ “It is just through their own essential nature that [phenomena] are not something definite. Their true nature is a no-nature, and their no-nature is their true nature; for all [phenomena] have one mark only, i.e. no mark” (Conze, *Wisdom Books*, 36). See also note 278.

no one knows where.”²⁷⁰ While the recorded words and actions of the past, as well as the live context of present circumstances, are already determined to a degree, their meaning and the course of their interaction is not.²⁷¹ And though a particular engagement may play out and end, the game does not, as Zennists are encouraged to return to “passed” koans as “the living word,” endlessly full of possible unfoldings of truth.²⁷² If the one enlightened perspective can determine anything, it is this: in spite of any illusions to the contrary, what reality was, is and will be, is not determinable;²⁷³ the best response is to be empty, receptive, and flexible, “[i]n contact with the flow, able to turn things around.”²⁷⁴ But beyond being attuned to it, the koan-game brings its participants to realize the universal, indeterminate reality that they already are,²⁷⁵ whereby the phenomenon of a particular “living, correct answer” flows of its own accord as an aspect of the unfolding of reality.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁰ Tenkei, *SBCR*, 80. See also, Yasutani, “Commentary on the Koan ‘Mu,’” 264.

²⁷¹ Speaking of Jinniu in *BCR* koan 74 and evoking the image of clouds – which are indeterminate and dynamic – Tenkei says, “With a wooden pail full of white rice like puffy clouds, laughing out loud, is this a happy laugh, or a wry laugh?” (see Appendix 1). In contrast to words that truly articulate, in the sense of determining and fixing in thought that of which they speak, “the subtle expression that switches” (Tenkei, *SBCR* koan 93 [Appendix 2]), the so-call “live” or “turning words” of koan performers are ambiguous and vague because reality itself is, in Zen, held to be so. Thus, the *BCR* is a “living record” (Taizan Maezumi Rōshi, Forward to *BCR*, xiii) in which reality is not presented as played-out and determined. See Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, 239 and Hori, *Zen Sand*, 29.

²⁷² Aitken, *Wu-men kuan*, 17. See note 149. See also Hori, “Koan and *Kensho*,” 288.

²⁷³ The *Diamond Sutra* describes the galaxy as a “no-system” (Conze, *Wisdom Books*, 64); “no defining characteristics can be found” (Cleary, *Hui-neng’s Commentary*, 119). Tenkei adds that it “is beyond all mundane measurements” (*SBCR* koan 2). Thus, a true master is “beyond all measurements” (*BCR* koan 49) and his indications of reality are “unfathomable even to the gods” (Hakuin, *SBCR* koan 39).

²⁷⁴ *BCR* koan 55. In the state of ‘no-mind’, “knowledge perishes” (Dogen, quoted in Archie S. Graham, “Art, Language, and Truth in Heidegger’s Radical Zen,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 27, no. 4 [December 2000]: 530). Thus, ‘no-mind’ should be read, in part, as ‘no-determinate-mind’; that is, as mind with no determinate content or intention. See note 289. See also *BCR* koans 36 and 41; Zhaozhou in koan 36; and Layman Pang in koan 42.

²⁷⁵ See Cleary, *Hui-neng’s Commentary*, 97 and 92 and Dogen in John Bowker, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 289.

²⁷⁶ “When has dead water ever displayed the ancient way?” (*BCR* koan 20). Rather, see “[t]he moon in the churning rushing water” (*BCR* koan 15).

With all things in play and on the move at an atomic pace,²⁷⁷ “how can one linger” if one is to play along?²⁷⁸ With sufficient training, one is “a complete master of adaptation,”²⁷⁹ always responsive to the living truth manifest in “the turmoil of consciousness.”²⁸⁰ As the “false conceptions . . . of coarse discriminating consciousness” are held to prevent such flexibility, teachers use “the dismantling approach” which “sweeps it all away.”²⁸¹ Un-fixed (and un-fixated), one is freed from bondage to illusion while freely flowing in the world-illusion, “free in the midst of phenomena.”²⁸²

Because ordinary, unenlightened thinking is taken by the idea that the “extraordinary truth that is everywhere” is somewhere beyond phenomena, it is the extraordinary koan-arena that cultivates the extraordinary individuals that can realize Buddha-nature here and now in the ordinary, phenomenal world that we all share.²⁸³ Take, for example, Zen’s use of language. Our words are indispensable to normal living and their utility is grounded, in part, on the practical and reasonable assumptions that

²⁷⁷ “Moment to moment, nonstop flow. . . . On the boundless swift-flowing water, tossing a ball: / Where it comes down it doesn’t stay – who can watch it?” (*BCR* koan 80); it is “difficult to pursue” (*BCR* koan 91). “Even as you call it ‘thus,’ it’s already changed. . . . What is the fundamental constant principle? . . . Moving” (Thomas Cleary, *Book of Serenity* [Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1998], koan 75); “whatever comes must go. This principle is always so” (Cleary, *Sutra of Hui-neng*, 76). “[H]ow could there be any fixed doctrine?” (*ibid.*, 101-2). See also the discussion above on the closing verse of the *Diamond Sutra*.

²⁷⁸ *BCR* koan 74 (Appendix 1; see Tenkei’s comments). See also *BCR* koans 20, 37, and 86; Hakuin, *SBCR* koan 39.

²⁷⁹ Cleary, *Sutra of Hui-neng*, 63. See also *BCR* koan 74 (Appendix 1); Hakuin in *SBCR* koan 80; Yasutani, 265; and note 115.

²⁸⁰ “The turmoil of consciousness is the great Naga *samādhi*” (*Wumenguan* koan 42, as translated in Hori, *Zen Sand*, 331). “Mind revolves around with myriad phenomena” (Linji, in *BCR* koan 22).

²⁸¹ *BCR* koan 93 (Appendix 2); Tenkei, *SBCR* koan 3; Tenkei, *SBCR* koan 93 (Appendix 2). For more examples of masters as demolishers of nests, see *BCR* koans 1, 6, 40, 62, 76, 91, 93 (Appendix 2), and 100. The dictum apparently is, “If it isn’t broke, break it” (phrasing mine; see *BCR* koans 3, 15, 33, 38 and *Wumenguan* koan 15).

²⁸² *BCR* koan 7. “I just untie bonds” (Cleary, *Sutra of Hui-neng*, 61), “get rid of students’ hang-ups and don’t let them hold on to anything” (Tenkei, *SBCR* koan 22), “free what is stuck and loosen what is bound” (*BCR* koan 22; see also koan 46), freeing buddha-nature “to its natural state free from attachments” (Suzuki, *Studies in the Lankavatara Sutra*, 105).

²⁸³ “Secure and intimate with the whole of reality, one obtains realization right there” (*BCR* koan 55). See also Wang, *Linguistic Strategies*, 169.

reality is not a dream and that things are substantial. In the Zen game, however, these conventions do not hold, and consequently, words and actions operate under a different set of rules. The same words play in a manner that is incomprehensible, indigestible, and frustrating to the ordinary, intentional intellect that consistently serves us so well.²⁸⁴

The ability to play in the koan arena affects the way one plays outside of it. Having engaged with both words and referents outside of their normal purposes, and having first-hand experience of the emptiness of phenomena, practitioners can navigate the “swift flowing waters” of the differentiated, phenomenal world and dream the “good dream,” *as* a dream. That is, like all of us they remain in the numberless weeds, but like a dragon “descend[ing] into the weeds” and appearing in the form of a snake, they have uncommon facility in this phenomenal reality, and play in it, rather than be enslaved to and lost in it.²⁸⁵ For “genuine Masters” the ordinary world of words and actions *is* “the realm of Zen mastery,” their home court on which they play extraordinarily.²⁸⁶

The experiences which forge these extraordinary players are of the peak variety and require intense participation. With “[e]yes alert, ears alert” participants are to fully engage with and through reality as manifest and heightened in koan language-events

²⁸⁴ In this game, “reasoning is exhausted” (*BCR* koan 90). “Wasn’t he crazy?” (*BCR* koan 74 [Appendix 1]). Yes, from the perspective of ordinary thinking. Zen’s “secrets” are only “impossible for demons and outsiders to fathom” (*BCR* koan 13). In fact, according to Dogen, only “scatterbrained people” believe that koans are “incomprehensible utterances” (Hori, “Koan and *Kensho*,” 280). From the perspective of the enlightened, they are not irrational, but rather just senseless and meaningless - *to the uninitiated*. See Hori, *Zen Sand*, 11.

²⁸⁵ *BCR* koan 74 (Appendix 1), for example, describes the work of masters as “descend[ing] into the weeds.” “Indra’s net” is a metaphor for reality in Huayan Buddhism, a branch closely associated with Zen. See Loy, 484 for a reading of the metaphor that conveys a spirit which may be applicable to Zen.

²⁸⁶ *BCR* koan 74 (Appendix 1); *BCR* koan 26 (as it appears in *SBCR*). See also *BCR* koan 51 and 93 (Appendix 2); Hakuin, *SBCR* koan 74 [Appendix 1]; and Cleary, *Sutra of Hui-neng*, 74.

“where the waves are high, [and] fish become dragons.”²⁸⁷ Though a “fish” begins with objective concentration on a koan, the reasonable sense of a subject in opposition to reality must drop off for the fish to really be what it already is: a dragon in concert with, and at one with, the vast empty sky.²⁸⁸ In such peak engagement, individual player-realities are subsumed in the larger play-reality — a state phenomenally manifest in action as timely as when “knocking and resounding occur together” without “the least bit of effort.”²⁸⁹

Still, “because there are many who ‘fall at the peak,’” fish and dragons must be serious in this realm where “spiritual powers wander at play.”²⁹⁰ Even ordinary language is an extraordinarily “sharp sword” when employed as koan language. While “skillfully doing a sword dance,” a “moment of folly” will cause one to “run afoul of the sharp point.”²⁹¹ The harmony between a spoken truth and the unspeakable truth is difficult to achieve and maintain. Maneuvering on a field littered with both good and bad illusions is not easy. An empty mind can be the playground of the Devil. Opponents are veiled, apply “pure ghee and poison at the same time,” and conceal knives in laughter.²⁹² Furthermore, a lot is at stake in this game of salvation. The person that truly enters into engagement

²⁸⁷ BCR koans 94 and 7. See Hori, *Zen Sand*, 645 or Sasaki and Miura, 108, for a discussion of the myth of the Dragon Gate. See also note 259 on the symbolism of waves.

²⁸⁸ Here ‘no-mind’ could be read as ‘no mind-spanning-a-distance-to-grasp-reality;’ a ‘mind’ emptied of distinction, that ‘understands’ in an entirely different way: “The chick breaks out, the mother hen breaks in — / When the chick awakens, there is no shell. / Chick and hen both forgotten, // On the same path, chanting in harmony, Through the marvelous mystery, walking alone” (BCR koan 16; cf. Miura and Sasaki, 120). Presented face to face, it’s not a matter of multiplicity” (BCR koan 12). Compare note 275.

²⁸⁹ BCR koan 42; BCR koan 74 (Appendix 1). According to the *Lankavatara Sutra*, a Bodhisattva “will conduct himself without effort” (Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, 39). This suggests yet another way to read ‘no-mind’: ‘no mind-acting-upon.’

²⁹⁰ Tenkei, *SBCR* koan 4; BCR koan 74 (Appendix 1). “Don’t be careless!” BCR koan 44.

²⁹¹ BCR koan 74 (Appendix 1); BCR koan 1; Cleary, *Sutra of Hui-neng*, 18; BCR koan 1.

²⁹² BCR koan 74 (Appendix 1; see also koans 9, 21, 51, and 85).

“plays with a deadly snake” and “dies” on this field.²⁹³ How one engages determines if he drowns in nothing more than a new set of illusions, or if he dies the ‘Great Death’ and is born anew as a dragon, freely realizing Buddha-nature.²⁹⁴

Then, one is “beyond patterns,” having escaped not only the empty “cage” of “worldly understanding,” but also the quagmire of Buddhist illusions.²⁹⁵ Without even “a load of Zen,” one is “purified, and at ease,” “naked and free in the bustling marketplace.”²⁹⁶ One is “an unburdened wayfarer,” “wander[ing] at leisure,” “abid[ing] in the enjoyment of things as they are.”²⁹⁷ With mastery of this serious game, one plays “like a child”²⁹⁸ and the world is a “playground of joyful absorption.”²⁹⁹

Yet, how *are* things on the playground? – Empty. In counterpoint to an innocent, deferential reverence for reality, accomplished Zennists, like children, may see fullness of

²⁹³ BCR koan 66. A saying can be “a life-taking spiritual talisman!” (BCR koan 74 [Appendix 1]). Zen teaching “is like leading the man to the edge of a ten thousand fathom cliff and giving him a push, causing his life to be cut off” (BCR koan 40). See also BCR koan 93 (Appendix 2), where the players speak of “poison,” “claws and fangs,” and of “firing arrows” that pierce “your heart and guts, penetrating deeply.”

²⁹⁴ See Watson, *Lin-chi lu*, 32, on exchanging illusions. See BCR koans 41 and 6 on the “Great Death.”

²⁹⁵ “[O]ne immersed in worldly understanding is like a monkey in a cage” (BCR koan 39). He who “transcends convention” is a “great man” (BCR koan 41).

²⁹⁶ BCR koan 45 (see also BCR koans 16, 17, 21, and 25); BCR koan 44; BCR koan 87 (see also note 302).

²⁹⁷ Tenkei, *SBCR* koan 25; BCR koan 64 (cf. koan 36); Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, 192.

²⁹⁸ Shunryu Suzuki, *Branching Streams Flow in the Darkness: Zen Talks on the Sandokai*, ed. Mel Weitsman and Michael Wenger (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 33. I draw attention to the fact that Suzuki says “like a child” and not “is a child.” See Watson, *Lin-Chi lu*, 52.

²⁹⁹ “Playground of joyful absorption” is a coinage of my own, based on a famous line from *Wumenguan* koan 1 and using “absorption” in lieu of the Sanskrit term “*samādhi*.” Wumen states that if one appropriately engages with *Wumenguan* koan 1 then “he will be free in his way of birth and death. He can enter any world as if it were his own playground” (Paul Reys, comp., *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones: A Collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings*. [Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle, 1957], 116). Similarly, a capping phrase runs, “The six realms and the four births are the playground of *samādhi*” (Hori, *Zen Sand*, 363). Compare to the translations of *Wumenguan* 1 in Aitken, *Wu-men Kuan*; Sekida, *Two Zen Classics*; Cleary, *No Barrier*; Ishii Shūdō, “Kung-an Ch’an and the *Tsung-men t’ung-yao chi*,” in *The Kōan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism*, ed. Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 112; and Yasutani, 262 (see also *ibid.*, 271). Also compare the comments of Dahui in Shūdō, 113; and Hakuin in Miura and Sasaki, 58.

possibility in the emptiness of actuality.³⁰⁰ Hence, there really is no “limit . . . to people playing with mud balls.”³⁰¹ Emptiness levels the playground, enabling what is conventionally impossible, and allowing players to engage in “constructing and demolishing, toying and sporting” with each other and with language.³⁰² Entering “into play, they are naturally leaping with life”³⁰³ over the illusory “double barrier” of ‘is’ and ‘is not’.³⁰⁴ “[A]ble to turn things around,” they create an upside-down “world where there is no Buddha,”³⁰⁵ where a person dancing and serving rice is a “master,” and those he serves are “little Bodhisattvas;” a world in which “playing with mud balls” is “joyful praise;”³⁰⁶ in which turning a sandal into a hat, or spouting “crazy words [and] insane talk,” if compelled, is “the voice of the *Dharma*.”³⁰⁷ Having gone “down into the Blue Dragon’s cave to seize the pearl” of wisdom, they hold the “gem” of Buddha-nature,

³⁰⁰ “You wander at ease everywhere, [because] you see that these are all empty names” (Watson, *Lin-chi lu*, 41). When one’s “senses are not fettered by the rules of conduct” (香嚴 Xiangyan [PY]; Hsiang-yen [WG]; Kyogen [J], in Aitken, *Wu-men Kuan*, 41), “the world becomes wider” (Hakuin, *SBCR* koan 29).

³⁰¹ *BCR* koan 93 (Appendix 2). Speaking of the masters in koan 28, Yuanwu says that though “both were adepts” capable of perfect reflection on the ultimate truth, “both let go” and were “two fellows playing with mud balls . . . covered with slime” (see also koans 36 and 48). According to Senzaki Sensei, masters behave so “just for fun” (Aitken, *Wu-men Kuan*, 84). As Yuanwu asks elsewhere, “[W]hat’s the harm?” (*BCR* koan 41). “Barechested, barefooted, he comes into the marketplace. / Muddled and dust-covered, how broadly he grins!” (Kapleau, *Three Pillars*, 311).

³⁰² Watson, *Lin-chi lu*, 60.

³⁰³ *BCR* koan 26. “Everyone is a living Buddha, leaping lively!” (Hakuin, *SBCR* koan 10).

³⁰⁴ See page 43 on the “double barrier.” On this playground, reality is not reality, illusion is not illusory, and hell is not hell, A is not A. See *BCR* koan 6; Hori, *Zen Sand*, 498; Shibayama, 258). See also page 50 and notes 352 and 355. “[T]his blindness is not really blind” (*BCR* koan 88). “Form is emptiness, emptiness is form.”

³⁰⁵ *BCR* koans 55 and 19. For more examples of Zen’s upside-down world see *BCR* koans 40, 55, 86, and 96. See also Tenkei, *SBCR* koan 37 and Hori, *Zen Sand*, 541.

³⁰⁶ *BCR* koans 74 (Appendix 1), 93 (Appendix 2), and 74 (Appendix 1).

³⁰⁷ *BCR* koan 35. “Dancing and singing are the voice of the *Dharma*.” (Hakuin in Hori, *Zen Sand*, 53). “Play with it and even broken tile is gold” (a capping phrase from *ibid.*, 297). Parents will recognize the poetic technique employed by Women in composing this verse after his passing of the “Mu” koan: “Mu Mu Mu Mu / Mu Mu Mu Mu Mu / Mu Mu Mu Mu Mu / Mu Mu Mu Mu Mu.”

“wondrous and difficult to fathom.”³⁰⁸ Yet, with the “precious treasure” in “the palm of the hand,” they do not ponder it, nor their accomplishment. Rather than sit and revere, “play with the gem,” and do so “without knowing its name.”³⁰⁹

Naturally knowing how to do so, they respond to the circumstances without calculation³¹⁰ and transmute the tragedy of life into the comedy of reality, the nightmare of suffering into “a good dream.”³¹¹ Opting for the more pleasant illusion, they “put an end to crying” and transmute the work of salvation into play,³¹² because ultimately, if Buddha-nature is always already complete and every apparent individual is already participating in it, “[W]hat further need [is] there?”³¹³

For them, there is no need, and they cannot suppress “the great laughter,” that “exists prior to any discourse.”³¹⁴ This primal laugh is manifest when they laugh at those

³⁰⁸ BCR koan 3 (see also koan 43). “Pranja is a spiritual gem, wondrous and difficult to fathom.” (Taisho 51n2076:0463b16, as provided by the Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association; translation mine). This line is from one of two “Poems of Toying with a Gem” by Danxia (see note 68) as recorded in the *Record of the Transmission of the Lamp* (景德傳燈錄 *Jingde zhuan deng lu* [PY] *Ching-te chuan-teng lu* [WG] *Keitoku dento roku* [J]), §30. For more references to the Dragon, its pearls (or gem), and its seizure, see BCR koans 62, 65, 82, and 100. See also Cleary and Cleary, 453n and Hori, *Zen Sand*, 641.

³⁰⁹ According to Danxia, “Consciousness has a precious treasure hidden in a cloth sack” (Taisho 51n2076:0463b29, as provided by the Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association; translation mine). “[A] bright jewel in the palm of the hand” (BCR koan 24; for more references to holding the treasure in the palm of the hand see koans 29, 34, 80, and 97). “Discern the matter and play with the gem” (Taisho 51n2076:0463b27, as provided by the Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association; translation mine). “Playing with the thing without knowing its name . . . [he] smashes the black dragon’s pearl” (BCR koan 82).

³¹⁰ BCR koan 97. For more references to the skillful employment of the gem, see koans 15, 36, and 74 (Appendix 1).

³¹¹ Buddha said that “Life is suffering” but Yunmen says, “Every day is a good day” (BCR koan 6). “When the string of a musical instrument is too tautly set it will snap” (Patriarch Jayata in Hyers, *Laughing Buddha*, 32).

³¹² BCR koan 93 (Appendix 2). “Then you work all day without ever working, talk all day without ever talking” (BCR koan 16); “then the seventeen hundred koans are giant cookies!” (Hakuin, *SBCR* koan 40). Compare Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, 192, and Hyers, *Laughing Buddha*, 163-4.

³¹³ BCR koan 74 (Appendix 1). See also Tenkei’s comments, and the verse of BCR koan 40.

³¹⁴ “When you see with clear eyes, how can you suppress a laugh?” (Master Yunan in Cleary, *No Barrier*, 54). “The great laughter after all needs an adept to understand it” (BCR koan 66). “Let me ask, what’s all this laughter about? It exists prior to any discourse” (BCR koan 35, as translated by Steven Heine in

under the illusion of conventional distinctions such as Buddha and ordinary being. They engage in “laughing aloud” at those mired in the struggle to get to the reality under their noses.³¹⁵ With the sense of humor that comes with being a veteran of the to-and-fro, their empty “selves” that course in ultimate truth laugh at their lower selves for continuing to course in fictions, for “giving play” to their own illusions,³¹⁶ and for being “masters.”³¹⁷ In behaving so, they dispense Zen medicine to adults suffering from the dis-ease associated with discrimination,³¹⁸ offering the perspective of the enlightened child – a “fellow with no reasons,” free and innocent of serious concerns, and open to the playing-out.³¹⁹

Thus, one returns from the koan game to daily life anew, relating to circumstances in a different way and, in a sense, as a different sort of being.³²⁰ Though “[e]veryone wants to get out of the ordinary flow,” as “[y]ou can’t drive stakes into empty space,”

“Visions, Divisions, Revisions: The Encounter between Iconoclasm and Supernaturalism in Kōan Cases about Mount Wu-t’ai,” in *The Kōan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism*, ed. Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000], 162). See also *BCR* koan 14, and Watson, *Lin-chi lu*, 123.

³¹⁵ *BCR* koan 74 (Appendix 1). See also Tenkei, *SBCR* koan 74 (Appendix 1). “[T]here is no such thing as awakening” (*BCR* koan 78); “really there is nothing transformed” (Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, 138).

³¹⁶ See Heine, “Visions, Divisions, Revisions,” 157. “All of them are giving play to their spirits” (*BCR* 22; see also, koans 1, 17, 60, 64, 67, 69, 81, 86, and 99). See also *Wumenguan* koan 12, and Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, 119.

³¹⁷ Zhaozhou said, “If I meet a seven-year-old child who can teach me I will become an ardent disciple of that child” (Aitken, *Wu-men Kuan*, 9). The masters’ master has no concern for his status as an enigmatic icon, and refers to himself as “old monk” or “withered old drill.”

³¹⁸ A master knows “how to give medicine in accordance with the disease” (*BCR* koan 65).

³¹⁹ *BCR* koan 75. “As before, there’s nothing to be concerned about” (*BCR* koan 34). With the “pure wind of unburdening,” Zhaozhou “would set [seekers] straight all at once, making them free and easy, without the slightest concern” (*BCR* koan 45; see also koan 78 and Linji in Hyers, 164).

³²⁰ “We say of this, ‘After awakening it’s the same as before awakening.’ . . . [Nevertheless] you must have greatly penetrated and greatly awakened: [only] then as before, mountains are mountains, rivers are rivers, in fact all the myriad things are perfectly manifest. Then for the first time you can be an unconcerned person.” Thus, Longya (龍牙 Long-ya [WG]; Ryuga [J]) says, “It’s like having vied in a boat race: / Though you relax on idle ground as before, / Only having won can you rest” (*BCR* koan 45; bracketed material mine).

“it’s necessary to be discriminating.”³²¹ For a “living man” of Zen, koan *practice* in the arena of emptiness culminates in *performance* amidst the turmoil outside of, as well as within, monastery walls.³²² In the ordinary realm, application of skills gained in the extraordinary game is possible because the koan arena is not so much an other realm as it is a part of the whole of reality, artificially sectioned off for a unique and heightened mode of engagement.³²³ This is not to say, however, that the transition is easy.³²⁴ Still, the truth that unfolds in the controlled, rule-governed reality of the koan-game is not at odds with the truth that unfolds in marketplace reality.³²⁵ To approach this same, immanent realm with a new comportment, to be “happy in everyday life,”³²⁶ rather than dismissing and devaluing it; to be able to take things lightly and play in the “clear waves” of reality, rather than drown in them; and to be liberated *to* life, rather than *from* it, is, within the

³²¹ BCR koans 43, 25, and 93 (Appendix 2). “Who says gold is like shit?” (BCR koan 83; see also koan 79).

³²² BCR koan 93 (Appendix 2). “[O]ne must pass beyond that Other Side too to begin to attain” (BCR koan 41). “If ordinary people know they are sages; if sages understand, they are ordinary people” (*Wumenguan* koan 9 [Cleary]). Zen, too, can be “a nest from which they cannot get out. Can any of you leap out and put it to use? How?” (SBCR koan 33; see also koan 25). Thoroughgoing culmination occurs at “the three-tiered Dragon Gate, where the waves are high, fish become dragons, / Yet fools still go on scooping out the evening pond water” (BCR koan 7).

³²³ “Extending throughout the world is the beautiful monastery” (BCR koan 35); “the whole earth is medicine” (koan 87). “Heaven, earth, the whole world is one gate of liberation” (BCR koan 61; see also koan 65). Celebrating the play of light upon waves, in contrast to a pure, undisturbed reflection, Xuedou says, “Distinctly outstanding - the moon in the churning rushing water” (BCR koan 15); “go along . . . with white clouds [transient illusions] and flowing streams” (BCR koan 25).

³²⁴ “Summoning him is easy, dispatching him is hard” (BCR koan 56; see also koan 75). This often likened to “stepping off of the hundred-foot pole without falling on one’s face” (see *Wumenguan* koan 46). See also Hori, *Zen Sand*, 23 and 429.

³²⁵ “In reality, going to inhabited areas to let down a hand and standing alone on a solitary peak are the same. [Enlightenment] is no different from discriminating intelligence” (BCR koan 43). “Where are correct and biased not perfectly merged?” (BCR koan 33).

³²⁶ BCR koan 99.

framework of Zen, to be saved.³²⁷ And not only is the apparent individual saved, but also, the reality - that “one” always already is³²⁸ - is allowed to be, and is allowed to play out.

Yet, reality is held to be already perfect and complete, just as it is, without any allowing-to-be by Zen folk.³²⁹ If everything, including oneself, is perfect and in accord with the truth, then why engage with koans? That is, what is the point, the meaning, the *telos* of such activity? Is it a means for enlightenment or is it autotelic? I will approach these questions on behalf of Zen from its two perspectives: that of the ultimate truth and that of the provisional truth.

Starting from the latter, it is undeniable that koan texts and koan practice maintain the duality of the enlightened and the unenlightened. Inasmuch as the “ordinary people” that seek enlightenment through mind-to-mind transmission of Zen insight are real, and the distinction between them and the enlightened is real, the interpretation of koans as

³²⁷ BCR koan 74 (Appendix 1). Hori says that it is “quite clear that Zen is *free in* language, not *free from* language” (Hori, *Zen Sand*, 89; see also Watson, *Lin-chi lu*, 37). I would add that this freedom extends to all of culture and social convention, as well as all of existence. Nanquan laments, “People these days see this flower as a dream” (BCR koan 40). Such a disposition runs contrary to a thoroughgoing conception of emptiness, as well as the Chinese folk character. Thus, the abundance of sayings that suggest that consummate Zen practice is “nothing special” and is not opposed to ordinary living. (Tenkei, *SBCR* koan 17; see also BCR koans 50 and koan 74 [Appendix 1]; *Wumenguan* koan 19; and the *Linjilu*, passim). Layman Pang 龐居士 (Pang Jushi [PY]; P’ang Chū-shih [WG]; Hō Kōji [J]) is a traditional exemplar of integrated Zen: “My everyday affairs are no different:/ Only I myself naturally harmonize / . . . Spiritual powers and their wondrous functioning – / Hauling water and carrying firewood” (BCR koan 42). The “world is the beautiful monastery” (BCR koan 35) “where Buddhas are chosen” (BCR koan 42) because the “sound of the valley stream is itself the [Buddha’s] Vast Eternal Tongue; / . . . the colors of the mountains the Pure Body” (BCR koan 37). For a true master “beyond ordinary and holy” (BCR koan 46) “even inhaling and exhaling is a sutra, and moving the feet is function of the sutras” (Dogen, in Carl Olson, *Zen and the Art of Postmodern Philosophy: Two Paths of Thinking From the Representational Mode of Thinking* [Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000], 29). “[T]iles and pebbles” (BCR koan 31), “worms and maggots” (koan 10), “even horse manure and weasel droppings radiate light” (Hakuin, *SBCR* koan 31). Thus, in Zen, the distinctions between ordinary and not, between suffering and salvation, and between work and play, break down. Play is no longer an escape but a potential state of being in which all of profane life is sacred play.

³²⁸ “Mountains and rivers and one’s own self – how could there be any distinction?” (BCR koan 60).

³²⁹ See Tenkei’s comment in note 377.

“tool[s] by which enlightenment is brought about” is valid.³³⁰ When “expounding by design,” salvation and the betterment of the universe is the end.³³¹

In order to “succeed” in this cosmic struggle, however, if one opts to do so by submitting to koan practice, one must, as I have said, forget purposes and adopt an autotelic comportment towards the engagement.³³² That is, one must set aside and be unattached to ultimate and even immediate goals, submitting to the koan at hand with the earnestness and immediacy of play. This practical, psychological prescription for Zen students accords with basic Buddhist teaching, according to which *any* subjective desire is more than a barrier to solving problems; it *is the problem*.³³³

³³⁰ Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright. “Introduction: Kōan Tradition – Self-Narrative and Contemporary Perspectives,” in *The Kōan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism*, ed. Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3. These authors do, however, argue that a koan is more than just a tool.

³³¹ BCR koan 74 [Appendix 1]. There is plenty in the tradition to suggest the tool metaphor. The whole concept of *upāya* - “skillful means” or “expedient methods” (see note 179) – strongly supports the tool metaphor.

³³² Linji: Have “not a thought of running after Buddhahood” (Hyers, 125). See also Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, 116, and notes 334 and 362.

³³³ According to the “Second Noble Truth,” “thirst” or “craving” (*tanhā*) is the root cause of suffering. Even the desire to solve a koan, to better oneself, to solve the world’s problem(s) is attachment to these particular possibilities and bondage to the illusion of an ego-agent. See Hyers, 124-5 and Watson, *Lin-chi lu*, 47. This, of course, is a species of the wider Chinese idea of *wu wei*, usually translated as “non-action” which it does, in a sense, mean. Nevertheless, it does not entail the absence of action. They are not telling us to become “inanimate objects” (Cleary, *Sutra of Hui-neng*, 32), but rather that we “behave ourselves with effortlessness like the moon, the sun, the jewel, and the elements” (Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, 139). “When the wind moves, the grasses bow” (BCR koan 59; see also koan 56). Besides action, *wei* classically could connote “functioning as,” “for the sake of,” or “for the purpose of” (these meanings are retained in some modern usages). Furthermore, it suggests “control,” “management,” and “manipulation” (*CJKV-English Dictionary*, s.v. “爲 wéi” [article by C. Muller], <http://buddhism-dict.net/dealt>, [accessed February 7, 2009]). Both of these meaning groups are derived from the fact that the character for *wei* “originally depicted a hand leading an elephant, as if training or using it” (Shi Zhengyu, *Picture Within A Picture: An Illustrated to the Origins of Chinese Characters* [Beijing: New World Press, 1997], 280; see also Hongyuan Wang, *The Origins of Chinese Characters* [Beijing: Sinolingua, 1993], 84). Therefore, *wu wei* could also be translated as “non-purposive-action,” “non-controlling-action.” Thus, the Bodhisattva’s “works are called purposeless for the reason that they are not actuated by any egotistic interests or desires or motives” (Suzuki, *Studies in the Lankavatara Sutra*, 99). The complete concept of *wu wei* “is a cluster of overlapping concepts that describe the truly accomplished person: one who acts effortlessly without deliberation [without analysis, or a “why”] or conscious intention [*telos*], without focusing on technique

Furthermore, as even “the Ancient Buddhas . . . have never arrived,” one should never think that they have reached the end of Zen practice, or exhausted the possibilities of even one koan.³³⁴ Any sense of progress or of arrival at the end (goal) of koan engagement could (and apparently often does) result in ego feeding pride. When this happens complacency can set in and threaten the sustenance and flexibility of living insight.³³⁵

Thus, even within the ordinary, dualistic framework, if we examine koan engagement under the means – ends rubric, we come up with some strange results. Ironically, that which seems to be a means to enlightenment – that is, the koan and one’s involvement with it – is to be approached as an end in itself. With full attention, one is to “aim” at nothing(ness), intentionally setting out to be un-intentional.³³⁶ Perhaps this approach is the best Zen means to achieve a Zen end – “the fruit of enlightenment ripen[ing] of itself.”³³⁷ Perhaps this game - in which teachers further hide in words what is already hidden and ineffable, and in which students “find by not seeking” - is a method.³³⁸ Perhaps all of the playful characteristics of koan practice have their purpose.

But what is “the fruit of enlightenment” for a practicing subject? As I have said, it is certainly not the “correct answer” to a koan – an apparent end that is really a means for the master to gauge one’s engagement and engage further. I would suggest that one of the

and means, without self-regard and self-consciousness” (Hori, *Zen Sand*, 57; bracketed interjections mine). See also note 362.

³³⁴ *BCR* koan 41. “Even Yellow Head (Buddha) and Blue Eyes (Bodhidharma) have yet to discern” (*BCR* koan 51).

³³⁵ “[N]ot admitting complete perfection: that’s the living eye of a Zen master” (Tenkei, *SBCR* koan 26). See also Cleary, *No Barrier*, 16 and Watson, *Lin-chi lu*, 47.

³³⁶ See Conze, *Wisdom Books*, 27-8.

³³⁷ Huineng as in Miura and Sasaki, 169.

³³⁸ “[T]he more you seek, the more you don’t see” (*BCR* koan 11). See also note 214.

fruits is the state of no-mind as no-*telos*-mind.³³⁹ An ironic end of this “means” is the end of ends. Having “nothing to do,” “searching minds” and “mental machinations to come to an end; throw[ing] away gain and loss” one is “free and easy” without “the slightest bit of concern.”³⁴⁰ Though this autotelic mode of being is always a possibility for us, “if all the [dualistic] complications were cut off, it would be impossible for beginners to focus.”³⁴¹ The great performers of Zen play along with their audiences’ telic conception of koan practice and play up the hide-and-seek game “by design” only because it is psychologically necessary: “It’s like having vied in a boat race : / Though you relax on idle ground as before, / Only having won can you rest.”³⁴²

Indeed, these fruits seem sweet and are, for some, worth the means. Yet, if we step back another level, we can ask, what are these fruits a means to? That is, “winning enlightenment” *may* be an end of Zen practice, but is it the whole game, or is it a move within a larger playing-out? If one “can relax on idle ground as before,” what grounds the possibility of this autotelic mode of being?

Zen can respond to this question only from the enlightened perspective, which asks, “When have you ever heard it said that [the fruit] was unripe?”³⁴³ “In reality there aren’t so many concerns” because of “the fundamental [and] eternal completeness of reality,” in which “there is no gain or loss, no illusions or dreams [nor awakening], no multiplicity of names [such as *nirvana*, *samsara*, etc.]. . . . no right or wrong” – in short,

³³⁹ See Cleary, *Sutra of Hui-neng*, 105.

³⁴⁰ Huangbo in *BCR* koan 11; Linji in Hyers, 125; *BCR* koans 33, 45, and 20.

³⁴¹ *BCR* koan 5, as it appears in *SBCR* (bracketed material is mine).

³⁴² *BCR* koan 45. It is not the case that unenlightened beings simply need to change their conception of things in order to become autotelic. “Later people would *vainly calculate* on their own and say, ‘Why so many concerns?’” *BCR* koan 74 (Appendix 1; emphasis mine).

³⁴³ Yunmen in *BCR* koan 6.

no duality.³⁴⁴ Thus, using koans to work for individual and/or cosmic improvement is ultimately futile: in a “self-regulating reality” empty of causes and effects, the “work” has already been done.³⁴⁵ In fact, “from the first there’s never been anything that needed doing.”³⁴⁶

So these texts and practices are all “used for what? There’s no one on earth who knows.”³⁴⁷ If there is a point to koan practice, it is, perhaps, the realization that the project is ultimately pointless; that koans are “of no use,” are not “worth half a cent,”³⁴⁸ that “this [long] journey to enlightenment . . . is meaningless.”³⁴⁹ “Everything being Buddha-nature,” there is “no enlightenment that one has to strive after!”³⁵⁰ Ultimately, the distinction between an enlightened elite and the innumerable ordinary is, as distinction, an illusion.³⁵¹ Enlightenment is a “donkey-tethering stake,” “a dream in a

³⁴⁴ BCR koan 21; Hakuin, *SBCR* koan 34; BCR koan 21. Bracketed material is mine. See also BCR koan 73.

³⁴⁵ Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, 124. As long as people “argue . . . by the principle of cause and effect . . . erroneous intellection will ever cling to them” (Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, 37). All of reality “is unborn, but that does not mean that there are no objects; . . . objects are here, but causeless” (ibid., 172).

³⁴⁶ Watson, *Lin-chi lu*, 34. See also Tenkei, *SBCR* koan 28; *Wumenguan* koan 7 (verse); and Hakuin’s “Song of Zazen” in Miura and Sasaki, 253.

³⁴⁷ BCR koan 23.

³⁴⁸ BCR koans 93 (Appendix 2) and 74 (Appendix 1; see also koan 45). “When you add it all up, it’s not worth a single letter” (Yuanwu, Cleary and Cleary, 574). “[K]oans . . . haven’t the least worth” (Hakuin in Kohn, 80).

³⁴⁹ Watson, *Lin-chi lu*, 26. See also ibid., 53; BCR koan 78; Cleary, *Sutra of Hui-neng*, 62; and Baizhong in Kohn, 167.

³⁵⁰ Yasutani, 267; Hakuin in Michael Kohn, trans., *The Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1991), 80. See also Watson, *Lin-chi lu*, 53 and Conze, *Wisdom Books*, 37.

³⁵¹ “Buddhas and sentient beings – fundamentally there is no difference between them” (BCR koan 60). “Who isn’t Xuansha?” (BCR koan 56 [Xuansha is an enlightened master under consideration]). “Officially, not even a needle is admitted; privately, even a cart and horse can pass” (Yangshan in BCR koan 62; also in Watson, *Lin-chi lu*, 124; see also Hori, *Zen Sand*, 321). Even Buddha is not Buddha: “I am not enlightened nor do I enlighten others” (Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, 228).

dream.”³⁵² Thus, Layman Pang advises: “Not to speak of becoming a bodhisattva, you don’t even need to become a Buddha.”³⁵³

As “you yourself are included” and are already sitting at the “the giant meal table” of the spiritual elite with everyone else,³⁵⁴ a layman may be as close as, if closer than, a wandering monk. In non-dual reality, “there’s no place to seek.”³⁵⁵ Reality is so hard for the novice to perceive is because it is hidden everywhere in broad daylight, “right under his nose;”³⁵⁶ because he cannot accept that the apparent dualities of phenomena and noumenon, of here and there, are illusions; cannot accept that “there is nothing hidden.” Yet, “how could anyone hide this extraordinary truth?”³⁵⁷ Thus, “[n]o patchrobed monk in the world arrives” because there is nowhere to go.³⁵⁸

Those that “leave the household” (become monks) to go in search of the truth and enlightenment are “wearing out [their] sandals, what is the use?”³⁵⁹ “What end is there to chewing over the words of others?” “What’s the use of so much talk?” “What end is there

³⁵² BCR koan 31 (see also Watson, *Lin-chi lu*, 26); Hideyoshi in Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, 303. See also BCR koans 1, 31, and 78; Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, 77; Hakuin, *SBCR koans* 2 and 11; and Cleary, *Sutra of Hui-neng*, 63.

³⁵³ Sasaki, Iriya and Fraser, *Sayings of Layman P’ang*, 78. See also BCR koan 51. 龐居士 Pang Jushi (PY); P’ang Chü-shih (WG); Hō Kōji (J).

³⁵⁴ BCR koan 91; Tenkei, *SBCR koan* 74 (Appendix 1). Of course, if this is the case, then elite is not elite. See also BCR koans 55 and 56; Tenkei, *SBCR koan* 69; Cleary, *Sutra of Hui-neng*, 41 and 49; Linji in James D. Sellman and Hans Julius Schneider, “Liberating Language in Linji and Wittgenstein,” *Asian Philosophy* 13 (2003): 107; and Hakuin in Bowker, 1066.

³⁵⁵ BCR koan 28. See also koans 6, 22, 37, 51, 85, 97, and 99.

³⁵⁶ BCR koan 91. See also koans 22, 25, 35, 55, 94, 93 (Appendix 2), and 94; Tenkei, *SBCR koan* 69; *Wumenguan*, koan 7; Watson, *Lin-chi lu*, 56-7; and Hori, *Zen Sand*, 381

³⁵⁷ BCR koans 98 and 41 (see also koans 75 and 74 [Appendix 1]). “The whole world has never concealed it” (BCR koans 40, 53 and 65). “The real does not conceal the false, the crooked does not hide the straight” (BCR koan 43; see also koans 39 and 90). See also Cleary, *Sutra of Hui-neng*, 13; *Wumenguan* koan 23; and Kapleau, “Think Neither Good Nor Evil,” 310.

³⁵⁸ BCR koan 85. See also koans 37, 41, and 57; The Fourth Patriarch in Hyers, 132; Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, 116; and Conze, *Wisdom Books*, 64.

³⁵⁹ BCR koan 98. See also BCR koans 11, 21 and 23: “What is the purpose of traveling [wandering] the mountains together with these fellows?”

to creating complications,” to “useless maundering?” “Why scatter dust and sand,” “stir up waves where there’s no wind,” or “refine pure gold?” That is, what is the purpose of playing the koan game?³⁶⁰ Ultimately, there is none – a problem if one is expecting to make something of oneself, yet not a problem if one is just playing along.

Ultimately, we are not here for any purpose.³⁶¹ No one has to save themselves and no one has to save anyone else: “everyone is a buddha.”³⁶² The question of the point of Zen, as it is posed within Zen, is, “What is the meaning of (or the reason for) Bodhidharma’s coming from the West (India)?”³⁶³ One master responded, “In essence, . . . there is no meaning.”³⁶⁴ If the “essential” perspective has the final say in Zen, then there is no teaching, nor a mind-to-mind transmission of it.³⁶⁵

³⁶⁰ *BCR* koan 77; *BCR* koan 60; *BCR* koan 53; *BCR* koan 95; *BCR* koan 49; *BCR* koans 4, 16 and 69 (see also note 259; *BCR* koan 39. These phrases are used throughout *BCR*. I cite these koans only as examples.

³⁶¹ Within the context of Buddhism, *wei* - as in *wu wei* (“non-action,” see note 334) – is a term that denotes “that which is . . . conditioned,” that is, phenomena (*Digital Dictionary of Buddhism*, s.v. “爲wéi” [article by C. Muller], <http://buddhism-dict.net/ddb> [accessed February 7, 2009]). However, in as much as *wei* also means “for the purpose of,” perhaps that which is conditioned is conditioned (at least in part) by that which it is for – its purpose; the conditioned is-for-the-purpose-of. *Wu wei*, within Buddhism, is a term for the ultimate, the unconditioned. By extension, perhaps, It just is, without purpose and without a why.

³⁶² Hakuin, *SBCR* koan 34. See also *BCR* koans 19, 25 and 57; Tenkei, *SBCR* koan 19; Cleary, *Sutra of Hui-neng*, 20); Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, 59; and The Fourth Patriarch in Hyers, 132.

³⁶³ Over one hundred koans involve around this question. In disguise, it asks for the insight unique to Zen which, within Zen, is held to be the ultimate truth. Many responses are “an answer that blocks the question” (*BCR* koan 21), an outright refusal to answer (koans 2 and 73), or refusal in the form of a subject change.

³⁶⁴ *BCR* koan 20. To this Yuanwu replies, “Obviously.” See Robert Aitken, “Bodhidharma’s Emptiness,” in *Sitting with Koans: Essential Writings on Koan Introspection*, ed. John Daido Loori (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2006), 298; Linji in Aitken, *Wu-men kuan*, 35; the “Verse of Bodhidharma,” in Hori, *Zen Sand*, 453-4; and Tenkei, *SBCR* koan 20 (see also Xuedou’s verse in *BCR* koan 57).

³⁶⁵ “The Buddhas never appeared in the world – there is nothing to be given to people. [Bodhidharma] never came from the West – he never passed on the transmission by mind” (*BCR* koan 56; see also koans 28 and 75). “What limit is there to the pure wind circling the earth?” Hakuin replies, “That Bodhidharma is everywhere, visible in everything” (*SBCR* koan 1). “Where is there no pure wind?” (*BCR* koan 96). “[T]ruth . . . is evident everywhere” (Cleary, *Hui-neng’s Commentary*, 134); it “is neither coming nor departing” (Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, 168). When masters speak so, they shift the sense of “Dharma” from “teaching” to “truth” or “reality itself.” This endless Dharma is always already present, and not subject to deterioration. Unlike a “teaching,” it cannot be encapsulated and passed on. Even if it could, as “[m]ind here, mind there are not different,” (Linji in Hori, *Zen Sand*, 135) and Zen insight “is not transmitted” (*BCR* koan 12; see also koans 7, 90, and 94). From the beginning “[e]veryone knows” (*BCR*

Nevertheless, being free to, as well as free from, duality,³⁶⁶ masters through the ages have opted into “the Bodhisattvas’ paradox,” taking up the task of saving innumerable beings that, according to face value of doctrine, do not even exist.³⁶⁷ From their exclusive perspective, the choice must be: play along with the provisional illusion that there is something to be done, or be bound to the idea that something must be done. They opt to take up and play along with what they take to be ultimately empty goals, rather than being enslaved to and played by them.³⁶⁸ And this they do with utter seriousness and dedication, as if the whole spectacle is utterly real.

Inasmuch as koans do not serve a purpose from the ultimate perspective, which does not allow a means – ends distinction, engagement with and through koans is a species of autotelic play – done for its own sake, “for the heck of it.” Coupled with the supposition that nothing is really real, the question “Why work with koans?” may be best answered with the open question, “If apparent beings, as beings, have to do something,

koan 30); “there is nothing hidden, . . . I have never explained” (*BCR* koan 98); “there are no teachers of [Zen] in all of China” (*BCR* koan 11; see also koan 62); “Patriarchs and Buddhas never helped people” (*BCR* koan 28). They are just “[c]arrying water to sell at the river” (*BCR* koan 57). Nevertheless, as the doctrine of the two truths perennially enables Zen to embrace apparently contradictory statements, it remains possible that the idea of ‘mind-to-mind transmission’ does signify something beyond playing along with the illusions of students. “Tell me, since it is not transmitted, why then so many complicated [koans]?” (*BCR* case 12). “The great meaning of this is to show that everyone is fully endowed, each individual is perfectly complete” (*BCR* koan 62; see also note 267. Perhaps, “it” is not transmitted, but rather, unconcealed with some “Zen lighting” (see note 374 below).

³⁶⁶ See Hori, *Zen Sand*, 90.

³⁶⁷ “A Bodhisattva is a being compounded of the two contradictory forces of wisdom and compassion. In his wisdom, he sees no persons; in his compassion he is resolved to save them” (Conze, *Buddhism*, 130). See also Cleary, *Sutra of Hui-neng*, 10; Conze, *Selected Sayings*, 99; Conze, *Buddhist Wisdom Books*, 62 and the *Diamond Sutra*, as translated in Cleary, *Sutra of Hui-neng with Hui-neng’s Commentary on the Diamond Sutra*, 93 and 137.

³⁶⁸ “[O]riginally there is nothing to seek” (Hakuin, *SBCR* koan 30). “All concerns are what you take up: none of it is any of my business” (*BCR* koan 21). In a different tone, Xuedou versifies: “Stopping the climb on the road of Zen. / And yet I say, the road of Zen is level and even; why stop climbing?” (*BCR* koan 69 [*SBCR* version]). Here, we take no-mind as not only no-telos-mind and no-attachment-mind, but also as no-no-telos-mind and no-detachment-mind. As the *Heart Sutra* says, “There is . . . no attainment and no non-attainment” (Conze, *Wisdom Books*, 89). “Where there is Buddha, do not stay; . . . Where there is no Buddha, quickly run past” (*BCR* koan 95).

why not play with koans?”³⁶⁹ Though ultimately “[t]here’s no enlightenment that one *has* to strive after” and “you don’t even *need* to become a Buddha,” realizing this, “how can one linger?”³⁷⁰ As for taking up the “many idle concerns” of the Zen word game, in stark contrast to the thrust of most religious thought, if one is not “*caught up* in gain or loss,” Yuanwu asks, “What’s the harm?”³⁷¹

I have been asking whether koan engagement is or is not autotelic, whether koans are or are not tools. Considering the question from two Zen perspectives has yielded, in characteristic Zen fashion, two contradictory answers: according to one, a koan is a tool; according to the other, it is a plaything. Nevertheless, the tradition holds that the apparent two truths is in fact one. In spirit of breaking through the double barrier, I suggest that perhaps the distinction between telic and autotelic is not absolute, that perhaps these terms are open endpoints of a continuum. It seems that at least in the case of koan practice, there is a ‘contracted telism’ in which the means and ends are so inextricable intertwined, and in which the goal is so close at hand, that the distinction blurs.

Zen engagement and Zen mastery, koan playing and mastery of the koan game, go hand in hand so thoroughly, that one cannot be the mere means of the other. Here, the apparent “means” cannot be dispensed with should a better one arise; it is of equal value to the apparent “end.”³⁷² Furthermore, the value of koan-play is intrinsic, as koans and

³⁶⁹ “In any case you will not be able to stand still” (Tenkei, *SBCR* koan 74 [Appendix 1]).

³⁷⁰ Hakuin in Kohn, 80; Sasaki, Iriya and Fraser, *Sayings of Layman P’ang*, 78; *BCR* koan 74 (Appendix 1). Emphasis mine in both cases.

³⁷¹ *BCR* koans 36, 37 and 41 (emphasis mine). Though Yuanwu said, “When you add it all up, it’s not worth a single letter” (Cleary and Cleary, 574), he nevertheless adds it all up and adds quite a bit to create the *BCR*: “People coming after him merely followed his words and produced interpretations; but what relevance has this? . . . I too am [doing the same] when I talk like this” (*BCR* koan 6).

³⁷² See Wright, “Rethinking Transcendence,” 132 and Hori, *Zen Sand*, 51-2.

are not mere representations of and indices of reality, but are reality itself, framed and manifest exquisitely within the artificial cultural standards (rules) of the Zen game.³⁷³

Thus, in response to the prevalent tool metaphor, though the difference is perhaps subtle, I would suggest that a koan is not so much a “tool,” as it is an “instrument” - something absolutely central and essential to a performance; that *with* which an event happens.

Similarly, koan engagement is not so much a “method” as it is a “practice.”³⁷⁴ With koans, Buddha-nature is played and realized, like a sonata or a film, rather than produced, acquired, birthed or found.³⁷⁵ Put differently, a koan is not a vehicle to get from sentience

³⁷³ In this sense, then, the apparent means (the koan) is the goal. This is why the characteristically “indirect” language of koans is sometimes referred to as “exceedingly direct” (*BCR* koan 69). Within the “live words” of masters “no mental route or verbal route is laid out” (Master Hujong in Park, 218), in part, because there is no need to get beyond what is said to what it refers (see Loy, 508; Faure, 241; and Wright, “Rethinking Transcendence,” *passim*). Thus, in koan 74 (Appendix 1), when the monk asks, “‘Come eat, little bodhisattvas!’ What does this mean?” Changqing said, “Sure seems like celebration on the occasion of a meal.” That is, Jinniu’s singing, dancing, and playing is nothing more than an event in which reality is framed as reality (being the behavior of a master), and is presented, heightened and magnified for his audience. On the Zen stage of reality, everything may be perfect. But with some “Zen lighting,” everything is also perfectly manifest, en-lightened. See Watson, *Lin-chi lu*, 41 and Cleary, *Sutra of Hui-neng*, 20.

³⁷⁴ Though the terms “tool” and “instrument” overlap considerably, the former tends to imply an object applied by an agent, exerted upon another object to produce a desired effect, often the permanent alteration of the work-object or the production of another object with change to the tool itself minimized. At the completion of work, a tool and its product subsist independently of each other. “Instrument,” however, carries connotations of greater flexibility and responsiveness, as with the temporal instruments of music or science, which produce an effect by being *exerted upon*. As for the instrumentality of instruments vis-à-vis tools, while a butter knife may be used as a tool for driving a flathead screw, a violin sonata cannot be played without a violin. Similarly, a golf club is not a tool for playing golf, nor a tool for mastering golf; there is no golf without golf clubs. Thus, while the words of a Zen master may be “a fishing line” (*BCR* koan 82), “Zen fishing” does not take place without them. “Method” and “practice” do not overlap to such an extent, though certainly a practice could be a method. Briefly put, the distinction which I have in mind here is that a practice is something one *does*, while a method is something one *does for* something else. That is, a practice need not be a method, at least from the perspective of a practicing subject.

³⁷⁵ See the discussion above on *tathāgata-garbha*. I am here taking a cue from Keiji Nishitani by using the term “realize” in the dual sense that he does, “to indicate that our ability to perceive reality means that reality realizes (actualizes) itself in us; that this in turn is the only way that we can realize (appropriate through understanding) the fact that reality is so realizing itself in us; and that in so doing the self-realization of reality takes place” (Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*, 5). This term quite easily hangs with the dual sense of understanding (under-standing) that I have been using. It is one thing to understand-realize₁ that all is Buddha-nature, that everything is empty (a dream, non-dual, etc.), and to cognize and represent it so. It is quite another thing to understand-realize₂ everything; that is, *be* the self-presenting everything (and nothing), to be Buddha. But as, according to Zen doctrine, everything already is

to Buddhahood, from A to B; it is a vehicle to get from A to A, a raft for rafting, for returning to the water, rather than for crossing to yonder shore. With koans, reality is realized as it is – in its ‘suchness’.³⁷⁶

Koan practice is a species of autotelic play, when doctrine is taken at its word.

Taking doctrine as deceptive moves, koan practice may not be autotelic, though it still should be approached as such. As with play in general, koans and koan practice may have telic and autotelic aspects. I have suggested the possibility that it may be described as an

everything (else) and everything already is Buddha, perhaps it would be more proper to say that the effect of Zen engagement is that one *really* realizes it (realize₃?). Perhaps, in play terms, that which always already is real is activated, put in play, or performed (see note 374). Perhaps such a state would be the simultaneous and harmonious interplay of understand-realize₁ and understand-realize₂. It “is not something to be gained . . . [it is] really not an object of attainment. Just realize the original purity of your own nature . . . [and] spontaneously realize buddhahood” (Cleary, *Hui-neng’s Commentary*, 108). “The brightness is there all the time . . . [it] is not something to be restored; it is not something appearing at the completion of the procedure; it has never departed” (D.T. Suzuki, *The Zen Doctrine of No-Mind: The Significance of the Sutra of Hui-neng (Wei-lang)* [York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, 1969], 53).

³⁷⁶ *Tathatā* ([S]; 眞如 *zhen ru* [PY]; *chen ju* [WG]; *shin-nyo* [J]) is usually translated as ‘suchness’ or ‘thusness’. On one hand, in the Mahayana, it is ultimate reality (Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, 241; see also *ibid.*, 198). On the other hand, “whatever comes to hand is It” (*BCR* koan 7; see also Cleary, *Sutra of Hui-neng*, 9 and Hyers, 132) and “abiding in the reality of [the] suchness” (Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, 115) of a transient particular is, especially in Zen, experiencing it *as* ultimate reality - or at least as a “facet of the diamond”: “What’s long is the long Body of Reality; what’s short is the short Body of Reality” (*BCR* koan 50). Appreciating the event of the particular manifestation of It “as so,” “as such,” or “as it,” is predicated upon the dissolution of dualism; that is, upon enlightenment. The Chinese character for ‘suchness’ suggests that it is that which follows - is “so” or “thus” - when perception is transformed to receive that which was previously concealed. When ‘suchness’ is expressed in language, which is necessarily dualistic to some degree, tautology is common (see, for example, *BCR* koans 40 and 44; *Wumenguan* koan 7; Tenkei, *SBCR* koan 39). As opposed to the Zen ‘A is-not A’ move, the tautological move suggests that discrimination represents dissatisfaction with the fact that A is A, that, at a more primary level of truth, an acorn is an acorn, and not just a potential oak. To bypass such a fundamental fact is to “refuse to accept Reality as it is or in its suchness” (Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, 35). “Greedily gazing at the moon in the sky, this fellow has lost the pearl in the palm of his hand” (*BCR* koan 28). This Zen version of ‘suchness’ dovetails nicely with the autotelic conception of reality that I have been laboring to assign to it. It is a name for “the eternally-abiding reality, the self-regulating reality” (Suzuki, *Lankavatara Sutra*, 124) which requires neither mental machinations nor agency for completeness. “There is nothing wrong with things just as they are; why turn it all upside down [by asking a question]?” (Tenkei, *SBCR* koan 15; see also *BCR* koans 71, 77, and 84). Nevertheless, masters and students do ask “Why?” Perhaps there is a difference between an everyday “Why?” - a means to some useful truth, a void opened to be filled - and an enlightened “Why?” - an ever empty end in itself with which the ‘suchness’ of things becomes manifest “[putting] an end to other words” (*The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana*, quoted in Wang, *Linguistic Strategies*, 62). Perhaps on a certain level, this is what Zhaozhou had in mind when he said, “It is enough to ask about the matter; bow and withdraw” (*BCR* koan 2).

instance of ‘contracted telism’. In all cases, the idea of koans as mere tools for accomplishing the task of becoming enlightened does not harmonize as well as the idea of koans as instruments of play that are instrumental in the particular, peculiar and exemplary Zen way of playing along with the playing out of reality.³⁷⁷

I have shown that koan study is playful in the senses outlined in Chapter 1. Playing the role of advocate, I have made a case against the charge of inconsistency, answering the question, “Why do these purported bearers of ultimate truth play so?” Granting them correctness, that which seems inconsistent from the ordinary perspective makes sense from the extraordinary Zen perspective which permits, and perhaps even encourages or strongly suggests, this behavior. In any case, this is simply what they do. Perhaps the most certain conclusion that could be drawn is that Zen folks play with koans because they play with koans.

³⁷⁷ It is worth noting that as autotelism is not the sine qua non of play, the inability to construe koan practice as strictly autotelic does not undermine the project of reasonably describing it as playful.

NOTE ON THE LAYOUT OF APPENDIXES

In what follows, two koans of the *Blue Cliff Record*, as translated by Cleary and Cleary unless otherwise noted, are presented for the convenience of the reader. I have also included and inserted the comments of Hakuin and Tenkei on the koans as they appear in Cleary's *Secrets of the Blue Cliff Record*. The appearance on the page, however, requires some explanation. As stated in Chapter 2, the *Blue Cliff Record* is a work that is made up of many layers added at various times and by different people. In an attempt to graphically represent this structure while presenting the material, I have used variations in typeface and placement upon the page to distinguish between contributors and their times. Every indentation represents a later date of origination of a piece of the text. To further facilitate the engagement of the reader with a particular layer, I present the original encounter (the "case" selected by Xuedou) in 12-point boldface Roman; Xuedou's contribution in 12-point italic; Yuanwu's in 12-point Roman; and the comments of Hakuin and Tenkei are in 10-point Roman. Hopefully, these measures will allow the reader approach the text from various angles, as well as help the reader maintain their orientation within this complex work and the appendages of the commentarial tradition which I offer.

APPENDIX 1

SEVENTY-FOURTH KOAN OF THE *BLUE CLIFF RECORD*: “JINNIU’S RICE PAIL”

Introductory Pointer [Yuanwu]

Wielding a sharp sword horizontally, he cuts off the nest of trailing vines [complications] in front of his point.

[Hakuin] With your own fine sword at your side, before even leaving your room you have cut away the totality of myriad forms, even down to an ant’s whiskers. The nest of complications includes the complications of confusion, the complications of enlightenment, the complications of Buddhist doctrines, the complications of Zen records.

[Tenkei] When Zen teaching masters act according to the occasion, they wield a precious sword, razor sharp, breaking up students’ nests of complications.

Hanging a clear mirror on high,

[H] The clear mirror is *samādhi* like a precious mirror; the clear mirror itself is the sharp sword.

[T] Sometimes [Zen masters] also enter absorption in the precious mirror and -

he brings forth the seal of the cosmic Buddha within a phrase.³⁷⁸

[H] Drawing out the seal of the cosmic Buddha refers to what in Zen is called the mind seal

[T] - expresses the mind seal of the cosmic Buddha in a single statement or saying. This is the genuine living methodology of a teaching master, but even so, -

Where one’s state is secure within,

[H] A state of inner peace is where even Buddhas and Zen masters do not know, the place where water cannot wet and wind cannot blow in.

[T] – in the realm of inner peace within oneself there are not so many things -

one wears clothes and eats food.

[H] As for dressing and eating, is this the razor-sharp sword? It is the clear mirror? Is it the seal of the cosmic Buddha?

[T] - just putting on clothes when cold, eating and drinking when hungry.³⁷⁹

Where spiritual powers wander at play,

[H] The realm of sporting spiritual powers is simultaneous arrival in the absolute and the relative, the realm of great freedom of spiritual

³⁷⁸ Vairocana is the cosmic Buddha. The sentence suggests that the words of Jinniu are the very words of Vairocana Buddha himself.

³⁷⁹ See Yuanwu’s comments on the case below.

capacities, sometimes entering into the domain of Buddhas, sometimes entering into the domain of demons.

[T] But where you sport spiritual powers -
how can one linger?

[H] How does one maintain focus on it? How does one distract oneself from it!

[T] - how will you go forward? In any case you will not be able to stand still.

Have you fully mastered it? Look at what's written below:

Case /selected by Xuedou/

Every day at meal time, Master Jinniu³⁸⁰ would personally take the rice pail and do a dance in front of the monks' hall: laughing aloud, he would say, "Little Bodhisattvas, come eat!"³⁸¹

[Yuanwu:]

"You may play with the fishing line as you will – without disturbing the clear waves, its meaning is naturally distinct" [source unnamed].

He applies pure ghee and poison at the same time – and he's right! Jewels and gems he arrays all at once, but what can he do? – those he meets are few.

[Hakuin] Even if you have to sell your swords and saddles, you Bodhisattvas, come and eat!

[Tenkei] In other places they call this
'the giant meal table of the successors of Mazu.'³⁸²

There's something to that, but there is no one earth who does not sit at this table. Nevertheless, there is no one who really knows how to eat the food, so no matter how fine a table of treats Jinniu has set out today, there seem to be no customers to partake of it. Even so, he sure is a genial host. When Zen teaching masters act for the benefit of others this way, it is just because people don't know they know what they know and go seeking outwardly; so Jinniu has no choice but to dance and laugh for twenty years and tell people not to eat rice through their noses, showing them what they already knew.

[Xuedou:] *Though he acted like this, Jinniu was not good-hearted.*

[Yw] This is a thief [Xuedou] recognizing a thief [Jinniu], a spirit recognizing a spirit. If someone comes to talk of right and wrong, then he's a right and wrong person.

[H] This remark is scary; in what respect is he not being good-hearted?

[T] He means it is a fine tea party, but don't drink too much irresponsibly and get poisoned. It's important *how* you drink.

[Later,] A monk asked Changqing, "When the man of old said, 'Bodhisattvas, come eat!' what was his meaning?"³⁸³

³⁸⁰ 金牛 Jinniu (PY); Chin Niu (WG); Kin-gyū (J)

³⁸¹ The "little" appears in Cleary's *SBCR*, but not in Cleary and Cleary's *BCR*. The original reads, "菩薩子."

³⁸² 馬祖 Mazu (PY); Ma Tsu (WG); Baso (J).

³⁸³ 長慶 Changqing (PY) Ch'ang Ch'ing (WG) Chokei (J).

[Yw] Indeed, anyone would have doubts about this. From the beginning, he hasn't known where Jinniu is at. What will Changqing say?

Changqing said, "[Seems] much like joyful praise on the occasion of a meal."³⁸⁴

[Yw] He sizes up the audience to give his order, and wraps up the case on the basis of the facts.

[H] This saying is hard to believe and hard to understand; the vein of the words is so fine it's as though it had been sifted through a silk mesh. It is a life-taking spiritual talisman!

[T] Celebrating what? Is it because the meal is your favorite dish? No, it's a celebration to let you know the way to eat with your mouth.

Commentary on the Case [by Yuanwu]

Jinniu was a venerable adept descended from Mazu.

"Every day at meal time, he would personally take the rice pail and do a dance in front of the monks' hall: laughing aloud, he would say, 'Bodhisattvas, come eat!'"

He did this every day for twenty years. Tell me, where was his intent? Was he just summoning the others to eat? He always struck the (wooden) fish and beat the drum (for mealtimes) and also personally announced it. So what further need was there for him to take the rice pail and do so many tricks? Wasn't he crazy? Wasn't he "expounding by design"? If he was expounding this matter, why didn't he formally lecture? Why did he need to act like this?

People today are far from knowing that the Ancients' meaning was outside of words. Why not then take a brief look at the stated purpose for [Bodhidharma's] first coming here? What was it? It was clearly explained:

A separate transmission outside the verbal teachings, to transmit individually the mind seal. [Yuanwu's paraphrase of Bodhidharma]

The ancient man Jinniu's expedient methods too were just to make you directly receive this. Later people would vainly calculate on their own and say, "Why so many concerns? When cold, turn toward the fire; when hot take advantage of the cool shade; when hungry eat; when tired, get some sleep."³⁸⁵ If we interpreted meanings this way, on the basis of ordinary feelings, to explain and comment, then the whole school of Bodhidharma would have been wiped off the face of the earth. Don't you realize that twenty-four

³⁸⁴ According to Sekida, Changqing is suggesting that Jinniu's ritual has the same function as the recitation of certain sutras that takes place before meals in a monastery. See his commentary on this case in his *Two Zen Classics*.

³⁸⁵ See also Tenkei's comment on the introduction, above.

hours a day, from moment to moment, the Ancients never gave up wanting to understand This Matter?

Xuedou said, *“Though he acted like this, Jinniu was not good-hearted.”*

Many people misunderstand this line. That which is called the supreme flavor of pure ghee is converted on encountering such people, into poison. Since Jinniu descended into the weeds to help people, why did Xuedou say that he wasn’t good-hearted? Why did he talk this way? Patchrobed monks [Zen monks] must have living potential to begin to understand.

People today don’t get to the Ancient’s realm – they just say, “What mind is there to see? What Buddha is there?” If you construct such views you have destroyed the old adept, Jinniu. If you go on today and tomorrow with such facile explanations, you’ll never be finished.

[Later,] A monk asked Changqing, “When the man of old said, ‘Bodhisattvas, come eat!’ what was his meaning?”

Changqing said, “[Seems] much like joyful praise on the occasion of a meal.”

The honored worthy Changqing was extremely compassionate – he leaked and tarried quite a bit. In truth it was

“joyful praise on the occasion of a meal.”

But you tell me, rejoicing over what?

Look at Xuedou’s verse which says:

Verse [Xuedou]

Laughing aloud in the shadow of the white clouds,

[Yuanwu] In his laugh there’s a knife. Why the enthusiasm? The world’s patchrobed monks don’t know where he comes down.

He lifts it up with both hands to give to them.

How can there be such things? Better not slander Jinniu! Can it be called a rice pail? If you are a legitimate patchrobed monk in your own right, you don’t eat this kind of food.

If they were sons of the golden-haired lion,³⁸⁶

They must first be beyond patterns. I’ll allow that they had eyes, but I only fear that their eyes were not true.

They would have seen the deception [the warp³⁸⁷] from three thousand miles away.

³⁸⁶ “The Golden-haired Lion is used in the Huayan school to symbolize the cosmos as the mutual interpenetration of the universal and the particular, of principle (relativity, emptiness of inherent fixed reality) and phenomena (the myriad of things and events)” (Cleary and Cleary, 243). Xuedou may also be playing on Jinniu’s name, which means “Golden Ox.” “If they had been sons of the golden haired lion,” they would not be inferior to Jinniu, the “Golden Ox.”

³⁸⁷ ‘Warp’ is used here in the sense of distortion. Occasionally, some lines in Professor Cleary’s *Secrets of the Blue Cliff Record* differ considerably from the Cleary and Cleary translation. He explains in his introduction that this is done, in part, to better accommodate the senses in which Hakuin and Tenkei take the original (SBCR, xii).

It wasn't worth half a cent. A scene of leaking and tarrying.
Where was the deception? Blind men!

Verse Commentary [Yuanwu]

"Laughing aloud in the shadow of the white clouds."

[H] Is it a ghost? Is it a spirit? Eerie! This refers to the appearance of cumulus clouds piled high; this line versifies Jinniu's lesson.

[T] With a wooden pail full of white rice like puffy clouds, laughing out loud, is this a happy laugh, or a wry laugh? You try to discern!

Changqing said, "Joyful praise on the occasion of a meal."

Xuedou said,

"He lifts it up with both hands to give to them."

[Yw] But say, was he just giving them food to eat, or do you think that there must have been something special besides?

[H] He acted wholeheartedly toward the entire community, presenting a night-lighting pearl, tray and all.

[T] Anyhow, though Jinniu is bringing it with both hands, there seems to be no one to receive it. It could also be said that Xuedou too is bringing it with both hands, but what has he brought to give out? And then there is the question of whether they were fed for free or whether there is some special mysterious marvel.

[Yw] If you can know the true point here, then you're a

'son of a golden-haired lion.'

"If they had been sons of the golden haired lion,"

then there would have been no need for Jinniu to take the rice pail, do a dance, and laugh out loud – in fact

They would have

known his mistake³⁸⁸

from three thousand miles away.

An Ancient said,

"Perceive before the act and you won't have to use the least bit of effort."

Thus patchrobed monks must always function outside of patterns before they can be called genuine Masters of our school. If they just base themselves on words and speech, they won't avoid leaking and tarrying in indulgent attachments.

[H] When you pass through the impenetrables, you are in the know wherever you are.

[T] If they were lionlike Zennists, they would understand the source outside of words, discern the warp from far away, and see what Jinniu's point comes down to, with distinct clarity. As for Jinniu's so-called warp, where did he go awry? The point is that we should see that he has performed all these complicated skills where there is fundamentally nothing to be said.

³⁸⁸ Compare Yuanwu's reiteration with Xuedou's original.

APPENDIX 2

NINETY-THIRD KOAN OF THE *BLUE CLIFF RECORD*: “DAGUANG DOES A DANCE”

(Yuanwu’s Introductory Pointer missing)

Case [selected by Xuedou]

A monk asked Daguang, “Changqing said [in *BCR* case 74³⁸⁹],
‘Joyful praise on the occasion of a meal.’

[Hakuin] This . . . refers to preaching and recitations after a meal, a ceremony of dedication of thanks.

– what was the essence of his meaning?”

[Yuanwu:] The light shines again. This lacquer tub [ignoramus]!
It is unavoidable to doubt; without asking, you won’t know.

[H:] This is a question to test the host. This monk has violently
poisonous guts; his question is not easy.

Daguang did a dance.

[Yw] Do not deceive people completely. He acts in the same way
as Jinniu did before.

[H] A wily adept indeed.

[Tenkei] Is this the same as Jinniu’s dance? Is it different? Daguang
and Jinniu are no different as dancers.

The monk bowed.

[Yw] He too acts this way; he’s right but I fear he’s
misunderstood.

[T] He’s jumping to conclusions; he won’t be able to continue in the
end.

Daguang said, “What have you seen that you bow?”

[Yw] He still should press him [An appropriate challenge³⁹⁰]; it’s
necessary to be discriminating.

[H] When you kill someone, you have to see the blood.

[T] Daguang quietly poked him.

The monk did a dance.

He draws a cat according to a model. After all he misunderstood.
He’s a fellow playing with a shadow.

[T] He faked it.

Daguang said, “You wild fox spirit!”

³⁸⁹ *BCR* koan 74 (Appendix 1).

³⁹⁰ The bracketed material is as it appears in Thomas Cleary’s translation of 1998.

This kindness is hard to requite. The Thirty-three Patriarchs only transmitted this.

[H] “You thief!” This is like the shout of Deshan and Linji.³⁹¹

[T] “You apparition,” he says, seeing all the way through him, brushing him off all at once. This is helping the person by not allowing emotional interpretations.

Commentary on the Case [Yuanwu]

The Twenty-eight Patriarchs in India and the Six Patriarchs in China only transmitted this little bit; but do you people know what it comes down to? If you know, you can avoid this error; if you do not know, as before you will only be

“wild fox spirits.”

Some say Daguang wrenched around the other’s nostrils³⁹² to deceive the man; but if that were actually so, what principle would that amount to? Daguang was well able to help others; in his phrases there is a road along which to get oneself out. In general, a teacher of the school must pull out the nails, draw out the pegs, remove the sticking points and untie the bonds for people [he must remove clinging and fixation³⁹³]; only then can he be called “a good friend” [a good spiritual guide³⁹⁴]

“Daguang did a dance, the monk bowed; in the end the monk also did a dance, and Daguang said, ‘You wild fox spirit!’”

This was not turning the monk over; after all, if you do not know the real point, and just do a dance, going on one after the other like this, when will you ever find rest?

“Daguang said, ‘You wild fox spirit!’”

- these words cut off Jinniu, and are undeniably outstanding. That is why it is said,

“He studies the living word, not the dead word.”

Xuedou just likes his saying

“You wild fox spirit!”

That is the basis on which he produces his verse. But tell me, is this

“You wild fox spirit!”

the same as or different from

“Zhizang’s head is white; Baizhang’s head is black,” [BCR case 73]

[or]

“This lacquer bucket!”

³⁹¹ 德山 Deshan (PY); Te-shan (WG); Tokusan (J). 臨濟 Linji (PY); Lin-chi (WG); Rinzai (J).

³⁹² To ‘get one’s nostrils / nose twisted by a master’ is to find out one is not so enlightened after all. The “Great Mazu” twisted the nostrils of (the latter great) Baizhang in BCR case 53. Any mention of this gesture has this, and other episodes, in mind.

³⁹³ Cleary translation of 1998.

³⁹⁴ See Cleary and Cleary, “Translators notes,” BCR case 93.

or

“Good monk!”

Just tell me, are these the same or different? Do you know? You meet him everywhere.

Verse [Xuedou]

The first arrow was light, but the second arrow went deep:

[Yuanwu] A hundred shots, a hundred hits. Where can you go to escape?

Who says yellow leaves are yellow gold?

[a reference to a passage in the *Parinirvana Sutra*, and, perhaps to Jinniu in koan 74³⁹⁵]
Yet they’ll put an end to crying; but even if you can fool a child, it’s of no use.

If the waves of the river Zen³⁹⁶ were alike,

What limit is there to people playing with mud balls? He draws a cat according to a model. He lets out a single road.

Innumerable ordinary people would get bogged down.

We meet a living man! He has entangled every patchrobed monk in the world, and makes them unable to get a hold; he entangles you too, and makes you unable to appear.

Verse Commentary [Yuanwu]

“The first arrow was light, but the second arrow went deep.”

Daguan’s dance was the first arrow. He also said,

“This wild fox spirit!”

This was the second arrow. This has been the tooth and nail since time immemorial.

[Hakuin] At first Daguan’s dance was still light; after that, his calling the other a wild fox spirit was profoundly poisonous.

[T] Daguan’s dancing was still tolerable, but the arrow shot “You wild fox spirit” pierced your heart and guts, penetrating deeply. . . .

Having praised to the skies, from this point there is a switch.

“Who says yellow leaves are yellow gold?”

Yangshan said to his community,

“You people should each turn back your light and reflect; do not memorize my words. Since beginningless aeons you have turned your backs on the light and plunged into

³⁹⁵ “It is like parents soothing their crying child by giving him some yellow leaves from a willow tree and saying, ‘Don’t cry, here is some gold for you’” (Sekida, *Two Zen Classics*, 386). The name Jinniu means ‘golden ox.’ If this is a reference to Jinniu, then it would seem that the monk, or perhaps Daguan, would be the “yellow leaves” in question.

³⁹⁶ Actually, the line reads, “If the waves of 曹溪 Caoxi (Ts’ao Ch’i [WG]; Sōkei [J]) were alike.” It was near the source of this river that the Sixth (and last) Patriarch, Huineng, lived and preached. He is the last person that all following lineage holders share as a common ancestor. Here, the source is Huineng, the river Caoxi represents Zen and the waves represent all the varied episodes that are its manifestation. For more on the symbolism of waves, see note 259.

darkness; the roots of your false conceptions are deep, and after all are hard to pull out all at once. That is why I am temporarily setting up expedient methods to take away your coarse discriminating consciousness; this is like using yellow leaves to stop a little child's crying."³⁹⁷

It is like exchanging sweet fruit for bitter gourd. The Ancients provisionally established expedient methods to help people; when their crying has stopped, yellow leaves are not gold. When the World Honored One [the historical Buddha] explained timely doctrines throughout his lifetime, these too were just talks to put an end to crying.

[T] The dance of Daguang and Jinniu, the beating and shouting of Deshan and Linji, the sayings and koans of the Zen masters: all of these are temporarily set up, as it were yellow leaves presented as gold to stop a child crying, not actually real gold. Thus he sweeps it all away. The words

"Who says?"

constitute the subtle expression that switches; here is where Xuedou helps others.

"This wild fox!"

- he just wanted to transmute the other's active discriminating consciousness; with (the process) there are provisional and real [truths], there are also illumination and function;³⁹⁸ only thus can you see the grasp of the patchrobed monk there. If you can understand, you'll be like a tiger with folded wings.

[H] Xuedou speaks this way to counter approval of the dance as right; yellow leaves are not yellow gold, you know!

[T] This [second] arrow ["You wild fox spirit!"] carries the barb of the unerring succession of Zen Patriarchs in India and China, the transcendental claws and fangs, including both temporal and true, both perception and action.

"If the waves of the river of Zen were alike,"

If suddenly all the students in all quarters did a dance like this, and only acted like this, then

[H] If methods of dealing with students were all the same . . .

[T] If they had faked it on the bank of the river where Buddha died, putting on a dance like this monk or something . . .

"Innumerable ordinary people would get bogged down."

how could they be saved?

[H] What is learned from imitation is a portent of the destruction and demise of Buddhism

[T] Everyone in the world would be dead, so make sure not to hoke up imitations; everyone breath through your nose.

³⁹⁷ See note 395.

³⁹⁸ This roughly corresponds to the wisdom – praxis dyad in the West.

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