

## INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN ZEN BUDDHISM AND DELEUZIAN PHILOSOPHY

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*This paper teases out some of the common threads between two separate traditions: zen buddhist thought as it is interpreted by Thich Nhat Hanh and by Allan Watts, and poststructuralist thought as it is interpreted by Gilles Deleuze, and by Henri Bergson. Despite some semantic differences, zen buddhism and deleuzian thought are found to have a great deal in common. Both open up new ways of thinking and of being that challenge the apparent inevitabilities of today's neoliberal world. The inter-related areas I will explore in this paper, in which deleuzian scholars and buddhist thinkers/practitioners can fruitfully be put in dialogue with each other, include abandoning the self-as-entity or ego, resisting the pull of binary thinking, and the interconnectedness of being.*

It has been a catch-cry of those driving the implementation of neoliberalism over the last three decades that *there is no alternative*. Neoliberalism is characterized on the one hand by the logic of globalism (it is happening everywhere so we are powerless to resist), and on the other, by heightened competition and individualism. The value and relevance of social responsibility gives way to the dominance of the market and market values. Neoliberalism is a discourse that works on and through desire, making each individual want to accomplish in its terms, despite its negative effects on health, and the undermining of collegiality and open debate (Davies & Bansel, 2005; 2010). It works within linear space-time when creative intellectual work requires not “linear, progressive, continuing, even, regulated, and teleological” space-time (Grosz, 1995, p. 98), but an open-ended, circular space-time in which an idea can be visited again and again, in conversation, in writing, in the writing of others, making new connections, enabling the proliferation of ideas, where thought is not determined by conceptions of the past and present, but open to multiple possible futures. Under neoliberal regimes academics are at risk of being frozen inside knowledges that are regular, predictable and knowable, leaving no room for the joyous, the not-yet-knowable, the unuseful, the irrational. New forms of thought not necessarily and not only driven by the anticipated end point or product, but through processes that

can enable life to “lift itself beyond itself” (Grosz, 2004, p. 112, Davies & Bansel, 2010).

My exploration here of the intersections between zenbuddhism and deleuzian philosophy opens each up in unexpected ways. It simultaneously opens up new possibilities for lifting intellectual life out of the neoliberal constraints it finds itself enmeshed in. There is an alternative to neoliberalism if we turn our attention away from globalism or “globe-making” in Nancy’s (2007a) terms and look instead to alternative practices of “world-making”. World-making as Nancy defines it, involves being open to the other and to the capacity to always become different from what one is already. At the centre of that openness, I will suggest, is a very particular kind of open listening, to oneself and the other, that lies at the heart of both buddhist and deleuzian philosophies, philosophies that generate a strong counter-force to the hyper-individualism of neoliberal regimes.

In this paper I explore what these two different philosophies/ontologies have in common. Both work from and with the experience of, and experiment with, being. Both see life as constantly evolving beyond the constraints of current epistemologies or ways of knowing. In my own explorations of each of these modes of thinking and being I find that each of these quite different modes of thought has a curious capacity to make the other more accessible. It is the productive interface between them that I will explore in what follows.

## **1. Thinking the unthinkable**

The deleuzian approach is to generate movement beyond fixed places by finding ways to think the unthinkable. Deleuze generated new concepts not as an epistemology to impose on or explain being, but as a generative practice that might unlock fixed ways of being. He explored ways to re-think human subjects not as a bounded entities, but as intersecting lines of force or intensity, where “... *each living thing – each individual – is a contraction of the world, a connection with all of the world*” (Williams, 2003, p. 23). Buddhist thought and practice, notwithstanding its distrust of concepts and its emphasis on percepts and affects, is similarly engaged with finding ways to think the unthinkable, and finding ways to be in the world as a particular manifestation of the world, and in connection with all of the world.

Buddhism tells us to give up our habituated and usual ways of thinking, to abandon our egos and our attachments, both material and emotional, and to find in the consequent *emptiness* a truth of ourselves. That truth is not so much an individualised truth, as the discovery that lying beyond (and before) all the illusions of self is a buddha-self that we have, or are, in common. It enjoins us to work tirelessly and for years if necessary, with relentless self-discipline, to achieve an effortless letting go of illusory truths. In that letting

go each can empty the self, not in order to accomplish an imagined good, but in order to become what each of us was already: “one does not practice Zen to become a Buddha; one practices it because one is a Buddha from the beginning – and this ‘original realization’ is the starting point of Zen life ...” (Watts, 1957, p. 154).

## 2. Experiencing for oneself I

Both buddhist and deleuzian thought emphasize the importance of the knower experiencing and experimenting for her- or himself, breaking loose from fixed ways of knowing and being. In zen life emptiness and fullness, struggling and letting go, all binaries in fact, are to be understood not as opposites but as complementaries, where neither can exist without the other. Watts tells a story to illustrate this point taken from Eugen Herrigal’s (1953) *Zen in the Art of Archery*, where intentionality and spontaneity are integrally related:

Herrigal spent almost five years trying to find the right way of releasing the bowstring, for it had to be done “unintentionally”, in the same way as a ripe fruit bursts its skin. His problem was to resolve the paradox of practicing relentlessly without ever “trying”, and to let go of the taut string intentionally without intention. His master at one and the same time urged him to keep on working and working, but also to stop making an effort. For the art cannot be learned unless the arrow “shoots itself,” unless the string is released wu-hsin and wu-nien, without “mind” and without blocking, or choice. After all those years of practice there came a day when it just happened – how, or why, Herrigal never understood. (Watts, 1957, pp. 195-6).

I have been reading (and more recently writing with) Deleuze for over a decade now, not knowing where his often inaccessible and complex writing might take me, but happy to go there nonetheless. Understanding Deleuze is a struggle. It takes time, and the concepts only work if you experience them for yourself. There comes a point where the ideas release themselves, almost like Herrigal’s arrow. In my recent book, written with Wyatt, Gale and Gannon, *Deleuze and collaborative writing: An immanent plane of composition*, we set out on an unmapped journey, a project of collaborative writing to and *with* each other and *with* Deleuze, with no idea where we were going. It was a pleasurable and sometimes painful journey that somewhat surprisingly ended in the production of a quite wonderful book. Norman Denzin wrote of that book: “This four-voiced engagement with Deleuze brilliantly moves collaborative writing into new spaces. The text explores uncharted topics, including all the transgressive poetic places between ontology, ethics, and

nightmares. In their hands writing becomes more than a method of inquiry, it is a way of being in the world. And once you enter this space, you can never go back” (Wyatt et al., 2011, back cover). Deleuze takes you into the not-yet-known, the not-yet-thinkable, where one must forget, and let go, in order to open up to the new.

Both zen Buddhism and deleuzian philosophy wish the subject to move beyond mindless, habitual repetitive citations toward what Buddhism calls mindfulness and toward what Deleuze calls lines of flight and thought. Buddhism sees ‘mindlessness’ as filled with concepts and clichéd repetitions, and as obedient to authoritarian knowledges. The move to mindfulness, in buddhist terms, is one that involves letting go of concepts and authority *and* trusting the body’s own knowledge gained through repeating, in a disciplined way, the buddhist verses and gathas that inform buddhist practice. Deleuze, in a comparable move, sees mindless habitual citations as creating both an illusion of stasis *and* providing a “safe plot of land” from which it is possible to take off on a new line of flight (Davies & Gannon, 2009). This flight, facilitated by the concepts he has generated, he sees as emergent, or immanent. It involves invention as well as letting go of what went before. The creatively evolving deleuzian subject, the subject open to the not-yet-known, is the place where new thought happens, those thoughts having the power to generate new ways of being (Davies, 2010).

### **3. Dismantling the self-as-entity**

Deleuze argued that the self, a concept that evokes self primarily as an entity, as separate or finite matter, is a misleading and erroneous way of conceiving what it is to be human. He was interested in thinking of human subjects as movement, as made up of intersecting lines of force where matter and force are not separable. The problem of imagining the self, he says, as a separate finite entity, places an unnecessary limitation on the internal life of the self as it shapes itself to fit the requirements of logic and of language. The imagined self as a stable entity is one that may take a great deal of effort to work against, since the struggle is not only against logic and language but also against the others who are caught within it.

Thich Nhat Hanh wrote in his early memoirs of being a buddhist monk of this same struggle with loved ones, who wanted to keep him the same:

To live we must die every instant. We must perish again and again in the storms that make life possible. It would be better I thought, if everyone cast me from their thoughts. I cannot be a human being and, at the same time, be an unchanging object of love or hatred, annoyance or devotion. I must continue to grow ... I cannot force myself back into

the shell I've just broken out of. This is a source of great loneliness for me ... (1998, p. 87).

This tension between habitual practice and the spontaneous emergence of something new is a continuing theme in both buddhist and deleuzian thought and practice. While buddhist practitioners are enjoined to engage in rituals and techniques involving the repetition of words from authoritative others, the buddha-self is spontaneous, and un-self-conscious. It comes from “the unthinkable ingenuity and creative power of man’s spontaneous and natural functioning – a power which is blocked when one tries to master it in terms of formal methods and techniques” (Watts, 1957, p. 26). The techniques are only useful as an instrument, not as the experience itself. One must experiment with life, and not simply follow the already known path. Buddhist practice, like Herrigal’s years of practice with the bow and arrow may or may not lead to the spontaneous, un-self-conscious arrow’s flight, or the experience of one’s buddha-self.

Integral to this shift is a non-judgmental openness to oneself and the other. Just as one learns to trust the unknown of oneself so one learns to be open to, to listen to, the other. One listens both to oneself and the other, not in order to judge them and find them wanting against some imagined essence, or against a code that dictates what they “should” be. Instead, one is open to the world, and open to the world as it exists in oneself and the other. In greeting the other, Deleuze asks, simply, “what is it to be this?”. What makes the just-thisness of you, in this moment? “You ask yourself how is that possible? How is this possible in an internal way? In other words, you relate the thing or the statement to the mode of existence that it implies, that it envelops in itself. How must it be in order to say that? Which manner of Being does this imply? You seek the enveloped modes of existence, and not the transcendent values” (Deleuze, 1980, np). In Thich Nhat Hanh’s words: “If we only analyze someone from the outside, without becoming one with them, without entering their shoes, their skin, we will never really understand them” (2010, p. 32).

In both deleuzian and buddhist thought, it is the construction of oneself as ego or self-as-entity that closes down the capacity to see the world in oneself and the other. One becomes caught up in categorical difference and in illusions of fixity. In deleuzian terms, fixity seeks to contain and to give direction to the lines of force. It seeks to coerce each individual to move in limited paths in order to make them more amenable to government (by oneself in the name of morality and self-survival, and by the other in the name of a particular order). The material/discursive habit of being-oneself-as-ego is limiting, and yet it is a difficult habituation to give up. Deleuze talks of a philosophical war, a war without battles, with and against oneself and with and against those governmental forces in oneself: “philosophy can’t battle with the powers that be, but it fights a war without battles, a guerrilla

campaign against them ... Since the powers aren't just external things, but permeate each of us, philosophy throws us all into constant negotiations with, and a guerrilla campaign against, ourselves" (Deleuze, 1995, np).

Thich Nhat Hanh similarly writes of a guerilla campaign in which one catches oneself in the act of being taken over by thoughts and practices that permeate us. He is interested in figuring how to let them go, how to exist without them, or in the face of them. His teachings are, he says, "tools which we can use to shatter and demolish our habitual and troublesome ways of thinking, old habits forged by our everyday lives" (2010, p. 55). His guerilla campaign is based on love – one must love the enemy in order to know and overcome it, whether that enemy is outside oneself or inside oneself. One should not rush to judgment, but take up a position of mindful, compassionate knowing in which it becomes clear that the enemy is not so very different from the self. Compassion toward oneself is intrinsic to Thich Nhat Hanh's mindfulness. In dealing with our own anger, for example, we might care for it like an old friend, or a baby:

... mindfulness is touching, recognizing, greeting, and embracing [the anger]. It does not fight or suppress. The role of mindfulness is like the role of the mother, embracing and soothing the suffering child. Anger is in you; anger is your baby, your child. You have to take very good care of it. When it recognizes anger, mindfulness says, "Hello there, my anger, I know you are there. I will take good care of you, don't worry." (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2001b, p. 119).

This loving, gentle, almost humorous approach is not about accepting all that is in order to keep it the same. It is an act of love that sees the interdependence of all beings, and all aspects of being. One sees the other in oneself and oneself in the other, and opens up new understandings that have the power to transform both. Through mindfulness one comes to understand that some cultural patterns when they dominate our ways of being, can become toxic if we allow them to remain fixed. The individualized ego is one form that that fixity can take.

The individualized ego, in buddhist thought, is constructed not through compassion and love, but through judgment, through comparison, through categorization, and through the fear of being found lacking. Individualism appears to offer the ego freedom but it is only if you are this or that kind of person who has rid him- or herself from certain aspects that are judged to be negative, that you can be loved and accepted. The ego must therefore suppress and deny the negative, and certainly not accept it and treat it with love.

The idea of the ego as a fixed entity, that both buddhist and deleuzian thought work against, is strung together out of a series of moments or events, which together take on an illusion of being solid, of being *this* and definitely not *that*. In buddhist thought

the ego exists in an abstract sense alone, being an abstraction from memory, somewhat like the illusory circle of fire made by a whirling torch. We can, for example, imagine the path of a bird through the sky as a distinct line which it has taken. But this line is as abstract as a line of latitude. In concrete reality the bird left no line, and, similarly, the path from which our ego is abstracted has entirely disappeared. Thus any attempt to cling to the ego or to make it an effective source of action is doomed to frustration. (Watts, 1957, p. 47).

Both deleuzian and buddhist thought and practice adopt the idea of the line, or lines of force or energy that make us up and that we make up. Both see a need to be aware of the way the illusory self-as-ego trips us up. In buddhist thought and practice one *empties* oneself of the ego and its fixities in order to open oneself up to the inter-dependence of subject and object, knower and known. One becomes aware of “a mutuality in which the subject creates the object just as much as the object creates the subject” (Watts, 1957, p. 120). One is no longer independent of or existing apart from the known: “I have no other self than the totality of things of which I am aware” (Watts, 1957, p. 120).

In very similar language Deleuze wrote about the multiplicity of self that one accomplishes once having figured how to de-individualize or de-personalize oneself. He saw this both as a harsh and disciplined exercise, *and* as an exercise of love, that opens us up to the intensities running through us. Following on from Nietzsche he wrote of developing a perverse taste: “for saying simple things in your own way, in affects, intensities, experiences, experiments. It’s a strange business, speaking for yourself, in your own name”, he says, “because it doesn’t at all come with seeing yourself as an ego or a person or a subject ...”. It is only through opening oneself up to the multiple intensities that run through one, that one experiences a “*depersonalization through love rather than subjection*” (Deleuze, 1995, p. 6-7 my emphasis).

Becoming aware of this unfolding of oneself as a set of intensities, such that one becomes the intensities rather than the separate material subject who “thinks” or “experiences” the intensities, enables thoughts to flow without interruption much as the spring from an unknown source flows into a well (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1998). In buddhist terms that flow is a liberation from self as object:

... the separation of the thinker from the thought, the knower from the known, the subject from the object, is purely abstract. There is not the mind on the one hand and its experiences on the other: there is just a process of experiencing in which there is nothing to be grasped as an object, and no one, as a subject, to grasp it. Seen thus, the process of

experiencing ceases to clutch at itself. Thought follows thought without interruption, that is, without any need to divide itself from itself, so as to become its own object. (Watts, 1957, p. 53).

In both buddhist and deleuzian thought the egoic self dissolves in this conceptualization. The human subject cannot readily be separated from the intensities or lines of force that make it up (or that it makes up) at any one moment. The distinction between one human and another, between human and animal, between human and earth other, cannot be sustained. What characterizes one being at any one point of time are the particular intensities running through that being, intensities and forces that may run through others, though differently configured at any one time. Categories for sorting different kinds of beings, and different individuals in this conception of being are not so useful. Deleuze observes: "It's not a question of being this or that sort of human, but of ... unravelling your body's human organization, exploring this or that zone of bodily intensity, with everyone discovering their own particular zones, and the groups, populations, species that inhabit them" (Deleuze, 1995, p. 11).

#### **4. Experiencing for oneself II**

While pondering these ideas (or allowing them to ponder me) I was staying with a friend in her summer-house in the Stockholm archipelago. I found myself welcoming a dragonfly that alighted on my bare leg. Instead of flinching against its strangeness I found myself open to it, in its difference. It was not at all clear (nor did it matter) who originated the experience, or which forces came from "me", the dragonfly or the sun, or indeed the idea of the dissolving ego. In that moment of just-thisness, I was unravelled in the intensities of intersecting lines of sun and dragonfly and thought:

*You alight on my bare leg  
outstretched in welcome sun after rain  
tiny black mouth opening and closing*

*small head nodding and twisting to the side  
bright gold orbs staring intently  
glitter in the sun*

*red tail lifting into the air  
stretch of bright wings  
red gold lace in sunlight*



*we stare      thus  
 eyes filled with warmth and light  
 in the soft bright air*

## 5. Going beyond binaries

So far I have traced the ways in which deleuzian and buddhist thought dismantle the ego – or self as finite entity and the implications this has for one’s relations with the other. This opening up to thought, or unraveling of oneself as separate, egoic being requires one to go beyond the self/other binary and the matter/force binary. Self and other, matter and force intra-act with each other, that is, they are constitutive of each other, and affect each other, in ways that cannot be understood simply through usual language practices of logic and categorization, or through scientific methods seeking predictability and repetition (Barad, 2007).

Deleuze used the term *haecceity* to refer to the just-thisness or immanence of being. In the moment of recognizing the just-thisness, binaries dissolve: God and matter are no longer separable, and nor are mind and body, interior and exterior, self and other, theory and practice, man and animal, organic and inorganic. “A *haecceity* is a moment of pure speed and intensity (an individuation) – like when a swimming body becomes wave and is momentarily suspended in nothing but an intensity of forces and rhythms” (Halsey, 2007, p. 146).

The English language makes this shift in understanding hard to grasp. It constructs the self as noun/object/ego rather than as a verb/processes/intensities. In both deleuzian thought and buddhist thought, the entity and the event intra-act with each other (Barad, 2007). Neither can precede the other, nor be a product of the other, and both are made different through the encounter with the other.

This linguistic/conceptual habit in English of separating nouns and verbs can leave us perplexed, unable to overcome our attachment to the matter/movement binary, unable to see the intra-activity between things and actions. Watts illustrates this dilemma in the English language with the image of the fist:

What happens to my fist [noun-object] when I open my hand? The object miraculously vanishes because one action was disguised by a part of speech usually assigned to a thing! In English the differences between things and actions are clearly, if not always logically, distinguished, but

a great number of Chinese words do duty for both nouns and verbs – so that one who thinks in Chinese has little difficulty in seeing that objects are also events, that our world is a collection of processes rather than entities. (Watts, 1957, p. 5).

Deleuze also gave primacy to movement, to verbs over nouns:

One's always writing to bring something to life, to free life from where it's trapped, to trace lines of flight. The language for doing that can't be a homogeneous system, it's something unstable, always heterogeneous, in which style carves differences of potential between which things can pass, come to pass, a spark can flash and break out of language itself, to make us see and think what was lying in the shadow around the words, things we were hardly aware existed. (Deleuze, 1995, p. 141).

Binary thought, which divides and categorizes, and creates hierarchies, works, in contrast, to keep everything the same.

## **6. The interconnectedness of being**

The idea of the interconnectedness of being draws on each of the ideas so far elaborated – dissolving the self-as-entity and going beyond binaries. Thich Nhat Hanh (1998) refers to interbeing endlessly interwoven that dissolves the concept of 'me' since the "concept of self is built on the opposition of unity and diversity... [But] unity and diversity interpenetrate each other freely. Unity is diversity. This is the principle of interbeing and interpenetration of the Avatamsaka Sutra" (2010, p. 63). Once we have let go of this particular unity/diversity binary, Thich Nhat Hanh describes the effect as being like a train breaking free of its tracks, able to fly freely in space: "The universe is a dynamic fabric of interdependent events in which none is the fundamental entity. What we call particles are only mutual relationships among the particles themselves" (2010, p. 65).

Interbeing is thus not one entity linked to another entity. The boundaries of one and another are not as easily able to be distinguished as language and its modes of categorisation would have us think. Thich Nhat Hanh (2010) compares the interdependence of beings with one another to the cells of the body interdependent with all that is around them. The cells of the body have their own knowledge. The heart knows how to beat without the individual paying attention to it, just as the lungs know how to breathe, and cells know how to repair themselves according to the part of the body they find themselves in. Each small particle has its own knowledge of life without the conscious attention of the individual ego or "knower"; and each particle, each

cell, is interdependent on every other cell, every other particle. Each particle is of itself empty. Just so, the individual self only exists in relation to others.

Bergson, so influential in deleuzian thought, explored a similar idea when he wrote:

...who can say where individuality begins and ends, whether the living being is one or many, whether it is the cells that associate themselves into the organism or the organism which dissociates itself into cells? In vain we force the living into this or that one of our molds. All the molds crack. They are too narrow, above all too rigid, for what we try to put into them. ... when experience has finally shown us how life goes to work to obtain a certain result, we find its way of working is just that of which we should never have thought. (Bergson, 1998, p. x).

## 7. Experiencing for oneself III

My own moment of experiencing and experimenting with these thoughts came while I was swimming in the hotel pool in Bangkok on my way to Sweden. In that in-between space, between one place in my life and another, I became intensely aware, through reading Thich Nhat Hanh's writing, and the practice of mindful breathing, of my own interconnectedness – of the molecular intra-activity of the cells of my body, and of my body with what surrounded it:

*A swimming meditation*

*Each heart cell knows how to be itself  
simply itself  
interconnected*

*Each cell of lung brain muscle  
knows itself interconnected  
gliding through water*

*this universe my body  
swimming through water and sky  
Breathing in out*

*In out gliding  
this myriad universe  
my body.*

*A lying in the sun meditation*

*Burning globe of light  
 flashing vast and hot so far away  
 warming my skin my heart*

*Gentle breath in out  
 small pricks on my upper lip  
 wet skin drying*

*Childhood memory of salt water on skin  
 sun glowing red through shut eyelids  
 and prickle of skin drying*

*Tears spring from my eyes  
 salt water gushing  
 a gulf of sadness*

*Gentle breath in and out  
 in and out  
 the bud of a smile*

*For the remembered child  
 present in the prickling of lip  
 this sun my heart*

*The spider's web at dawn: the interconnectedness of being continued*

The interconnectedness or intra-activity of interbeing is expressed in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, as “a vast network of gems or crystals, like a spider’s web at dawn, in which each gem reflects all the others. This net of gems is the Dharmadatu, the universe, the realm of innumerable dharmas or ‘thing-events’.” (Watts, 1957, p. 70). Chinese commentators divided the Dharmadatu into Four Dharma Realms: “the unique, individual ‘thing-events’ of which the universe is composed”; “the underlying multiplicity of things”; “emptiness or void, and form, are not incompatible”; and “each ‘thing-event’ involves every other [and is] self-determinative, self-generating, spontaneous” (Watts, 1957, p. 71).

Deleuze elaborated a similar set of ideas when he reconfigured the process of subjectification. Rather than subjection being about the formation of the separate individual, it is the formation of a mode of intensity, a line of force, which opens up the possibility of going beyond existing knowledge: “Subjectification isn’t even anything to do with a ‘person’: it’s a specific or

collective individuation relating to an event (a time of day, a river, a wind, a life ...). It's a mode of intensity, not a personal subject" (Deleuze, 1995, pp. 98-9). Seeing the subject as interconnected is intricately linked with the deconstruction of the matter/force binary. It is not separate entities that shape interbeing, but interacting intensities. The individual identity is part of the fixity to be resisted. "[A]ll writing that responds to Deleuze's principles, must then work against the fixing of a world in set concepts or a fixed real world. This is why he speaks of a writing in tune with 'impersonal individuations' and 'pre-individual singularities'." (Williams, 2003, pp. 30-1). Deleuze seeks out an immersion in the present moment, in time and in space, that often eludes us in the press of normative expectations, and of habitually repeated thoughts and practices. Haecceity is a moment of molecular intensity, when percepts, affects and concepts connect the individuating self in relation to a milieu of space and time. This is closely linked to the buddhist concept of *suchness* accomplished through meditation or *Za-zen*:

To see the world as it is concretely, undivided by categories and abstractions, one must certainly look at it with a mind which is not thinking – which is to say, forming symbols – about it. *Za-zen* is ... a quiet awareness, without comment, of whatever happens to be here and now. This awareness is attended by the most vivid sensation of 'nondifference' between oneself and the external world, between the mind and its contents – the various sounds, sights, and other impressions of the surrounding environment. (Watts, 1957, p. 156).

Such awareness makes no distinction between nature and culture; man is not opposite to, or arranged in some hierarchy superior to, naturally occurring forms of being. Trust in the inborn mind involves going beyond the nature/culture binary. The experience of, and experiment with, trust in one's own emptiness brings one to a direct knowledge of one's own nature, of the spring that feeds into the well. One is not distinct from nature and the other, but intricately intra-acting with the intensities, the flows, that make life possible, both one's own and the other's.

In comprehending this inter-relatedness of ourselves with all being, or interbeing, we can begin to greet the other, both human and not-human, organic and inorganic, not in categorical or hierarchical terms, but with love. Thich Nhat Hanh expands on this idea through much of his writing. For example: "*Dharmakaya* literally means the 'body' (*kaya*) of the Buddha's teachings (*Dharma*), the way of understanding and love. It is also the ground of being manifested as mountains, rivers, stars, moon, and all species" (2006, p. 9). He writes of the Lotus Sutra: "The one who 'looks at all beings with eyes of compassion' is ... the *bodhisattva* of compassion. In the sutra, this line reads: 'Eyes of loving kindness look on all living beings.' ... The source of love is our fully awakened mind" (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2006, pp. 7-8).

## 8. Experiencing for oneself IV

In pondering these ideas I found myself sitting gazing at a Japanese woodcut print, Hiroshige's *Plum Orchard in Kameido*, that hangs in my study. I had brought this print home from a trip to Chicago, not long after a young colleague, with whom I had worked closely, suggested I should retire and so make room for young blood such as hers. The print had been my answer to myself – the ageing tree, still blossoming, represented my own still strongly flowing life-force. Hanging it in my study was, for me, a statement to myself. But the concept of interbeing takes me further than representation or statement; the print has its own active being in relation to my life. I found myself becoming aware of its life force:

*Your grey trunk and branches  
are gnarled and twisted  
your bark is rough  
and pitted with age*

*fragile white blossoms  
spring from thin shoots –  
the sap rises through you  
and the ground is deeply blue*

## 9. Becoming a place where thought might happen: the line of ascent

In reading the print “with love” (Deleuze, 1995, pp. 8-9), in coming to conceive of oneself as a flow among other flows something shifts. One becomes the arrow's flight, without intention, or, in deleuzian terms, a place where thought might happen. As Williams explains:

When you stand, daydreaming, looking out over your favourite land- or cityscape, or staring into another's eyes or flesh, or allowing your body to become an automaton through repeated work and exercise, allowing thought and sensation to drift through you, you are closer to Deleuze's idea of the individual than when you squeeze your head in your hand, reflect and consciously toil with a problem. An individual is not a self-conscious “I”, it is a location where thoughts may take place ... This view of thought as independent of consciousness breaks down the difference between humans and other things. For Deleuze, the evolution of a line of animals or plants or rock formation can also be said to express ideas. (Williams, 2003, p. 6).

That individual, with head squeezed between hands, consciously toiling with a problem is the individual who, in Thich Nhat Hanh's words, is limited to concepts that function as "cinder blocks from the memory warehouse." With these one can only build hovels though they are celebrated as if they are palaces. "Understanding does not arise as a result of [such] thinking. It is a result of the long process of conscious awareness. Sometimes understanding can be translated into thoughts, but often thoughts are too rigid and limited to carry much understanding. Sometimes a look or a laugh expresses understanding much better than words or thoughts" (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2010, p. 45).

Deleuze used *thought* to refer to the spontaneous breaking loose, leaving *consciousness* behind. Thich Nhat Hanh uses *conscious awareness* for breaking loose, leaving (mindless) thought behind. Both are struggling with the limitations of language to express the state of breaking free of the repeated citations that hold everything the same. Both look to poetry and art – to the flash in language that burns up the cinder blocks and produces something new.

In *Creative Evolution* Bergson writes of two opposing movements or lines of force, ascent and descent. Descent is the unthinking repetition of the already known. It keeps everything the same. Ascent is associated with ripening and enduring, and with the line of flight toward the as-yet-unknown. Each of Thich Nhat Hanh's meditations or gathas can be seen as a line of ascent, as a method of metamorphosis through which one gains access to the unfolding of experience, becoming unfixed, letting go of being the same as before. "As the sun sends its rays through the window, you are not just yourself. You are also the beautiful view through the window. You are all that exists ..." (2006, p. 11). The gathas also provide a set of repeated practices, words learned by heart that provide the safe space that Deleuze points out is necessary, given the potential danger of lines of flight into the not-yet-known. This holding together of the line of ascent into the unknown and the line of descent that is a repetition of the already known is necessary, as both are integral to the universe, as Bergson points out:

It is true that in the universe itself two opposite movements are to be distinguished ..., 'descent' and 'ascent'. The first only unwinds a roll ready prepared. In principle, it might be accomplished almost instantaneously, like releasing a spring. But the ascending movement, which corresponds to an inner work of ripening or creating, *endures* essentially, and imposes its rhythm on the first, which is inseparable from it. (Bergson, 1998, p. 11).

Ascent then depends on descent. Descent is therefore always present, it is both necessary *and* a movement that takes continual effort to work against. Deleuze is interested in opening up lines of ascent that work against the ap-

parent inevitability of globalization or globe-making. That line of flight is spontaneous.

Thich Nhat Hanh talks in a very similar way. The point is not to force the change but to be open to the spontaneous moment of being, when the ripe fruit bursts open, or the water from an unknown source flows into the well. There is neither a “real” self who escapes, or who can decide to escape, but a movement that escapes the over-coded striations of the moral order, the line of descent, that dictates who and what we should be (Davies, 2010).

Whereas in Bergson’s terms, life is “mobility itself”, life also has this counter-tendency toward stasis – to resist the new. But the desire for stasis, for predictability and control, is a desire based on an illusion of stability:

... particular manifestations of life accept this mobility reluctantly, and constantly lag behind. [Life] is always going ahead; they want to mark time. ...[They] counterfeit immobility so well that we treat each of them as a *thing* rather than as a *progress*, forgetting that the very permanence of their form is only the outline of a movement ... the living being is above all a thoroughfare, and ... the essence of life is in the movement by which life is transmitted. (Bergson, 1998, p. 128).

Life then, in Bergson’s view, and in Deleuze’s, holds both movements of ascent and descent. Neoliberal government creates constant lines of descent, holding everything the same in a constant and stifling press toward individualism and competition in pursuit of productivity. This is despite the fact that capitalism depends for its life-blood on the creative bursting forth of the new and the not-yet-thought. In this sense capitalism is schizophrenic (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). It seeks to control its (untrustworthy) labour force in order to extract maximum productivity from it, while at the same depending on those over-controlled individuals to produce new and creative ideas. At its best capitalism is constantly in flux, breaking things open to bring about new ideas. It depends on the state to be regulative in order to channel that creative energy toward the flow of capital. Under current neoliberal forms of government control stifles creativity. The lines of ascent and descent have achieved a contradictory, destructive blindness to the value of each to the other (Davies & Gannon, 2009).

## **10. (In)conclusion**

In zen Buddhism: “... the essential standpoint of Zen refuses to be organized, or to be made the exclusive possession of any institution” (Watts, 1957, p. xii). Likewise, delezian thought seeks to open up “flows beneath the social codes that seek to channel and block them” (Deleuze, 1995, p. 19).



Reading deleuzian and zen buddhist philosophy/practice in tandem, this paper creates a productive interface where each serves to illuminate the other, and where each makes a significant contribution to thinking beyond the apparent inevitabilities of neoliberalism's globe-making. The world is made, and re-made through the experience of and experiment with being, in which one opens oneself, one listens to, one trusts the not-yet-known in oneself and the other, and the flow in between. As each of the cells of the body make up the universe of oneself, so each being, human, animal, earth, makes up the world, and is integral to the world's unfolding life. In earlier analyses of the impact of neoliberalism on academic work (Davies & Bansel, 2005) I showed how our lives and bodies are permeable to neoliberalism. I am interested in the ways in which the apparently intractable nature of neoliberal time(s) might be permeated by different ways of thinking and being – an ontology and epistemology that opens up the possibility of resistance. Drawing on the overlapping ideas and practices of deleuzian and buddhist thought and practice I have explored ways “to bring new facets and forces, new intensities and relations into being” (Rose, 1999, p. 31).

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