

**dissolving the consciousness
in *satori*: merleau-ponty
and the phenomenology of
suzuki's embodied buddhism**

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INTRODUCTION

Ontological dualism describes a range of philosophical frameworks that broadly conceive the mind as separate from the world in a discontinuous and absolute way, and its influence in philosophy is commonly attributed to René Descartes' effort to establish the "objectivity" from the viewpoint of the rational thinker, the *cogito*.¹ Descartes proposes that the mind does not occupy space or have physical dimensions, and is therefore independent of physical forces. By contrast, the world of objects and bodies is composed of physically extended matter and subject to physical forces.² Descartes' ontological dualism has been challenged by many traditions, including Spinozist parallelism, Bergsonian vitalism, and the group of philosophers associated with phenomenology, including Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Focusing on the work of Merleau-Ponty and his concept of *écart* (as well as *flesh*), this article argues that the philosophical challenge to ontological dualism within European philosophy dovetails with the philosophical traditions identified with Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki's Zen Buddhism. Suzuki, who practiced Zen under the tutelage of Soyen Shaku during his university studies,³ translated many texts from Japanese into English, and introduced much of this literature to Europe and the United States. Suzuki has faced criticism for his essentialist approach,⁴ but his physiological perspective nevertheless

provides a framework of embodied Buddhism that correlates strongly with Merleau-Ponty's ontology. In particular, Suzuki's account of the experience of *satori* can be related to the Merleau-Ponty's own conception of consciousness, which allows for post-dualistic conceptions of thought and the body.

To develop this argument, this article will focus on the role of the body in mediating the separation of self from the world in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. This requires some understanding of intersections between phenomenology and Gestalt psychology, and their shared conceptual relation to the Hindu concept of *Māyā*. Having discussed the body as a point of significance to phenomenology, being both the very constitution of our existence in the world and also the method through which we discover and encounter meaning, the article will turn to a discussion on pre-personal and personal consciousness, focusing on Merleau-Ponty's view of embodied knowledge, and the 'mental self' as derived from what he calls *praktignosis*. Finally, these concepts will be shown to have deep similarities to particular contemporary articulations of Zen thought, including the engagement with a lived/living world (a common perceptual framework of "self-division"). The article will here offer a phenomenological reading of *satori*, primarily as conceived through the interpretations offered by Suzuki.

It is important to emphasise from the outset that Merleau-Ponty is not articulating a "Western Buddhism", in the manner that Arthur Schopenhauer had attempted (I will discuss this below). Rather, I want to suggest that certain themes made explicit in Suzuki's conceptions of experience can help us better understand more implicit or obscure aspects of Merleau-Ponty's thought, and *visa versa*.

THE BODY IN MERLEAU-PONTY'S PHILOSOPHY

The Body is the site of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, retaining a central significance throughout the entirety of his work. The Body is not an object and instead "is the condition and context through which I am able to have a relation to objects".⁵ Merleau-Ponty envisages the body as an event in motion, rather than an inert mass of biological matter to be animated by a conscious mind. Merleau-Ponty differentiates the body from external objects because it is entirely unable to be observed externally; rather, it is the totality of the constitution of experiences, and "what prevents its ever being an object, ever being 'completely constituted,' is that it is that by which there are objects".⁶ The problem of considering the body as an object separate from the subject is the error inherent to the Cartesian

tradition in Western philosophy—that is, the fallacy of securing an impersonal perspective that can maintain its distance from that which is observed. For his part, Merleau-Ponty challenges ontological dualism by presenting consciousness as the relation between self and world, rather than as a position elevated above the physical world.

Within this conception of the Body and consciousness, the mind is not a non-spatial object “in” or the body, but rather becomes the condition of mediation between the body and the world it inhabits. We arrive here at a theme central to Merleau-Ponty’s *The Visible and the Invisible* (*Le Visible et l’invisible, suivi de notes de travail*, first published in 1964): the motion of *écart*,⁷ which is used to describe the movement from “the visible to the the invisible”, or from the seen world to the unseen mind. The self tries to both *know* itself and *be* itself, insofar as it attempts to possess and know its own embodied consciousness. In this way, the self becomes both an agent of knowledge and an object of its own knowledge, creating an internal division that cannot be overcome. This division or “moving away” from self becomes the foundation of our temporal existence.⁸ This phenomenological view of the human subject’s relationship to the world posits knowledge as a relation to an experienced body schema, rather than as a synthesis of successive and varied impressions (as suggested by the Kantian tradition). A distinction must therefore be made between *being in* space and time and the dynamic process of *inhabiting* space and time. As David Morris explains “in virtue of my habits, I do not live and move in relation to things as grasped by objective science within geometrical space; I live and move in a space of practical things correlative to my anticipations”.⁹ Merleau-Ponty’s description of this experiential framework is derived from clinical applications of Gestalt psychology, to which I now turn.

GESTALT: THE ‘MĀYĀ’ OF MODERN PSYCHOLOGY

The construction of an external environment through a body schema is an emergent, tertiary property of consciousness. This property is a focal point of Gestalt psychology, which provides an important touchstone for Merleau-Ponty’s contributions to phenomenology.¹⁰ The fundamental basis of Gestalt is that the mind perceives the world first as a whole, and fills in details later, rather than the world appearing as the synthesis of its parts. For example, one cannot learn a musical instrument by learning each note and time signature from a book, and then proceeding to combine these elements individually into a musical composition. Like reaching for an object, “the movement of my hand towards it, the straightening

of the upper part of the body, the tautening of the leg muscles are enveloped in each other. I desire a certain result and the relevant tasks are spontaneously distributed amongst the appropriate segments”.¹¹ To play the piano, the individual tasks of playing the keys and controlling the pedals, are not dictated by the mind, but performed spontaneously by the synthesised body. Indeed, overthinking the application of any of these elements individually is likely to disrupt the continuation of the others. One has to, so to speak, *be* their hands and feet, rather than a conscious subject attempting to command them. In this way, the specialised function of analytical consciousness is distinct from the holistic perceptions of bodily consciousness. This implies that the internal distinctions of perspective and the ability to discern between objects in the world is an emergent property of mind.

The origins of the theme of holism in Gestalt theory can be found, at least in part, within many already existing traditions outside Europe. The Vedantic concept of *Māyā*, like the psychological descriptions of Gestalt theory, “signifies the illusory character of the finite world”.¹² The philosophical concept of *Māyā*, meaning illusion or magic, has been associated with many of the philosophical and religious traditions of the Indian sub-continent, but in the context of this discussion its most important development was into the realm of Buddhist psychology. For example, in the Tibetan Mahāyāna system of Śāntara (c. eighth century), or “union with Brahman” (meaning the ultimate cosmological reality), entails “the dissolution of appearances – an end to the realm of *māyā* along with the world of plurality and difference.”¹³ This begins to build a picture wherein the ordinary awareness of differentiated reality is an illusory apprehension of an holistic reality. This Tibetan tradition later contributed to Zen Buddhist conceptions of the ultimate reality of emptiness, and the manner in which the mind relies on this emptiness in the construction of the awareness of form.¹⁴ These factors of Zen philosophy will be discussed further below in relation to Suzuki’s interpretation of Rinzai Zen, but for now, the involvement of *Māyā* in German philosophy will briefly be considered.

Māyā has been consciously engaged with by many philosophers who were influential in the development of the modern “psychological sciences”. As one important point of connection, Douglas Berger has extensively investigated the influence of the Vedantic concept of *Māyā* on the thought of 19th century German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer.¹⁵ Broadly, Schopenhauer conceived of *Māyā* as an illusory perception of the world: “epistemologically, *māyā* entails an erroneous perception of things and a fallacious assessment of their nature; axiologically, it is the

inauthentic valuation of world and other; metaphysically, it is the mere phenomenal appearance of a noumenal reality”.¹⁶ The concept is later mentioned in Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy* (1872), in which the author claims that when the symbolic faculties of mind are roused to their most extreme intensity, the fundamental Oneness of existence demands the “destruction of the Veil of Māyā”.¹⁷ Both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche give an interpretation of the Indian concept of Māyā which sees it as an illusory veil separating the self from the world,¹⁸ deceiving the subject as to the nature of their perceptions and obscuring the intrinsic, primal oneness of the world as flesh. In his posthumously published text *Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense*, Nietzsche also alludes to the holistic perspective which would come to characterise Gestalt thought. Nietzsche purports that “every idea originates through squatting the unequal. As certainly as no one leaf is exactly similar to any other, so certain is it that the idea “leaf” has been formed through an arbitrary omission of these individual differences, through a forgetting of the of the differentiating qualities¹⁹”. This is then posed as a process of dissimulation, the concealment of truth from oneself in service of the preservation of the ego, a self-preserving resistance to the synthesis of all phenomena. Nietzsche’s description of this affective-functional relation to the experience of difference is adversarial in posture, yet conceptually similar to the mode of being which Merleau-Ponty terms *écart*, or separation: “This conception derives from *Gestalt* as transcendence, that is, as the horizon of differences, as it is a pregnancy of meaning established in the constitutively unfinished movement of its expression. In the same way, silence marks a discontinuity in continuity that makes reflection possible.”²⁰ This describes the core ambiguity of the experience of being, that of being both a whole and a multitude, a drive to consider oneself as a complete entity, juxtaposed against the lived experience of dynamism in an evolving world. The Vedantic and Buddhist antecedents of European phenomenology are still emerging in detail, and deserve more discussion than can be included here.²¹ For now, this discussion has sought to establish a similar non-duality, between whole and discriminated particulars, in the theory of mind across these divided epistemic and cultural contexts.

THE PERSONAL AND THE PRE-PERSONAL

Throughout his phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty identifies a core ambiguity in the human experience: the tension between pre-personal and the personal aspects of consciousness. As indicated above, the pre-personal explicitly pulls the body as *flesh* into the realm of philosophy, and this fleshly body is required to adopt a

certain state in order to be receptive to experiences in the world. Laurence Hass points to the common reflex test, in which a doctor taps a patient's knee in order to elicit a physical reaction. In an active state, with the muscles tensed, the reaction cannot be invoked, so in order to become receptive to the test, the patient must adopt a mode of being that is *object-like*.²² In this example, the mode of objects is not merely stasis, but rather inertness. If the leg were to remain tensed – that is, actively immobile – the reflex test would be ineffective (this is also why the phenomenon will not occur if the patient is, say, walking). This object-like capacity of the body gives rise to Merleau-Ponty's concept of the *flesh*, or the experience of reciprocal receptivity between the body and the world:

[Flesh] is primarily a perceptual structure: the encroachment and overlapping of phenomena within perception lead us to the assertion that flesh is a new word for being. As a product of perceptual experience, the origin of flesh is within the perceiving body: sentient bodies *become* flesh through auto-affection, and non-sentient bodies *become* flesh through their being perceived.²³

This account of the flesh is in stark contrast to Jean-Paul Sartre's dualist account of the human subject, wherein the immanent world is said to flow towards or away from the Self, which in turn comes to be oriented toward an Other.²⁴ This characterisation of intersubjective human relations can be contrasted with Merleau-Ponty's account of a more touch-focused relationship to the external world. Rather than focusing on Self-Other relations, the concept of *flesh* in the work of Merleau-Ponty is best understood in terms of horizons, or the partially revealed aspects of self and world that present as open to perceptual experience: "in reality, beings themselves are present to us as a horizon, that is, there is only so much of a being that is present to us at any given time, and there will always be aspects of the being that are just beyond the horizon of its presence".²⁵ The horizon as a geographical feature is a meeting point between the earth and sky. One does not experience the world as a consciousness peering out from the domain of the body, but as the unfolding of the world unto the sky, making the self an aspect of the field in which it participates. The use of tools can therefore be seen as an attempt to broaden one's horizons. The subject learns to understand the affect on the tool as an affect on the self, in essence expanding the horizon of self to include the tool in the experience of the body rather than as acted on by the body: "[habit] is always composed of motoric and perceptual elements in an inextricable mixture".²⁶ For example, through the use of a fork or of chopsticks, one engages a novel inter-

action between the utensil as self and the world. Similarly, the piano becomes an active part of the pianist's body-perception. Further examples are given in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*:

When the typist performs the necessary movements on the typewriter, these movements are governed by an intention, but the intention does not posit the keys as objective locations. It is literally true that the subject who learns to type incorporates the key bank into his [*sic*] bodily space.²⁷

The habit-body is an extension of the body schema and an entwining of both the physical and perceptual modes of the self. It is through this expanding of the experiential horizon that consciousness arises: "Our bodily experience of movement... provides us with a way of access to the world and the object, with a *praktognosia* which has to be recognised as original, and perhaps as primary. My body has its world, or understands its world, without having to make use of any 'symbolic' or 'objectifying function.'"²⁸ It therefore follows that perceptual synthesis "is not purely cognitive; it is a moving activity"²⁹ Abstract knowledge can then be conceived of as a kind of static "external world schema" that is imposed over direct experience. This conceptual overlay can take the form of language, political ideology, or mathematical interpretation, but ultimately this abstracted knowledge is secured in relation to bodily knowledge, for it and through it. Hyong-Hyo Kim observes that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy "never leaves phenomenology of body. As a result, the liberation of the ultimate level of truth is not part of it, even though he gets through the logic of dependent co-arising".³⁰

Using the works of Merleau-Ponty, this article has so far constructed a view of the emergence of consciousness from the experience of the body. In the following section, I examine Zen, a philosophy-religion derived from intersections of Buddhist and Taoist teachings, which provides accounts of the mind-body relationship that resemble Merleau-Ponty in important ways. In particular, this analysis will continue with the discussion of Zen *satori* in terms of Merleau-Ponty's conception of the personal and pre-personal.

ZEN, ENLIGHTENMENT AND THE DOCTRINE OF NO-MIND

"Buddhism" describes a long enduring and highly varied set of intellectual and cultural traditions, often tied to the social and political contexts of its emergence and popularisation. My focus here will be the work of Suzuki, who in turn draws

on traditions associated with the “Golden Age of Zen” in China,³¹ and on subsequent themes in the Japanese Zen schools of thought (specifically the Rinzai tradition). Suzuki’s own philosophical and historical studies of Zen practice and development, including the influential essay collection *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (1927), slightly predated the most influential publications of Merleau-Ponty. Suzuki’s Rinzai reading has been chosen due to the emphasis this School has placed on direct experiences, the radical nature of the transition into enlightenment and its conception of “no-mind” which will be presented as a dissolution of the personal/pre-personal. The development of Zen as a confluence of Buddhist and Taoist practices and ideas also allows for a conception of transcendence in a non-dualist mode, which opens onto a key concern of the phenomenological tradition.³² There are further social and political elements to the development of Zen, including those aspects influenced by contact with Confucian thought, that remain beyond the scope of the present article. For the purposes of my discussion, the embodied aspects of the Buddhist and Taoist components of Zen philosophies will be the focus.

Zen Buddhism arrived in Japan by way of the Golden Age of Ch’an Buddhism in China,³³ as one of the Buddhist schools of Mahāyāna.³⁴ The Indian Buddhist Monk, Bodhidharma, is credited with introducing this specific method of practice during the Liang Dynasty.³⁵ Despite broad differences between Mahāyāna, Theravada and the earlier Indian Buddhist traditions, these disparate schools are fundamentally engaged with the central unifying concept of Enlightenment.³⁶ Enlightenment is described by Suzuki in the broader Zen tradition as a kind of ‘waking’ to the reality of one’s existence, or perhaps more accurately, to the reality of one’s non-existence. Enlightenment seeks to contest the egoistic sense of self as the foundational source of morality, suffering and evil. This soteriological distinction traces back to traditional Indian accounts of the Buddha’s life, where upon attaining Enlightenment (*prajñā*), Gautama Buddha intuited that “the existence of self is an illusion, and there is no wrong in this world, no vice, no evil, except what flows from the assertion of self”.³⁷ Suffering is a unique mode of consciousness which arises from a fundamental misunderstanding, wherein the mirage of a Self blinds us to the undifferentiated continuity of the living-world. If an organism acts destructively towards its environment, in truth it is acting destructively towards itself as an integrated part of that environment. Understood in this way, Enlightenment is not a doctrine to be known, nor a faith to be held, but rather, “involves the reintegration of subject and object until they are once more completely infolded, until object is lost in subject and the appearance of any object

has ended.”³⁸ The varied schools of Buddhism seek to grapple with this psychological and metaphysical paradox, each offering a methodology designed to lead the Self to its own dissolution. Traditionally, these pathways are constructed through scholarly dedication or meditative practices, often a mixture of the two. For his part, Suzuki argued that Zen stands at a radical breaking point with traditional Buddhism.³⁹ He argues that Zen is the outcome of particular Chinese interpretation of the doctrine of Enlightenment, and that Zen is a pragmatically oriented awakening to the living-world in contradistinction to a static knowledge of it.⁴⁰ In an essay derived from his own time as a Zen Buddhist Monk in Japan, ‘Practical Methods of Zen Instruction’ (1927), Suzuki notes that the often posed question of ‘What is Zen?’ is difficult to answer, because it involves a kind of qualia that defies scholarly instruction.⁴¹ The teachings of Zen masters, at least in Suzuki’s reading of the Rinzai tradition, do not involve instructing one how to live by the virtue of Zen, but rather demonstrate the absurdity of attempting to do otherwise: “Their methods are naturally very uncommon, unconventional, illogical and consequently incomprehensible to the uninitiated.”⁴² This rejection of canonical, static truth can be traced to the first patriarch and “spiritual father” of Zen, Bodhidharma, who introduced the notion that simply learning doctrines through the emulation of masters is a self defeating process. While not the author of any texts on Buddhism, Bodhidharma’s disciples documented and collected accounts of his thoughts on the nature of enlightenment (*prajñā*). One of these texts, translated as the “Bloodstream Sermon” (1987), proceeds in the following way:

To find a buddha, you have to see your nature. Whoever sees his nature is a buddha. If you don’t see your nature, invoking buddhas, reciting sutras, making offerings and keeping precepts are all useless. Invoking buddhas results in good karma, reciting sutras results in a good memory; keeping precepts results in a good rebirth, and making offerings results in future blessings—but no buddha.⁴³

It is not enough, therefore, to study the texts of Buddhist sages, or engage exclusively in the practice of *zazen* (座禪), translated from Japanese as “seated meditation”, without the corresponding break with dualistic methods of thinking.

Meditation with the aim of a totally “silenced” mind was widespread throughout the early history of Buddhism in China.⁴⁴ Some subsequent representations of meditative practice, especially in its wide popularization outside Buddhist contexts, emphasise the notion of a silenced mind as an unblemished mirror which

reflects the world without prejudice. However, Suzuki argues for caution around such characterisations of meditative traditions, lest they reproduce the very dualisms that Buddhist practices seeks to alleviate: silence versus noise, clean versus blemished. In Suzuki's interpretation, Hui-neng, the sixth and final Patriarch of the "Golden Age of Zen", likened this separation of the uncleaned and the cleaned mind to any other dualistic structure:

They have evidently forgotten that the self-nature is not a somewhat whose Body can be reflected on our consciousness in the way that a mountain can be seen reflected on the smooth surface of a lake. There is no such Body in self-nature, for the Body itself is the Use; besides the Use there is no Body.⁴⁵

Hui-Neng's contention is that the constitution of Body is its Use, and that the Use is the incarnation of Body. A non-dual approach that can be understood in terms of Merleau-Ponty's assertion that the self cannot be apprehended as object, as it is the onto-epistemic precondition by which there are objects. Suzuki concludes that this onto-epistemology is central to Hui-Neng's metaphysics:

Self Nature, Otherwise expressed, is self-knowledge; it is not mere being but knowing. We can say that because of knowing itself, it is; knowing is being, and being is knowing. This is the meaning of the statement made by Hui-neng that: 'In original Nature itself there is Prajñā-knowledge, and because of this self-knowledge. Nature reflects itself in itself, which is self-illumination not to be expressed in words.'⁴⁶

In Suzuki's reading of Hui-neng, the mind is a tool for "discrimination", with the blunt mind discriminating crudely, while the sharper mind dissects in more subtler nuances: "By 'discrimination,' therefore, is meant analytical knowledge, the relative and discursive understanding which we use in our everyday worldly intercourse and also in our highly speculative thinking."⁴⁷ This discrimination, the separation of the world into forms, is the foundation of the illusion of ego, and the ego seeks to concretise these discreet forms in a desperate defence of its own existence as a discreet being. As noted above, Enlightenment is broadly considered an awakening to the reality of one's existence, in order to overcome the illusions of the discriminating mind. Bret Davis argues that this does not exclude plurality, as Enlightenment is still an experience within the midst of the living world: "The true *samādhi* of oneness does not exclude an engagement with the plurality of

things in the world, but entails a non-duality of equality and differentiation and a stillness in the midst of movement.”⁴⁸ However, this does not mean that practices of discrimination can simply be overcome by pointing to the fictitious nature of dualisms. To remove one half of a dualism is to create two dualisms: “if we cut a bar magnet in halves, so as to take off its north pole, we find only that each half has now north and south poles as before.”⁴⁹ Similarly, to cleanse the mind from impurity to purity via meditative states, conceived in opposition to non-meditative states, is merely to expand the dualisms in operation. To articulate a non-duality in language, a system of division and classification, is to make of it a dualism, a Zen and not-Zen.⁵⁰ In the spirit of avoiding this duality, Hui-neng propounded a doctrine of sudden awakening, *satori*, where the self-nature is discovered ontologically, rather than rationally or epistemologically. The final section of this article will examine the relationship between *satori* in Suzuki and *flesh* in Merleau-Ponty.

SATORI: DISSOLUTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS INTO FLESH

In the Rinzai tradition, *satori* can be broadly understood as the experience or understanding of *kenshō*, the realisation of non-distinction between self and world, the fundamental integration of organism with environment, transcendence with immanence, body with mind.⁵¹ This is demonstrated in an encounter between the sixth patriarch, Hui-Neng, and a monk from a rival school, Zhicheng, wherein Hui-Neng is reported to have “Only when there is not a single *dharmā*⁵² that can be apprehended can one posit the myriad *dharmas*. To understand this doctrine is called ‘the body of the Buddha’. It is also called *bodhi* and nirvana, and emancipated perceptual understanding”.⁵³ From this point of view, Hui-Neng is critical of what he sees as quietistic meditation, which makes the error of trying to apprehend purity as if from a distance, to cling to it as a thing. In his commentary, Suzuki argues less for purity than for “the opening of *satori*, or at acquiring a new point of view as regards life and the universe.” In phenomenological terms, we could understand this a heightened awareness of the world’s affectivity to and through oneself.⁵⁴

The relationship between the outcome of the moment of *satori*, and Merleau-Ponty’s conception of *flesh* is striking. Recall the above descriptions of *flesh* as an affectivity, where “sentient bodies *become* flesh through auto-affection, and non-sentient bodies *become* flesh through their being perceived.”⁵⁵ This reorientation from an intellectual to an affective relationship between subject and world, is how Suzuki engages with the purpose of the apparently paradoxical Koans which are

posed to Zen disciples, to demonstrate the lack of ability with which logical and analytical language can approach the fundamental reciprocity and inter-relativity of the living world. This can be seen in the famous koan from the Platform Sutra, in which Hui-Neng encounters two monks arguing over whether a flag is moving or it is the wind that is moving. Hui-Neng responds that it is neither, but rather the mind that moves.⁵⁶

Further, for Suzuki's affective interpretation of Zen, the use of the koan should be read in the context of "Ch'an meditation [which] is not aimed at cutting off the empirical world, as some Indian yoga systems may be. On the contrary, it seeks to engage deeply in experience by minimizing mental analysis and evaluation."⁵⁷ This is to say, that the koan is an instrument of Buddhist practice, and is thus informed by the concrete factors of dharma. As in Hui-Neng's above commentary, there cannot be only one true meaning of a koan, as there cannot be only one true dharma. Koans then, are a performative method of affective engagement between the cognitive subject and the lifeworld as it appears to that subject. Stephen Heine's analysis reveals that within the koan, "the encounter might oppose two kinds of religiosity, one communing with spiritual realities in a *mysterium tremendum* and the other dismissing transcendent symbols and advocating the here and now; but the distinction between the two tended to be overcome by their interplay in the dialogue as a whole."⁵⁸ Suzuki's assertion that the koan is fundamentally incomprehensible has been interpreted as a continuation of the political traditions of iconoclasm that abounded in the foundation of Zen practice in China,⁵⁹ however in terms of this discussion of the embodiment of Zen and the phenomenology of practice, it is fair to view Suzuki's claim of incomprehensibility in terms of the affective dispersion of an analytic 'distance' from the world as experienced in the 'sudden awakening' associated with the Rinzai school. It is incomprehensible only in the manner of qualia, that is, untranslatable into linguistic terms.

The Koan illuminate the limitations of reasoning that begins with empty or incoherent abstractions. In doing so, the Koan orient the mind towards the generative space of non-being, a dissolution of the *personal* ("being") into the *pre-personal* ("becoming"). Once the self is recognised as pre-conditioned by the affective and reciprocal 'opening up' of body and world into each other, the emptiness of non-being takes form in a dialectic with the living world and the transience of perpetual becoming is no longer a source of existential anxiety. Rather, non-being is generative emptiness that "enables the forms of reality to be such as they really are, to be in their 'suchness'."⁶⁰ This "emancipated perceptual understanding"

is pre-conscious being, separate from attachments of conscious discrimination.⁶¹ The primary ground of being is the dialectic of perception, the motion of the visible to the invisible through which the world of appearances is constituted. It is against the perception of appearances as permanent, particularly the appearance of the ego, that *satori* orients one's experience, to borrow from Suzuki. The great emptiness of *écart* is experienced as the relief which allows subjectivity to emerge in contrast to the appearance of perception. Hui-Neng explains that "one's enlightenment (one's Way, *tao*) must flow freely. How could it be stagnated? When the mind does not reside in the *dharmas*, one's enlightenment flows freely."⁶² The normative aims of Buddhist practice, the cessation of suffering, or the cultivation of spiritual being, are thus predicated on this moment of radical re-orientation to the pre-personal body, and the bodily habituation of the intimate being-world dialectic. This separates the aim of Buddhism from Western interpretations of spiritual practice, disregarding the search for one's "true self" or higher being and rather aiming to re-invest one's being in the primary ground of self knowledge. This puts Merleau-Ponty's rejection of classical psychology in the same ontological space as the experience of *satori*:

The body catches itself from the outside engaged in a cognate process; it tries to touch itself while being touched, and initiates 'a kind of reflection' which is sufficient to distinguish it from objects, of which I can indeed say that they 'touch' my body, but only when it is inert, and therefore without ever catching it unawares in its exploratory function.⁶³

This is the revelation, the emancipation from "thingness", the realisation of one's "suchness" as part of an inter-affective whole, that is achieved by *satori*: "Satori may be defined as an intuitive looking into the nature of things in contradistinction to the analytical or logical understanding of it".⁶⁴ Through this revelation, one comes to inhabit the living world, rather than to apprehend it, and the discriminating, analytic consciousness is reintegrated into the functionality of the body-affectivity, the pre-personal *praktignosia*.

CONCLUSION: INTERCULTURAL PHENOMENOLOGIES OF THE BODY

This article has sought to elaborate on similarities on perceptual modalities in both Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology and Suzuki's interpretation of Ch'an and Zen Buddhism. While few direct dialogues exist between these two disciplines, some historical links have been identified in the work of the German precursors

to existential philosophy. In constructing this link, central concepts from Merleau-Ponty have been juxtaposed with Suzuki's reading of traditions taught by the Zen patriarch, Hui-Neng. The striking similarities include a perceptual-substance as the framework of being, *flesh* in the work of Merleau-Ponty and the living world of *Prājnā* in the Zen canon. Further, both systems of thought emphasise a direct engagement with the world that involves inhabiting the environment, rather than encountering it as an externality.

Clearly, Merleau-Ponty and Suzuki engaged with different fields of thought, and were situated within thoroughly distinct cultural and linguistic contexts. Some minor cross-cultural points have been raised, including the impact of Buddhism on German phenomenology and psychology, and the common apprehension of a 'psychological intermediary' in the perspectives of Gestalt psychology and the Indian philosophical concept of *Māya*. However, these scholarly links have been elaborated elsewhere, and this study has aimed particularly at the role of the body in the respective ontologies of Merleau-Ponty and Suzuki. This comparative phenomenology of the body allows intellectual bridges to be built, as well as allowing for a reflective examination of the silences inherent to our own accounts of experience. This study in particular has illuminated the knowledge of the body and its critical importance to the outcome of philosophical inquiry. As one's consciousness ceases the effort of distinguishing itself from experience, to become the seeing, rather than that which sees, a fundamental reconciliation with the world is made, on the level of primal, pre-personal *praktignosis*. Whether in response to the spiritual afflictions of attachment and suffering, or in the nihilistic field of wartime Europe, the fundamental afflictions of philosophy and psychology that plague the conscious subject are best resolved on the level of body-world affectivity.

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NOTES

1. René Descartes. *Meditations and Other Metaphysical Writings*. Camberwell: Penguin Classics, 2000, 25-27.
2. Descartes, 148-150.
3. Esben Andreasen, *Popular Buddhism in Japan: Shin Buddhist Religion & Culture*. Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1998, 56.
4. Hu Shih, "Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism in China Its History and Method." *Philosophy East and West* 3 (1953, 3-24).
5. Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*. Sydney, Australia: Allen and Unwin, 1994, 86.
6. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965, 92.
7. 'Gap,' 'difference' or 'disparity' in French.
8. 'It is in better understanding perception (and hence imperception)— i.e.: understand perception as differentiation, forgetting as undifferentiation. The fact that one no longer sees the memory = not a destruction of a psychic material which would be the sensible, but its disarticulation which makes there be no longer a separation (écart), a relief. This is the night of forgetting. Understand that the "to be conscious" = to have a figure on a ground, and that it disappears by disarticulation – the figureground distinction introduces a third term between the "subject" and the "object." It is that separation (écart) first of all that is the perceptual meaning. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible followed by working notes*. USA: Northwestern University Press, 1968, 197.
9. D. Morris, 'Body' in *Merleau-Ponty: Key concepts*. UK: Acumen Publishing, 2008, 118.
10. A. Harrison, "At Arm's Length': The Interaction Between Phenomenology and Gestalt Psychology" in *Phenomenology and Science*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 2.
11. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 149.
12. S. Radhakrishnan, "The Vedanta Philosophy and the Doctrine of Māyā." *International Journal of Ethics* 24 (1914, 431-51).
13. Douglas Duckworth, "Tibetan Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna" in *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy*. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, 106.
14. B. Davis, "Forms of Emptiness in Zen" in *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy*. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.
15. D Berger, "*The Veil of Māyā*": *Schopenhauer's System and Early Indian Thought*. Binghamton: Global Academic Publishing, 2004.
16. Berger, 63.
17. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*. London: Penguin Classics, 1993, 21.
18. There were additional comments about Indian philosophies in the Schopenhaurian scholarship with which Nietzsche would have been familiar, including the works of Hartmann, Dühring, Mainländer, and Bahnsen. For insightful commentary on Nietzsche's encounters with texts on Indian thought, and the relative lack of exposure to Chinese or Japanese Buddhism, see Thomas H. Brobjer, "Nietzsche's Reading About Eastern Philosophy" in *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 28 (2004, 3-35).
19. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Truth and Falsity in an Extra-Moral Sense*. New York: Institute of General Semantics, 1992, 62-63.
20. Maria Carmen López Sáenz, "An Approach to Comparative Phenomenology: Nishida's Place of Nothingness and Merleau-Ponty's Negativity." *Philosophy East and West* 68, no. 2 (2018, 508).

21. Of particular interest is the research of Stephan Atzert, who has extensively studied the relationships between Buddhist thought, Schopenhauer and Freud.
22. L. Hass, *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy*. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2008, 80-81.
23. Emphasis in original. Bannon's paper gives several interpretations of Merleau-Ponty's conception of *flesh* in the context of environmental philosophy: his study goes on to criticise *flesh* as a perceptual phenomenon and endorses a Heideggerian ethic based in 'wildness' as a better understanding of the relationship between *flesh* and nature. B. Bannon, 'Flesh and Nature: Understanding Merleau-Ponty's relational ontology' in *Research in Phenomenology* 41 (2008, 341).
24. J-P Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. Abingdon: Routledge Classics, 2003, 278.
25. Bannon, 340.
26. E. Casey, "Habitual Body and Memory in Merleau-Ponty" in *Man and World*. Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1984, 285.
27. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 145.
28. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 140-141.
29. Morris, 116.
30. Hyong-Hyo Kim, "Merleau-Pontean "Flesh" and Its Buddhist Interpretation" in *Merleau-Ponty and Buddhism*. USA: Lexington Books, 2009, 43.
31. John C. H. Wu, *The Golden Age of Zen*, Teipi: United Publishing Center, 1975.
32. See also Jay Goulding, "Merleau-Ponty and Asian Philosophy" in *Merleau-Ponty and Buddhism*. USA: Lexington Books, 2009, 243.
33. Ch'an is the Chinese pronunciation of the common character for Zen (禪).
34. Mahāyāna: A Pāli word translating roughly to 'The Great Wheel' [Emmanuel, Steven, M. 'Introduction' in *A companion to Buddhist Philosophy*. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, 2.] which denotes the forms of Buddhism which spread through eastern and northern Asia, in contrast to the 'Southern Buddhist' school of Theravāda, which translates to 'The Doctrine of the Elders'. [Andrew Skilton, 'Theravāda' in *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy*. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, 72.]
35. D.T Suzuki, "History of Zen Buddhism from Bodhidharma to Hui-Nêng (Yeno)" in *Essays in Zen Buddhism*. London: Souvenir Press, 1927, 176.
36. Sanskrit: प्रज्ञा (*prajñā*). Japanese: 見性 (*kenshō*), 悟り (*satori*). Mandarin: 開悟 (*Kai Wu*).
37. P. Carus, *The Gospel of Buddha*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1994, 41.
38. T. McEvilley, *The Shape of Ancient Thought: Comparative studies in Greek and Indian philosophies*. New York: Allworth Press, 2002, 575.
39. Suzuki, "History of Zen Buddhism", 163-164.
40. Suzuki, "History of Zen Buddhism", 163-164.
41. D.T. Suzuki, "Practical Methods of Zen Instruction" in *Essays in Zen Buddhism*. London: Souvenir Press, 1927, 267.
42. Suzuki, "Practical Methods of Zen Instruction", 271.
43. R. Pine, *The Zen Teaching of Bodhidharma*. New York: North Point Press, 1987, 11-13.
44. Davis, 199-200.
45. D. T. Suzuki, *The Zen Doctrine of No-mind*. Maine: Weiser Books, 1972, 43.
46. Suzuki, *The Zen Doctrine of No-mind*, 40.
47. Suzuki, *The Zen Doctrine of No-mind*, 51.
48. Davis, 202.
49. A. Watts, *Tao: The Watercourse Way*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1975, 95.
50. Ronald Green, "East Asian Buddhism" in *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy*. Hoboken: Wiley-

Blackwell, 2013, 124.

51. Green, 123.

52. Sanskrit (धर्म). In Buddhism, *dharma* refers to the concrete factors of existence: “not so much an ethical concept as one of cosmological theory, *dharma* bears some relationship to the Greek *logos*, meaning the principle or law governing the universe”. *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd rev. ed., s.v. “Dharma.”

53. J. McRae [trans], *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*. California: Numata Centre for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2000, 93-94.

54. Suzuki, “On Satori - The revelation of a new truth in Zen Buddhism” in *Essays in Zen Buddhism*. London: Souvenir Press, 1927, 237.

55. Bannon, 341, emphasis in original.

56. McRae, 38.

57. Green, 123.

58. John C. Maraldo, “Liberating the Koan” in *Journal of Chinese Religions* 31 (2003), 171.

59. Maraldo, 173.

60. Davis, 190.

61. J. Kockelmans, “Merleau-Ponty on Sexuality” in *Journal of Existentialism* 6 (1965, 13).

62. McRae, 57.

63. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 93

64. Suzuki, “On Satori,” 230.