

Art Mind, Buddha Mind: An enquiry into the relationship between Contemporary Art
Practices and Buddhist Practices



Holly Foskett Barnes
ART330 Contemporary Fine Art Research Writings (single)

BA (Hons) Contemporary Fine Art
2012

University College Falmouth
Incorporating Dartington College of Arts

Special thanks to Rob Gawthrop for his continued support over the course of my three-year degree. Thanks also to my family and friends for their encouragement and support throughout this research writings.

Contents

Pg. 1 Table of Illustrations

Pg. 2 Illustrations

Pg. 6 Synopsis

Pg. 7 Introduction

Pg. 9 Chapter 1, *Art as PRACTICE*

Pg. 12 Chapter 2, *Art as PROCESS*

Pg. 15 Chapter 3, *Art as LIFE*

Pg. 20 Conclusion

Pg. 21 Glossary

Pg. 22 Appendix

Pg. 23 Word Count

Pg. 24 Bibliography

Table of Illustrations

Figure 1. *At The Waterfall* (2003) Marina Abramovic

http://0101.nccdn.net/1_5/38e/23a/0d1/115049256018024.jpg [Accessed 04/2012]

Figure 2. *The House with the Ocean View* (2002) Marina Abramovic

http://www.moma.org/images/dynamic_content/exhibition_page/42650.jpg [Accessed on 04/2012]

Figure 3. *Fountain* (1913) Marcel Duchamp

http://media.tumblr.com/tumblr_lh3nsjGg6Q1qz7ycd.jpg [Accessed on 04/2012]

Figure 4. And Cover Image, *To Add One Meter to an Anonymous Mountain* (1995) Zhang Huan

<http://www.indyish.com/wpcontent/uploads/2008/07/huantoadd1metertoanunknownmountain.JPG> [Accessed on 04/2012]

Figure 5. *The Artist is Present* (2010) Marina Abramovic

<http://www.zimbio.com/pictures/upoNbvTpFo9/MoMA+Celebrates+Marina+Abramovic+Artist+Present/XXFXwm8GUpD/Marina+Abramovic> [Accessed on 04/2012]

Figure 6. *One Year Performance* (1980-81) Tehching Hsieh

<http://artistresearcher.files.wordpress.com/2010/09/biennial-17-sep-pt1-194.jpg> and [Accessed on 04/2012]

Figure 7. *One Year Performance* (1985-86) Tehching Hsieh

http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-6PI01QWatCI/TVa1jcqdwUI/AAAAAABxg/EMqvOgYFTwQ/s1600/NO.5_2_Statement.jpg [Accessed on 04/2012]

Figure 8. *White Paintings* (1951) Robert Rauschenberg

http://www.sfmoma.org/images/artwork/large/98.308.A-C_01_d02.jpg [Accessed on 04/2012]

Figure 9. *Dust Breeding* (1920) Marcel Duchamp

http://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/data/13030/ft/ft3w1005ft/figures/ft3w1005ft_00027.jpg [Accessed on 04/2012]

Figure 10. *Bicycle Wheel* (1913) Marcel Duchamp

http://www.marcelduchamp.net/images/bicycle_wheel.jpg [Accessed on 04/2012]

Illustrations



Figure 1. *At The Waterfall* (2003) Marina Abramovic



Figure 2. *The House with the Ocean View* (2002)



Figure 3. *Fountain* (1913) Marcel Duchamp



Figure 4. *To Add One Meter to an Anonymous Mountain* (1995) Zhang Huan



Figure 5. *The Artist is Present* (2010) Marina Abramovic

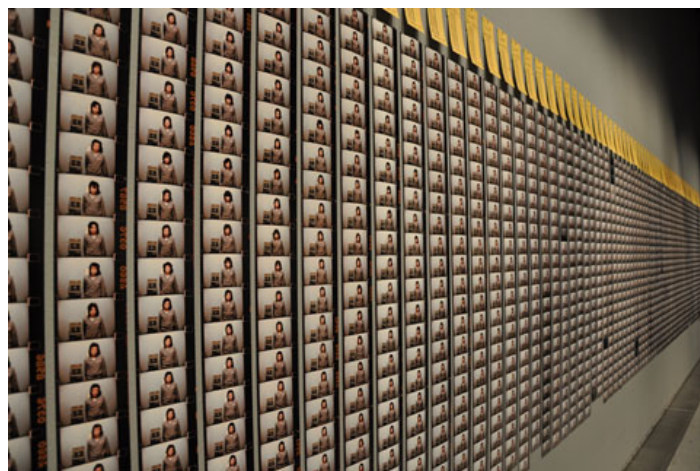


Figure 6. *One Year Performance* (1980-81) Tehching Hsieh

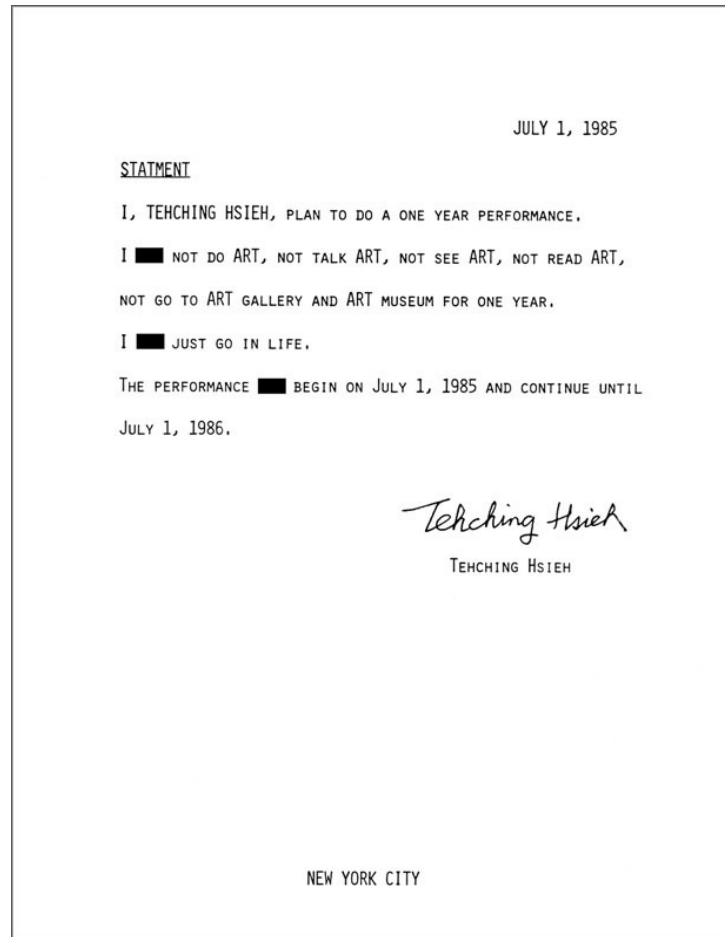


Figure 7. *One Year Performance* (1985-86) Tehching Hsieh

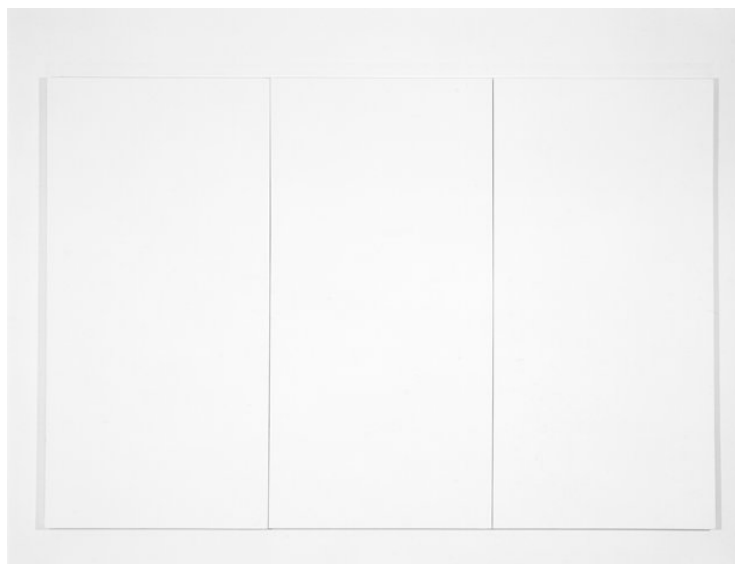


Figure 8. *White Paintings* (1951) Robert Rauschenberg



Figure 9. *Dust Breeding* (1920) Marcel Duchamp



Figure 10. *Bicycle Wheel* (1913) Marcel Duchamp

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Synopsis

Since the appearance of Buddhism in the West, during the mid-nineteenth century, cultural threads have been explored by the arts. Over the 20th century in particular, through the progressive relationship of art and theory, Buddhist philosophy has been recognised as one applicable to that of thinking about art and it is on this symbiosis of methodologies that this paper is founded.

Introduction

My own understanding of Buddhism was stimulated through my artistic practice, as I traveled to China and close to Tibet in 2011 to observe and gain knowledge of Buddhism in its cultural environment. These observations were the catalyst for me to consider the relationship between Buddhist practices and contemporary art practices, in light of their shared approach to philosophy. This is supported by extensive academic research and reading of Asian literature, which will elucidate these connections throughout the paper. Within this study, I have endeavored to sustain a balance of Western and Far Eastern influences, to compose a sense of interconnectivity within this body of work.

This application of Buddhist methodology to art practices is supported by the ethics of the American art based consortium '*Awake: Art, Buddhism and the Dimensions of Consciousness*'. The group of 50 arts practioners, directed by art historian Jacquelynn Baas and curator Mary Jane Jacob, produced two publications, *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art* and *Smile of the Buddha: Eastern Philosophy and Western Art*, both of which have been a grounding source of reference, as an articulation of the relevance of Buddhism in current contemporary culture.

Buddha (Sanskrit *Budh*) means '*the awakened one*' or '*the enlightened one*', the derivation of which inspired the name of the consortium and illuminates the core intention of the group: to "... elucidate the common ground between the creative mind, the perceiving mind, and the meditative mind." (Baas and Jacob: p9). The consortium draws on parallel explorations with Buddhism "... not as a prescriptive religious doctrine, but as a perspective that has achieved a state of synthesis with some important elements of art practice" (Baas and Jacob: p11). This distinction is essential in the context of this paper, as is the definition of Buddhism, as interpreted by my own understanding of it (see 'Buddhism' in glossary).

A further significant influence on the paper is Marcel Duchamp. His acute, yet somewhat cryptic, relationship with Asian and Buddhist philosophy remains a constant thread of interest, maintaining equilibrium between Buddhist and conceptual art thinking.

The paper is written with three interconnective chapters, exploring *Art as Practice*, *Process* and *Life*. Chapter 1, *Art as Process*, looks at the corresponding practices of Buddhism and contemporary art, as illustrated by the work of Marina Abramovic. It also introduces my understanding of Sanskrit language, as a constant source of reference throughout the paper (see glossary for Sanskrit terms). This is followed in chapter 2, *Art as Process*, noting the significance of the conceptual process in artmaking, supported by Marcel Duchamp, and also by Ch'ing Yuan and Zhang Huan. Chapter 3, *Art as Life*, brings together the relationship of *practice* and *process* to explore the notion of interconnectivity. The chapter looks at the non-dualist approach to artmaking, as shown through the lifeworks of Tehching Hsieh, including further examples from Robert Rauschenberg, John Cage and Marcel Duchamp.

The intention of the paper is to offer a parallel approach to consider art and Buddhist philosophy, along with the intentions of the *Awake* group, as a suggestion towards what I consider the effect of art should ultimately have upon the viewer: a sense of enlightenment, or awakening, in allowing them to see the world in a different light.

Art as PRACTICE

As Stephen Bachelar suggests, “Buddhism appeals to people today because it places less emphasis on belief and more on practice” (Bachelar: p141), an idea that translates directly to that of contemporary *art* practices. This focus on practice offers an image of a process that is continual and transmutable, one that illuminates the *patha* (the path in Sanskrit) rather than the destination.

The widely used term ‘practice’ puts forward a sense of activity and movement in respect of a developing process, in Jacob’s words; “Practice is about trying, developing, cultivating, improving... to practice, to perfect” (Jacob: p166). Activity suggests ritualistically living out certain actions or thoughts in order to create. As noted by Jacquelynn Baas, this idea is supported by Marcel Duchamp’s interest in the Sanskrit word for art: “The word ‘art’ interests me very much. If it comes from Sanskrit, as I’ve heard, it signifies ‘making’” (Duchamp, cited by Baas, Buddha Mind: p19). Through my understanding of the Sanskrit language, it is possible Duchamp is referring to the Sanskrit for art *kalā*, in relation to *kara*, which has various interpretations surrounding making and doing via actions of the hands. Nevertheless, as much as creating is about doing, it is about thinking. A further variation of *kalā* is *kalpanā*, which suggests creativity through conceptualizing and imagination, perhaps a derivation that also interested Duchamp’s conceptual thinking, as well as an interesting contribution to the idea of Eastern philosophy as contemporary creative thought.

In conjunction with the idea of practice and ‘making’, there is an element of repetition, in order “to practice, to perfect” (Jacob: p166), which has a fundamental relationship within Buddhist practices, such as meditation. Mark Epstein states that, from a psychological point of view, “Buddhism offers entry into the mind as a vehicle for reaffirming the positivity of the creative act” (Epstein: p35). In extension of this association between practice and meditation comes the *mantra*, used to center spiritual consciousness, a focus that can also be applied to the intentions of art making; whilst meditative practice instills a sense of esoteric introspection, the artist outwardly communicates their exoteric mantra. Mantra draws from the idea of meaning that exists outside of the words, which can be equally applied to conceptual art thinking.

Marina Abramovic, as an artist of the *Awake* consortium, contributes to the recognition of the potential of advocating Buddhist thought as a creative methodology and art as practice. Her connection with Buddhism begins with first hand experience, primarily concerned with the relationship between mind and body in relation to performance work (Abramovic, 2003: p188).

Abramovic's collaborative work with Ulay (Frank Uwe Laysiepen) in the 1980s began in the environmental setting of the desert, from the Sahara to the Great Australian Desert, where they encountered nothing and everything: "This landscape was so minimal that we really faced ourselves, sitting there for long periods of time in the heat, just mindless actually, facing all that was present" (Abramovic, 2003: p187). She continues to express the developing process both physically and mentally "... physically, the body stops moving. And then the mind starts moving, and you really start seeing. We both had some knowledge of the mind and we knew that was missing in our performances" (Abramovic, 2003: p187). Whilst the desert landscape implies a sense of emptiness through the image of infinite space it also exists as infinite possibility, which, like Rotondi asserts, is a powerful receptive and artistic state of mind: "I think of this point or zone of creation as zero, which is the twin of infinity" (Rotondi: p222).

Abramovic's experiential confrontation of consciousness evokes a meditative quality stimulated through *practice*. By refusing interaction with one's physical surroundings, the mind becomes both meditatively empty, yet active. The Sanskrit for 'emptiness' (*syunyata*) derives from *shvi*, meaning 'swelling' (Epstein: p34); "There is a fullness to Buddhist emptiness, a sense of spaciousness that both holds and suffuses the stuff of the world" (Epstein: p34). Epstein states that a "third space of intermediate experience" is offered – similar to Duchamp's proposition of art as the 'gap', which will be considered later in Chapter 2 – the 'space' in which the artist is open to create. The empty mind refers to the meditative state of open subconsciousness and mindfulness in the creative journey: to be empty is to be open to being filled. As Mary Jane Jacob proposes, "The 'empty' mind is the creative mind" (Jacob: p164), as illustrated through Abramovic's meditative practice in the desert.

Whilst Abramovic continues to work with meditative technique she expresses the importance of developing a physical realized work, in the institutional context of the art

world, as a result of the application of *practice*: “But at the same time, the art piece has to be independent, not an illustration of Buddhist ideas... You have to see what you are and in which context you are working – as an artist or as a Buddhist practitioner?” (Abramovic, 2003: p194). Here Abramovic articulates an important distinction that generates an analogous concern: just as the artwork has to be defined as separate from Buddhism, we must make a distinction between the intention of the gallery from that of the monastery.

Abramovic’s piece *At The Waterfall* (2003) (Figure 1) is a mosaic of digital portraits of 120 Buddhist monks from all varying sects, chanting varying *mantras*. The fusion of these prayers creates an effect of a waterfall, which washes over the audience as they sit in 12 seats in front of the projected piece. The looped work creates an eternal repetition and passing of energy from person to person, ending in that of the viewer, or rather participant. This work is pivotal in considering Abramovic’s attitude towards art not as “an illustration of Buddhist ideas” (Abramovic, 2003: p194). She appears to use these cultural references as a vehicle to conceptualize universal thought and experience, directly signifying Buddhist culture but through the gallery space allows the viewer to consider its experiential quality in a different light.

Abramovic is interested by this transferal of human energy, as demonstrated by her durational performance works, such as *The House with the Ocean View* (2002), (Figure 2) looking at immediate interaction with the audience through non-verbal communication. This appears as an extension of her earlier collaborative work *Nightsea Crossing-Conjunction* (1983) and observations in the desert, in which an Aboriginal Australian and Tibetan Monk joined Ulay and herself at a table for four hours over the course of four days to simply sit opposite one another. These more recent works look at the idea of energy transferal in a less egocentric way, as a way of externally exerting her findings and communicating these both spiritually and conceptually. Abramovic states, “If you are an artist, you have responsibility to share. You have to unconditionally give... That’s how Buddhism works in my own life. I give art unconditionally so that it might have its own function in the life of everybody” (Abramovic, 2003: p194). In a sense, this interaction with the audience, through the intimacy of live durational performance, creates a lasting preservation of her practice, as the meditative process is instilled in the participant.

Art as PROCESS

“Practice becomes the rituals of life... And sustaining a practice – not just surviving in the art business, but living in the space of art – means to know that the process is of greater value than the product” (Jacob: p166).

In light of this quotation, process is inseparable from practice. The process is the creative journey that takes place between the emergence of a concept or idea and a realized work: it is birthed from space and, like Abramovic’s desert, this space is not ‘empty’, it is infinity. Jacob’s suggestion that “the process is of greater value than the product” (Jacob: p166) is an attitude reflective of Buddha’s own teachings; *nirvana* (the ultimate destination, as equivalent to our ‘product’) is not directly expressed by Buddha himself, who instead concentrates on teaching how to live a compassionate life “... the focus should be on mindful progression on the path, not on the destination” (Kinnard: p45). The journey of life signifies the process of art making, in that the destination or product is conditioned, whereas the journey is liberated thus should be celebrated. We can similarly substitute the term ‘destination’ for ‘discovery’: discovery of oneself and of the human condition, both of the artist and the viewer.

Marcel Duchamp, as a pioneer of 20th century contemporary art thinking contributes widely to this idea. Although certain connections between Dadaism and Asian influences have been recognised – exemplified by Tristan Tzara’s notion of Dada as “the return to a quasi-Buddhist religion of indifference” (Hompes: p11) – Duchamp’s relationship with Buddhism is more abstract. Buddhism’s emergence over the 20th century suggests that Duchamp would have been exposed to Buddhist thought, Tosi Lee argues that his mentor Frantisek Kupka may have been directly responsible for this insight, as a practitioner of meditation and Buddhism himself (Lee: p127). As earlier stated, this relationship is perhaps also manifest in his interest in the Sanskrit definition of art.

In conjunction with Lee’s observation of Duchamp’s relationship with Buddhism, is Duchamp’s idea of the ‘gap’ in art: “What art is in reality is this missing link, not the links which exist. It’s not what you see that is art, art is the gap” (Duchamp, 1957 cited in Schwarz, 1969: p197). In this, Duchamp directly asserts that meaning exists outside of the art object – much like the *mantra* – and more exclusively, “in the mind of the viewer” (Baas: p20).

Duchamp refers to the “missing link” between the artist’s creative journey “from intention to realization” (Duchamp cited in Baas: p20) and proposes that this “gap is filled by the participation of the spectator” (Baas: p20). In fact, this is the point at which the spectator *becomes* the participator. In Duchamp’s own work, he applies this through shifting the “attention from artistic product to process, and shifted responsibility for that process to the perceiver” (Baas: 20). This shift is illustrated and iconicized by Duchamp’s *Fountain* (1917) (Figure 3) – or rather as Louise Norton calls it, “Buddha of the Bathroom” (Norton, 1917) – which illuminates the intrinsic relationship of the artist and spectator within ‘the creative act’ (the very title of his essay in 1957). Duchamp’s ‘readymade’ urinal epitomizes the spectator’s opportunity to consider the “meticulous monogamy” of “objects and ideas” (Norton, 1917). In response to those critical of this conceptualisation, Norton replied, “... that the Fountain was not made by a plumber but by the force of an imagination” (Norton, 1917), an imagination that exists not only in the artist but, equally, in the audience.

Through this, Duchamp states that process does not cease at the production of a realized work. Like Abramovic’s transferal of energy, this provides art with an ongoing, living process, as initiated by the spectator’s conceptual and active engagement in the work. This also refers to the earlier connection in the practice of contemporary arts as an active means, in conjunction with Duchamp’s attitude towards art as actively ‘making’. Perhaps with this knowledge, Duchamp’s own understanding of *kalpanā* is exposed, as mentioned earlier, as a Sanskrit interpretation of imaginative and conceptual artmaking.

The conceptual bridges connecting the linear series *artist*, *process*, *artwork* and *audience*, lends itself to *Awake*’s vision of ‘mindfulness’, as an equally integral component of Buddhist philosophy. The idea of mindfulness is encouraged through *experiencing* art. The following is an illustration of this process, from the parallel perspectives of Zen master Ch’ing Yuan and contemporary Chinese artist Zhang Huan.

“Before I had studied Zen for thirty years, I saw mountains as mountains and waters as waters. When I arrived at a more intimate knowledge, I came to the point where I saw that mountains are not mountains, and waters are not waters. But now that I have got the very substance I am at rest. For it is just that I see mountains once again as mountains, and waters once again as waters.” (Ch’ing Yuan cited in Danto, ... : p58)

Ch'ing Yuan's experience reflects the process of acknowledging the Zen notion that there is no metaphysical 'gap' between "illusion and reality" (Danto: p58). Danto compares this mindfulness within the context of art, "Nothing need distinguish artworks from mere real things. It is not that they are not distinct. It is that the difference between them need not be visible" (Danto: p58). Like Duchamp and his *Fountain* (1917) asserts, this realisation is made via the invisible realm of the perceiving mind.

Zhang Huan is a contemporary artist, born in Beijing, and continues to work in New York. The Chinese authorities prohibition of some of his more anarchistic performances instigated him to move to New York (Huan, 2010: p102). As his practice has developed, Huan steps away from his performative "feats of endurance" (Jacob, 2003: p241) and works more sculpturally, directly informed by his practice of Buddhism.

Zhang Huan's piece *To Add One Meter to an Anonymous Mountain* (1995) (Figure 4) is a documented work, transcending the height of a mountain by use of a mountain of physical bodies, one meter tall. Huan recalled, "When we left, the mountain was still the same mountain, without any change" (Huan, 2010: p103). In his creative process, Huan acknowledges the transience of the work within the permanence of landscape. Like Ch'ing Yuan, this enlightenment is a way of seeing – both of art and of the world – that cannot be observed "in perceptual terms" (Danto: p58) but through the perceiving mind.

Both Yuan and Huan have parallel experiences of participating in a journey to reach understanding. This reinstates that it is the significance of the process that exposes mindful discovery: "We shall not cease from exploration / And the end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time" (T.S. Eliot, cited in Baas: p25). Eliot's articulation, as influenced by Buddhist thought, echoes this, in that the destination metaphorically represents discovery. Yuan and Huan 'see' the mountains (and waters, in Yuan's case) after a cyclical journey of discovery. This cyclical imagery leads into the final chapter, where process takes the form of the *mandala*, and through Duchamp's philosophy on bridging the 'gap' – ultimately of art and life – a sense of interconnectivity is achieved.

“In the non-dual universe, every frame is just a performance born of its moment. Hence art’s amazing capacity to leap out of every boundary created for it” (Larson: p73).

Together with the relationship of *practice* and *process* is the relationship of the practitioner and life. In relation to the Buddhist practitioner, this is clearly defined as an interrelationship, given the “Zen idea that the distinction between religion and life is to be overcome” (Danto: p56). It was John Cage who expressed this philosophy in terms of the “art-life paradigm” (Baas: p20), in saying “... he wasn’t interested in destroying the barrier between art and life, or even blurring it. He was interested mainly in observing that there is no barrier between the two” (Larson: p62). Cage’s phenomenological approach to art will later be explored, but here signifies an important movement in postmodernist thinking. The observation of ‘no barriers’ – or least the deconstruction of barriers – acts as liberation against dualism. “‘No barrier’ returns me to the reality of the moment” (Larson: p62) and, as Larson suggests, it is in this moment that art is birthed, and more explicitly performance art.

In March 2010, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) hosted Marina Abramovic’s retrospective: *The Artist is Present*. Abramovic featured in a work, of the same title, (Figure 5) in which she sat in the atrium for the duration of the museum opening hours, as an invitation for viewers to sit for a time of their choosing opposite her embodied presence. This work appears a reduction of previous experiments into the transferal of energy and non-verbal communication, such as *The House with the Ocean View* (2002), complimentary to Duchamp’s premise of the vital participation of the spectator. *The Artist is Present* is Abramovic’s longest piece of endurance, lasting 3 months, and an instrumental contribution in considering ‘art’ as ‘life’. Abramovic’s retrospective was part of MoMA’s series of exhibitions exploring performance art, the first of which, in 2009, was Taiwanese artist Tehching Hsieh.

Tehching Hsieh’s *One Year Performances* (between the late 1970s and early 1980s), or ‘lifeworks’, are a series of unparalleled endurance, conveying the “enactment of art and life as simultaneous processes” (Heathfield, 2008: p11) in Hsieh’s devotion to practice. In correspondence with Hsieh, I asked directly of his view of art and life and if he

considered them separate, to which he replied, “The time of doing my work is art time, the time between each piece is life time. Art time and life time are separated, but the life in art time cannot be separated from art” (Hsieh, 2012: Appendix A). This reinstates the interdependent relationship of art and life but through an articulated third element: the medium of *time*.

Hsieh’s series of *One Year Performances* demand a vast commitment to time, as a framework, “As I use long duration in my work, time is the most important factor” (Hsieh, 2012: Appendix A). In applying a timeframe, he comments “... that this choice of a year was one that attuned the work to the earth’s orbit of the sun, reminding us of the reliance of the cultural measure on a cosmic order” (Heathfield, 2009: p18). This acts also as a reminder of human powerlessness against the fundamental powers of nature and (Buddhist) awareness of temporality.

In Hsieh’s *One Year Performance* (1980-81) (Figure 6) he stated, “I shall punch a Time Clock in my studio every hour on the hour for one year” (Hsieh, 1980: p102). The concept of temporality is emphasized in the documented series of photographs of the work, as Hsieh freezes time photographically to record “the reality of the moment” (Larson: p62). In this, a relentless repetition is instilled, the only visible change being the hands of the clock and the length of his hair. These changes appear to document *life* as much as they do time. Yet the impact of the photographs stimulates the viewer to reflect that Hsieh’s ‘life’ existed outside of each frame, and this is where the mind wanders, in the space between every photograph. This is also a reflection of Duchamp’s idea of meaning existing outside of the art object, in the ‘gap’ between each frame, as well as the external meaning of the *mantra*, further suggested in Hsieh’s use of repetition. The Sanskrit origin of the word *mantra* offers a connection with conceptual thought, as it derives from *man-* meaning ‘to think’ (Jayarava: unpaginated), just as Hsieh offers us the same opportunity.

“Thinking-as-art” (Heathfield, 2009: p55) continues to be expressed in Hsieh’s work and of the written statements that accompany each of his *One Year Performances*, “... as in many of those of Conceptual Art, [it] is a kind of Duchampian speech act: a declaration of non-art matter (a life) as art” (Heathfield, 2008: p14). Heathfield continues to elucidate how this thinking came about in Hsieh’s practice:

“... his idea of creating durational works arose from a desire to ‘make the process of thinking about art’ an artwork... In this respect Hsieh’s work reflects an interest in the destabilization of art’s objecthood through the refiguring of art as the process of ideas” (Heathfield, 2008: p14).

This is paradoxically exemplified in his final *One Year Performance* (1985-86) (Figure 7). In the written statement he announces that he will “not do ART, not talk ART, not see ART, not read ART... I just go in LIFE” (Hsieh, 1985: p296). Hsieh communicates that doing, talking, seeing and reading art *can* be separated from life, however, “The only relation to art not excluded by this rule would be thinking” (Heathfield, 2009: p55). It is in the withholding of the word ‘thinking’ that its meaning is illuminated, thus confirming the power of the negative. This concept is evident in Asian philosophy, as I found during my experience of learning calligraphy in Yunnan, China. Whilst gaining understanding of *cursive script*, the final stage of the calligraphic art, my teacher expressed that the space between each stroke and character is just as present as the visible presence of ink.

Hsieh’s thinking strongly relates to Marcel Duchamp perceiving art via conceptual means. In this light, we return to consider Duchamp’s view “art is the gap” (Duchamp, 1957 cited in Schwarz, 1969: p197), in respect of the interconnective bridging of art and life.

Parallel to Duchamp’s speculation, Robert Rauschenberg remarked, “... that he [Rauschenberg] worked in the gap between art and life.” (Larson: p62). Robert Rauschenberg’s *White Paintings* (1951) (Figure 8) had a highly influential role in the 1950s, in particular as the source of inspiration for John Cage’s *4’33”* (1952) (Cage: unpaginated) in relation to his study of oriental philosophy and interest in “... erasing the difference between music... and the irrepressible racket of life” (Danto: p56). Cage commented on Rauschenberg’s canvases, likening them to “mirrors for air” and “airports for shadow and dust” (Cage, 1953 cited in Danto: p56), reflecting the symbiosis in Rauschenberg’s approach to artmaking. Cage’s image of “dust” is recurring in his own work, perhaps as a metaphor for life’s noise, and in this he refers to a Chinese Zen poem; “The mind is like a mirror. It collects dust. The problem is to remove the dust” (Cage 1958-59, cited in Patterson, 2002: p97).

Cage met Duchamp in 1942 and he also greatly influenced Cage's work (Shultis, 2002: p24). In acknowledging Duchamp's relationship with process and of the perceiving mind, he declared that, "... everything seen – every object, that is, plus the process of looking at it – is a Duchamp... Duchamp collects dust" (Cage, 1969 cited in Larson: p63). It is possible that Cage is referring to Duchamp's collaborative work with May Ray, *Dust Breeding* (1920) (Figure 9), consisting of a photograph of the dust that had collected over 3 or 4 months in a studio, perhaps Cage considered Duchamp to be collecting, or documenting, life. Interestingly, Arturo Schwarz makes a connection with the fall of dust as:

"... An important theme in Chinese Buddhist (Zen) thought: which is not surprising in view of Buddhism's ultimate objective of mastery over time. But Duchamp seems to have perfected the somewhat mystifying disciplines of the Chinese by introducing his own affirmative irony: he does not rub the dust away from the 'Mirror of the mind'... he grows it" (Schwarz, 1969: p134).

Schwartz and Cage's parallel observations, within the same year, illuminate the significance of Duchamp exposing life's very substance: time. *Dust Breeding* brings time to life by making its process physically visible, much like the visible growth of Tehching Hsieh's hair in his durational work. The title, *Dust Breeding*, brings me to recall Mark Epstein's "Understanding of emptiness, or *shunyata*... Buddhism asserts that there is something positive, something joyful, something creative that underlies all experience... Emptiness is best compared to the hollow of a pregnant womb" (Epstein: p34).

Epstein's interpretive view embodies Duchamp's perception of life and art as one. In light of this, we return to the Sanskrit origin of art *kalā*, to explore *kāla*: time. The concept of time, in continuation of looking at *Dust Breeding* and the work of Hsieh and Abramovic, connects my own interpretation to Jacquelynn Baas' reading of Duchamp's interest in the Sanskrit origin the word 'art':

"He was probably referring to the ancient Indo-European root, *ar*, which meant to join or fit. It is the root of the Sanskrit word *ara*, which signifies the spoke or radius of a wheel (among other things). In Buddhism, the wheel is associated with turning the wheel of the Dharma – the liberating truth set in motion by the Buddha" (Baas: p20).

Kay Larson establishes the relationship between *Dharma* and Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel* (1913) (Figure 10), "... liberated from its pedestrian purposes, [it] is now turned on its stem and spins freely in air, precisely like the universal Buddhist symbol of the Dharma"

(Larson: p63). This cyclical image concludes my proposition of his synonymous understanding of art and life; a final spoke to complete the wheel of *kalacakra*, the wheel of time.

“Art is an outlet toward regions which are not ruled by space and time. To live is to believe, that’s my belief” (Duchamp 1956, cited in Tomkins, 1997: p394). The connection of the term “belief” draws together elements of this paper. Duchamp’s relationship with words, exhibited in his witty use of puns, suggests he found text a somewhat conditioning form of language, “Words were suspect, he [Duchamp] felt, because they tended to take on a life of their own” (Tomkins, 1997: p394), as opposed to visual language, “... despite the term ‘visual art’, all art represents invisible things (Coomaraswamy, cited by Viola: p249 Buddha Mind). This is my final reflection, as like the *mantra* and the ethos of the Sanskrit language, meaning exists outside of words, outside of the art object, in the invisible but ever-present realm of mindfulness.

Conclusion

This paper is a contribution toward contemporary art thinking to illuminate the potential in considering philosophical Buddhist practices and philosophy as synonymous with contemporary art practices and thinking, explored through the interrelationships of *practice*, *process* and *life*. This writing further highlights the universality of these philosophies as a beneficial exchange.

In this research process I have been introduced to a new way of thinking, unearthed by theoretical and philosophical research, particularly through the writings of Jacquelynn Baas and Mary Jane Jacobs and the *Awake* collective. These essays have been a grounding source of reference and enlightening points of departure in the process of my enquiry. Through this, I acknowledge an opportunity for further independent study in the context of these current contemporary studies and to enhance and expand upon my developing methodological and philosophical knowledge.

Within this study, it is important to note the cultural connections between Eastern philosophy and Western contemporary art, which I also consider through drawing on my experience of observing Buddhism first hand. I intend to travel to India and Nepal in November 2012, to observe the birthplace of Buddhism and its consequential emergence in the Far East, which will later be supported by revisiting China through the artistic communities I was introduced to in 2011. I anticipate these travels will widely benefit my knowledge and understanding of Buddhism and its cultural significance.

Glossary

Buddhism A philosophy following the teachings of Siddhārtha Gautama Buddha. My primary knowledge stems from Mahayana, in East Asia, and Vajrayana, a branch of Tibetan Buddhism as taught by His Holiness the Dalai Lama XIV. The shared teachings, explored here, offer insight into the mind, knowledge and nature.

Cursive Script The final stage of the Chinese calligraphic art. The order of calligraphic fonts is: *oracle, seal, official, running and cursive script*.

Dharma A liberating law of nature, by Buddha, illuminating universal truth.

Kalā Creation of art.

Kāla Time, eternity and death, as part of the Wheel of Time.

Kalacakra The Wheel of Time, as associated with the Wheel of Life and the Wheel of Law in Tibetan Buddhism.

Kalpanā Making, doing or creating via conceptual or imaginative means.

Kara Making, doing or creating via actions of the hands.

Mandala A cyclical image metaphorical of the whole universe, used for ritual in meditation.

Mantra Chant, word or sound repeated in meditation to center consciousness.

Patha Path, road or way.

Samsāra The cyclical process of birth and rebirth in Buddhist reincarnation.

Sūnyatā Buddhist idea of Emptiness, as a vessel.

Appendix

Appendix. A: Email correspondence and interview with Tehching Hsieh (his assistant Maya Houg writes on his behalf).

Dear Holly Foskett-Barnes,

This is Tehching's assistant Maya Houg here on his behalf, please find his answers regarding your questions as below:

1. Do you consider yourself an artist, practioner or thinker?

TH: I consider myself an artist; my practice and thinking are used to support my art. For me art includes the other two.

2. Do you consider art and life to be separate?

TH: the time of doing my work is art time, the time between each piece is life time. Art time and life time are separated, but the life in art time cannot be separated from art.

3. Does Buddhism inform your art practice?

TH: I don't have religion, but I leave the work open for different approaches.

4. In performance, how do you consider space and time?

TH: As I use long duration in my work, time is the most important factor, space affects because of time.

5. How does the viewer contribute to your work?

TH: the audience is secondary, yet without them my work will not exist.

Good luck to your dissertation.

Best,
Maya

Word Count: 5020

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First published, University College Falmouth incorporating Dartington College of Arts in 2012 by Holly Foscett-Barnes. All Rights Reserved.

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