

CHAPTER 1

Signing In

Like any author of a book who does not write under a Kierkegaardian type of pseudonym and desires credit for his/her work for personal or professional reasons, I have signed in by signing my name on the title page of this book. Of course, at this point this is a book that I intend to write. According to Jacques Derrida's theory of signature, signing is not a conscious or intentional act. It is a continual act because an author is constantly signing his/her name in the text, even after signing one's name to the title page or outside of the text. If one's signature is both inside and outside of the text, the ordinary distinction between the author and a text is difficult to maintain. Moreover, the signature itself both remains and disappears at the same time.¹ If we assume for the sake of argument that Derrida is correct about the impermanent and ambiguous nature of this activity, these features of signature make it difficult to circumscribe the boundaries of a text.

By inscribing a signature into the body of a text, one transforms it into a monument, which makes it a thing: "But in doing so, you also lose the identity, the title of ownership over the text: you let it become a moment or a part of the text, as a thing or a common noun."² Not only is the author divorced from the text, but the written signature suggests the actual nonpresence of the original signer.³ What Derrida is implying is that the process of signature is temporal because it leaves a mark of one's former presence in a past moment now or a present moment that will continue to be a future now or present.

The general nature of signature, or the signature of the signature, is related to the work of writing which designates, describes, and inscribes itself as an act. By signing itself in the text before it ends, the activity of writing gives another the opportunity to read by producing an event that

in effect announces “I am writing” or “this is writing.” Derrida explains this process further: “. . . when the placement in abyss succeeds, and is thereby decomposed and produces an event, it is the other, the thing as other, that signs.”⁴ Derrida seems to suggest that the best that a signer can hope for is to leave some accidental or intentional marks in the text. Derrida might not be aware, however, how similar in spirit his reflections on signature are to Zen Buddhism. In order to grasp this commonality in spirit between Zen Buddhism, Derrida, and some other postmodern thinkers, it is essential to bring them into dialogue with each other. At first, it is not even necessary that they speak to each other because it is only essential for them to stand opposite each other and look into each other’s eyes.

Eye to Eye

From the existential perspective of Jean-Paul Sartre, the phenomenon of the eye forms the basis for the look or gaze. The continual gaze of the other enables me to be what I am, even though the gaze of the other hides his/her eyes from me.⁵ When I look at the other this does not suggest that he/she is presented to me as an object, which would involve the other’s collapse of the other’s being-as-a-look. Before the gaze of the other, I stand guilty, feel naked before the other’s gaze, and experience my alienation. Likewise, I experience guilt when I gaze at the other, “because by the very fact of my own self-assertion I constitute him as an object and as an instrument, and I cause him to experience that same alienation which he must now assume.”⁶ In his book on the French playwright Jean Genet, Sartre argues that it is the gaze of the other that transforms him into a thief when Genet is observed stealing, and the same gaze forces him into assuming the character of a homosexual.⁷ Other French writers have taken Sartre’s insights in a different direction.

The influential psychologist Jacques Lacan disagrees with Sartre about the nature of the gaze, which for the former possesses an inside-out structure and not the character of surprise of Sartre’s conception. Lacan also disagrees with Sartre’s assertions that one does not see the eye when under the gaze of the other, and when I see the eye of the other the gaze disappears, which motivates Lacan to conclude that Sartre did not complete a proper phenomenological analysis. In contrast to Sartre, Lacan states, “It is not true that, when I am under the gaze, when I solicit a gaze,

when I obtain it, I do not see it as a gaze.”⁸ Moreover, the gaze can see itself, although the gaze that one encounters is “not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other.”⁹ Thus the gaze is connected to the presence of others, whose gaze reveals the cause of one’s desire that is identified with the *objet petita*. By examining the nature of the gaze, Lacan wants to demonstrate the intersubjective nature of desire. What happens in the case of peering through the keyhole of a door like the example provided by Sartre in his work or in voyeurism?

In an example like voyeurism, the individual is not present in the sense of seeing, but is present as a pervert. Lacan identifies the object with the gaze itself or the gaze that is the subject, the completely hidden gaze. In contrast to Sartre, Lacan explains, “The gaze is this object lost and suddenly refound in the conflagration of shame, by the introduction of the other.”¹⁰ Lacan exposes here the conflict between the gaze as an object and the actual gaze of the other. Moreover, Lacan testifies to the split between the eye itself and the gaze, its object of desire. With the intention of providing an answer, Lacan raises the following rhetorical question: What is the subject trying to see? And he answers: “What he is trying to see, make no mistake, is the object as absence. What the voyeur is looking for and finds is merely a shadow, a shadow behind the curtain.”¹¹ With the commencement of the gaze, the individual continually attempts to adapt oneself to it, a point of disappearing being. In the final analysis, the gaze is unapprehensible for Lacan within all the possible objects in the sphere of desire.

The postmodern figure Georges Bataille, a novelist, literary critic, philosopher, and religious theorist, conceives of the eye as an erotic entity. The interrelated motifs of human and animal eyes plays a central role in his novel entitled *Story of the Eye*. In the erotic climax of the story, the major female protagonist sits in the stands surrounding a bullfighting rink playing with the gonads of a bull that she inserts into her vagina, an act that distracts the observing bullfighter who is thereby gouged in his own eye by the horn of the charging bull. Bataille erotically connects in this novel the gazing eye with the gonads, anatomical items of the same shape, which can both enable one to see erotic events or blind one, give life or death. Bataille also connects gazing and sexuality with violence in a holy alliance in this work and in other texts.

From a different perspective, Michel Foucault discusses both directly and indirectly in his study of punishment how the gaze objectifies and controls those incarcerated in a penal institution. The best exam-

ple of this type of control is the architectural design of the Panopticon sketched by Jeremy Bentham, a Utilitarian philosopher. The central tower of the structure, an example of the microphysics of power that is integrated into the macrophysics of a web of power, is surrounded by prison cells. The circular structure gives the guards an opportunity to see the prisoners without themselves being seen in return. The incarcerated person, a visible object, stands metaphorically naked before the prying eyes of the guards, invisible powers, who insure an automatic exercise of power.¹² Those in control can thus objectify and monitor the criminals, but those incarcerated do not have the opportunity to do the same to the guards because they do not know when they are being observed. Since there is no mutual gazing encounter, the person incarcerated is broken down analytically, penetrated, monologically isolated, and controlled by observers. From Foucault's perspective, the eyes can become instruments of power if they are used in the proper context. Moreover, the medical gaze of the clinic establishes the individual.¹³ The privileged place of the gaze is also evident in Foucault's study of madness in which such a person is declared to be blind (a metaphor for madness), or if cured to see the daylight, a dazzling light similar to that shared by the person of reason. But the madman sees this brilliant light as void or as nothing.¹⁴

In contrast to Foucault, Derrida understands that the eyes possess a more ambiguous character because when one catches the gaze of the other one sees the other see as well as no longer simply seen. When the eyes of the other become visible, "one no longer sees them see, one no longer sees them seeing."¹⁵ Within the context of discussing drawings of blind people, Derrida claims that the staring eye resembles an eye of a blind person because it sees itself disappear as it is gazing upon itself. The gazing eye sees the seeing, but it does not see what is visible. Since it sees nothing, the seeing eye perceives itself as blind. Moreover, the blind person does not see oneself exposed to the look of the other, which suggests that the blind person possesses no shame. Derrida also draws an analogy between the eye and sex due to his conviction that the blind person is a figure of castration: "More naked than others, a blindman virtually becomes his own sex, he becomes indistinguishable, from it because he does not see it, and not seeing himself exposed to the other's gaze, it is as if he had lost even his sense of modesty."¹⁶ Derrida takes the gaze of the artist into consideration in his discussion.

From Derrida's perspective, the artist's gaze leads to ruin. Why is this the case? When the artist attempts to draw a self-portrait of himself

the image can maintain its appearance for only an instant, the briefly created image becomes a memory. The act of recalling the image or memory is the actual action of drawing. Derrida is affirming that the artist cannot recapture the presence of the original gaze. The time factor of the face—what Derrida calls the ruin of the face—does not indicate aging or the passage of time. This is why he can write: “In the beginning there is ruin. Ruin is that which happens to the image from the moment of the first gaze. Ruin is the self-portrait, this face looked at in the face as the memory of itself, what *remains* or *returns* as a specter from the moment one first looks at oneself and a figuration is eclipsed.”¹⁷ Ruin enables one to see, but it does not show you anything. Derrida suggests that the self-portrait is a mere trait that is incomplete and eclipses itself. Does this discussion of the eye and gaze in Derrida’s works imply that the eye is without any essence?

Derrida is opposed generally to the notion that something possesses an essence because it smacks of a metaphysical stance. Although it cannot be stated with absolute certainty that the human eyes possess an essence, it is perhaps possible to suggest that their essence is represented by tears, which both obstruct sight and unveil vision. Tears contain an ability to reveal “nothing less than *alētheia*, the *truth* of the eyes, whose ultimate destination they would thereby reveal: to have imploration rather than vision in sight, to address prayer, love, joy, or sadness rather than a look or gaze.”¹⁸ Derrida thinks that the shading of tears goes beyond seeing and knowing.

If we take the views of these various postmodern thinkers and place them eye to eye with some Zen Buddhist thinkers, we will find some remarkable differences and some interesting similarities. The importance of visual metaphors in Zen Buddhist writings cannot be understated. According to the Zen philosopher Dōgen, our eyes are connected with the origin of the divine light within us.¹⁹ The ability to truly see, according to Dōgen, is essential for success: “If we do not see ourselves we are not capable of seeing others—both of these are insufficient. If we cannot see others we cannot see ourselves.”²⁰ Many centuries after the death of Dōgen, Hakuin stresses again the importance of the eye and gaining the ability to genuinely see: “But if you do not have the eye to see into your own nature, you will not have the slightest chance of being responsive to the teaching.”²¹ The type of seeing with which these two Zen masters are concerned is an intuitive perception and not a subject/object kind of perceptual process. They are also not concerned with the eye as a physical

object. Dōgen is, for instance, convinced that there is a unity between the eye, mind, entire body, and enlightenment.²² If Dōgen is not concerned with the physical eye, what does it mean to properly see?

In order to see things correctly, one must see things as they are by combining the phenomena of seer and seen. Dōgen wants us to accept things as they are and not to let our prejudices or prejudgments influence the way in which we actually see things. We must stop assuming that objects are external to our mind because they are rather the mind itself.²³ The eye and/or vision that Dōgen is discussing is both primordial and directly connected with the body: “‘Right vision’ is within the enlightened vision of our entire body. That is why we must possess the eye which existed before our body was born. This vision sees all things as they are in their true form—the actualization of enlightenment. We share that vision with the Buddhas and Patriarchs.”²⁴ This primordial eye and its insightful vision forms a unity with the body. Thus Dōgen is not referring to ordinary seeing which is something exercised by a subject upon an object, but he is more concerned with what he calls the Buddha-eye.

What Dōgen means by the Buddha-eye is illustrated by an often repeated apocryphal story about the origin of Zen Buddhism in which the historical Buddha preached before a large gathering on Vulture Peak without speaking a word; he simply held up a flower and winked to which the monk named Mahākāśyapa responded with a smile and accepted from the Buddha the direct transmission of the enlightened being’s teachings, a practice that was imitated by all the Ch’an or Zen Patriarchs throughout the ages. Without getting into his entire interpretation, we will focus on Dōgen’s comments about the eye. By holding up the flower for all those assembled to see, the Buddha both conceals and reveals himself in the flower, an act that involves more than using the fingers because it involves the vision and mind of the Buddha. By means of this vision, one can understand that: “Mountains, rivers, heaven and earth; the sun, moon and earth; rain and wind; human beings and animals; trees and grasses—all these are nothing but the holding up of an udumbara flower.”²⁵ When the Buddha winks in the narrative all human beings lose their ordinary vision and their Buddha-eye opens. And when the Buddha raises the flower for all to see it, everyone is performing the exact same action unceasingly from a primordial past with their entire bodies. Moreover, concealed within the flower itself is the Buddha-eye.

When our Buddha-eye opens we reflect the eye of the Buddha in our own eye because we now have the “Buddha’s vision and original face.”²⁶

We can now see the Buddha (*kembutsu*) face to face, which enables us to see the unlimited nature of the Buddha and to observe the “sun-faced and moon-faced Buddha.”²⁷ When this occurs the entire world and all its inhabitants and all moments of time are nothing but the practice of seeing Buddha. In other words, to truly see the Buddha we must open our own Buddha eye, which suggests that we see the Buddha by means of the very eye of the Buddha—Buddha eye seeing Buddha eye. This type of seeing is the actualization of the eye of the Buddha, and to attempt to conceal this actualization is impossible because it will eventually emerge by itself.²⁸ The type of seeing connected with the eye of the Buddha is a not-seeing, which involves a seeing without a subject and without an object that is seen. It is thus nondual seeing because it is both subjectless and objectless.

A similar point about not-seeing is made by Nishitani, a modern Buddhist philosopher associated with the Kyoto school, who thinks that the eye is a physical sense organ when it sees things, but when the eye is grounded in itself, it manifests the nature of not-seeing. He elaborates, “The eye is an eye through that essential not-seeing; and because of that essential not-seeing, seeing is possible.”²⁹ Moreover, it is the unity of seeing and not-seeing that forms the true nature of the eye and gives it a nonobjective mode of being.

This seeing that is a nondual not-seeing is not limited to perception because Dōgen is certain that we can hear sound through our eyes. This means that it is possible to hear the teachings of the Buddha through the eyes, even though this might initially seem absurd. Dōgen pushes his point to the limit: “Further, we can hear the sound throughout our body in every part of our body.”³⁰ A Japanese scholar makes clear that Dōgen is not confused about the different functions of the various sense faculties nor is he espousing some kind of Zen nonsense. This scholar refers to Dōgen’s position as a synesthesia, a process that possesses two major implications. The five sense faculties are devoid of fixed and determined functions because they can be modified or interchanged, and the second implication is that it represents the development of a totally new sensory circuit based on the harmonization of the five sense faculties.³¹ The radical nature of Dōgen’s position distinguishes him from the postmodern thinkers previously considered.

Lacan’s gaze, the erotic eye of Bataille, Foucault’s gaze that objectifies and controls, and Derrida’s ambiguous eyes are all different than the understanding of the eye offered by Dōgen and Nishitani because they are

dualistic conceptions. Although this is the major difference between the Zen thinkers and the postmodernists, they do share some common features. Derrida agrees with the Zen thinkers, for instance, that not-seeing makes possible the seeing to be seeing, even though the Zen thinkers attribute this to emptiness and a postmodernist like Derrida discovers not-seeing through a process of deconstruction. Nishitani clarifies what he means by seeing as emptiness: "Emptiness here means that the eye does not see the eye, that seeing is seeing because it is not-seeing."³² Derrida and Nishitani also agree, although for different reasons, that blindness is simultaneously present in seeing. Nonetheless, perception is connected in western thought with a representational mode of thinking. It is this mode of thinking from which many postmodernists are attempting to free themselves as they attempt to find new paradigms that bare some resemblance to the nonrepresentational mode of thinking of Zen Buddhism, although in the final analysis it is not the same as the Zen way of thinking. This fundamental difference is evident when perceiving a work of art.

A Work of Art

According to Lacan, a picture is a trap for the gaze.³³ This interesting remark gives us reason to pause in order to consider a work of art and its relation to the eye. Due to his profound influence on many postmodern thinkers and the importance that he accorded to art, the thoughts of Nietzsche on the subject also give us reason to consider art. Nietzsche thought that art represented the highest value in contradistinction to knowledge and truth. Since art is closer to life and more akin to what is actual, it is more valuable than truth. Nietzsche was convinced that art possessed the power to transform and transfigure life into higher, as yet unexperienced, possibilities. By considering the nature of a work of art, we will be further able to view some of the differences and commonalities between Zen thinkers and postmodernists.

In his work entitled *Holzwege*, Martin Heidegger devotes an essay to the origin of a work of art. Not only is the artist the origin of a work of art, but the work itself is the origin of the artist.³⁴ Heidegger wants to get beyond the ordinary view of the origin of a work of art and to call attention to the work of art itself that establishes equally as well the origin of the artist as artist. A work of art possesses a thingly character that can take the form of stone in an architectural work, wood with a carving, color

with a painting, and sound with a musical composition. Due to the fact that it can also be a stone, a piece of wood, color or whatever, the work of art is a thing, which does not simply mean that it is an aggregate of traits or a collection of properties, because its thingness is its matter, forming a basis and sphere for the actions of the artist. The arrangement of the matter is determined by its form, although this does not imply that matter and form are the primary determinations of the thingness of a thing.³⁵

In order to illustrate his argument, Heidegger examines Van Gogh's painting of a pair of peasant shoes, which simultaneously discloses truth and being. Van Gogh's painting does not simply reproduce a pair of peasant shoes that are present; it rather reproduces the general essence of a thing. The painting of the peasant shoes establishes a world in a nonobjective sense to which we are subject. This painting is also an occurrence of truth, which is creatively preserved by art in the work itself.³⁶ If the painting of the peasant's shoes involves an occurrence of truth, this must be grasped as truth putting itself into the painting. Thus, art is a way, although not the only path, on which truth can happen.

Instead of the occurrence of truth and the manifestation of being, Lacan and Jean-François Lyotard find alienation of the observer from a work of art, a frustrated wish-fulfillment, a set of traces, and lack of signification by a work of art. By identifying with the object of one's gaze for Lacan, the subject alienates oneself from oneself. A painting is not, for instance, a mere representation of objects perceived in life because it can transform subjects and force them to give up the gaze and that aspect of the ego formed by the gaze.³⁷ For Lyotard, the goal of art, a set of traces, is to expose the unfulfilled wish.³⁸ Lyotard analyzes the statement "This is art," and concludes that it is a cognitively inconsistent sentence because to determine an object one must already possess its rule of signification. Without the rule, we cannot possess the object because we are not in "a position to signify or name it."³⁹

Similar to Heidegger and Lyotard and their focus on the origin or nature of art, Derrida considers the origin of drawing, which implies the thought of drawing in the form of a memory of a trait. The trait is not invisible and not something sensible.⁴⁰ The trait is a tracing, an imperceptible outline. Since a trace represents a limit for Derrida, when we think about drawing it takes us to the limit. Derrida explains further, "This limit is never presently reached, but drawing always signals toward this inaccessibility, toward the threshold where only the surroundings of

the *trait* appear—that which the *trait* spaces by delimiting and which thus does not belong to the *trait*. *Nothing belongs to the trait*, and thus, to drawing and to the thought of drawing, not even its own ‘trace.’”⁴¹ Drawing, as tracing, separates one thing from another and divides itself by starting from itself and leaving itself, and it also retraces the nonideal borderlines or the unintelligible limits.

Within the context of postmodern art, Mark C. Taylor identifies, for instance, two processes at work: disfiguring and cleaving. These two operations are identified by Taylor in his attempt to grasp the *chora*, a non-existent that stands behind being and becoming, makes possible all existence, and forms the essential space where both form and copy are inscribed. The operation of disfiguring is connected to activities like marring, destroying, deforming and defacing in a process of negation or deprivation that also includes the negation of the notions of calculating, considering, and comprehending. By enacting denegation in the realm of form, the process of disfiguring interweaves revelation and concealment and presence and absence which allows for “both a re-presentation and a de-presentation.”⁴² If the artist removes, deforms, or defaces a figure and destroys its beauty, he/she leaves a trace of something that is other, which itself is neither being nor nonbeing, present nor absent, immanent nor transcendent.⁴³ Associated with the notion of disfiguring is that of cleaving, which suggests both dividing and joining as well as separating and uniting. Cleaving is an operation that allows opposites to emerge and remain suspended in a process that is unthinkable and beyond the distinction of identity and difference.⁴⁴ The dual processes of disfiguring and cleaving are indicative that there can be nothing original from the postmodern perspective because such operations render everything secondary due to the tendency of the postmodern artist to disjoin, fragment, distort, and partially destroy a work of art in order to figure what cannot be figured.

In contrast to a postmodern deconstruction of drawing or consideration of the nature of art in the postmodern era, Dōgen quotes a saying by the Ch’an Master Hsing-yen (Japanese: Kyōgen Shikan): “‘A painting of a rice cake cannot satisfy hunger.’” Many different kinds of people have diligently studied this saying without arriving at an useful understanding of its meaning. Like a similar saying, it is a mere clever expression and possesses no viable relationship to our real experience. To this puzzling statement, Dōgen offers his own interpretation: “The painting of a rice cake can be said to be everything: [Buddhas, sentient beings, illusion, enlightenment]. A rice cake, made from glutinous rice, represents both

transitory and unchanging life. The painting of a rice cake actually symbolizes detachment, and we should not think about coming or going, permanence or impermanence when we look at it.”⁴⁵ Dōgen offers a nondual interpretation of the saying; he denies the common view that a painting is unreal while the rice cake is real. The painting of the rice cake is not different from the various forms of existence. In other words, an actual rice cake is not different from a painting of a rice cake. Dōgen warns: “Do not try to find a real rice cake outside of the painting, if you do not know what the painting signifies.”⁴⁶ From Dōgen’s perspective, the painting may or may not appear in its true form: “The true meaning of a painting of a rice cake transcends the distinction of past and present, or birth and destruction.”⁴⁷

Dōgen further develops his interpretation of the painting of the rice cake by discussing unsatisfied hunger, which symbolizes the illusion of sentient beings for Dōgen. Hunger is used as a metaphor and/or symbol by Dōgen to illustrate the condition of illusion. By becoming detached from the opposites of enlightenment and illusion, a person loses his/her hunger. Dōgen indicates the nondualism of his position in the following way: “In reality there is no hunger of rice cake conflicting with each other, but when you think you are hungry the entire world becomes hungry; conversely, if there is a real rice cake it exists everywhere.”⁴⁸ From this viewpoint, since an eatable rice cake and a pictorial representation of a consumable rice cake are both empty, either one can satisfy a person’s hunger, and are examples of ultimate reality in diverse forms. Moreover, an insightful observer of a painting can see, for instance, both movement and inertia, the way of practice, truth of the Buddha’s teaching and of the painting itself, the entire universe is manifested in the painting, and one can find one’s true self in the painting. Therefore, viewing a painting possesses the potential to lead one to an awakening, which functions to actualize the painting.⁴⁹ Thus a painting, from Dōgen’s perspective, can satisfy one’s hunger.

In comparison to Taylor’s notions of disfiguring and cleaving and his emphasis on the surface of a work of art, Dōgen grasps a depth and mysteriousness (*yūgen*) to a work of art, whereas Taylor seems content with initiating a nonstop dialectic that gives birth to a double negation, a negation of negation. Dōgen and Taylor agree that we exist in a world of flux, although Taylor disagrees with Dōgen that we can catch a glimpse of the eternal in the world of flux. Rather than disfiguring or cleaving a work of art, Dōgen lets it be itself and does not seek to mark or spoil it in any way.

Both thinkers agree, however, that art can express loneliness and sadness, and they tend to agree about the centrality of intuition and its epistemic role. With his emphasis on disfiguring and the splits or cracks that it can initiate, Taylor's postmodern perspective shares a stress on the gap or opening, the space or time between one thing and another. Much like the *chora* stressed by Taylor, Zen artistic theory recognizes the prominence of *ma*, the ground of all existence. It is *ma*, an interval between two or more spatial or temporal things, that makes possible the coexistence of opposites, stands behind, and unites such opposites as being and nonbeing.

Zen Buddhism and Postmodernism

According to D. T. Suzuki, a modern Zen Buddhist apologist and introducer of Zen to a western audience, the nature of Zen is unique within the context of world philosophy. Suzuki identifies several characteristics of Zen that are reflections of its uniqueness; he claims that it is irrational and inconceivable, it emphasizes direct pointing to the essence of human beings, it is the art of seeing into one's own being, it points the way from bondage to freedom, it is nonintellectual and mistrusts reason and words, it stresses what is natural, common and concrete, it is iconoclastic, it is playful and comic, it assumes a nonintentional approach to life, and it rejects conceptual categories.⁵⁰ Rather than viewing Zen from an historical perspective like the Zen scholar Hu Shih,⁵¹ Suzuki stresses the nature of its pure experience or *satori* (enlightenment). In fact, there is no Zen without *satori* in the opinion of Suzuki.⁵² This is confirmed in his own words: "Satori is thus the whole of Zen. Zen starts with it and ends with it."⁵³ Suzuki uses this experience, which he identifies as irrational, inexplicable, and incommunicable, as a critique to characterize Zen as a whole or to indicate its essence. Within the confines of a reverse Orientalism directed at the West and founded on dual, strong sectarian and nativistic positions, Suzuki thinks that Zen Buddhism represents the religious and philosophical culmination of all thought: "As I conceive it, Zen is the ultimate fact of all philosophy and religion. Every intellectual effort must culminate in it, or rather must start from it, if it is to bear any practical fruits."⁵⁴ Although it has taken some time, Zen Buddhist scholars are now challenging Suzuki's interpretation of the nature of Zen and its tradition.

Suzuki's attempt to demonstrate both the continuity and homogeneity of the Zen Buddhist tradition is considered by Faure to be misleading

because it gives a slanted view of the actual tradition in which diverse religious and philosophical trends appear and disappear under different sectarian affiliations. Unlike Suzuki, Faure denies any identifiable essence of Zen.⁵⁵ Faure also accuses Suzuki of an excessive, secondary Orientalism that “offers an idealized, ‘nativist’ image of a Japanese culture deeply influenced by Zen.”⁵⁶ Faure also claims that Suzuki is a biased sectarian who misconstrued the Sōtō position and favored certain periods of Japanese history that represented a more pure and virile teaching.⁵⁷ Suzuki’s hidden agenda is to prove in a comparative way the mystical superiority of Zen to Christianity.⁵⁸ Faure also criticizes Suzuki for perpetuating a misunderstanding of unconsciousness in the tradition by means of his psychological interpretation of *satori*, for his reliance on categories of nineteenth-century Orientalism, for his denial of historical continuity between Indian religious traditions and Zen, for his teleological fallacy that makes the early Ch’an tradition culminate with modern Japanese Zen, and for his emphasis on the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra* as an original text.⁵⁹ Along similar lines, Hseuh-li Cheng criticizes Suzuki for his failure to recognize that *dhyana* (meditation) and *prajna* (wisdom) are interrelated and cannot be separated.⁶⁰ Moreover, Suzuki did not understand that the change from northern to southern forms of Ch’an represents a shift from *kuan-ching* (keeping an eye on purity) to *chien-hsing* (looking into the nature), and he did not grasp that they are not incompatible.⁶¹ By means of his writings and promoting of the superior nature of the Rinzai school, Suzuki carries on a sectarian polemic against the Sōtō school. Even though not all the characteristics of Zen identified by Suzuki are entirely accurate, he does capture some of its spirit that connects it in some ways to the spirit of postmodern philosophy.

Postmodernism is difficult to define precisely because there are several opinions about its nature offered by different writers. This opinion is supported by a philosopher on the same subject: “It appears to be more like an assemblage of attitudes and discursive practices.”⁶² I would disagree, however, with McGowan’s connection of postmodernism with romantic dreams of transformation and his claim that it is a romantic vision of a unified world that is experienced as a frightful reality.⁶³ In the final volume of his study of Nietzsche, Heidegger anticipates the term postmodernism: “Western history has now begun to enter into the completion of that period we call the *modern*, and which is defined by the fact that man becomes the measure and the center of beings.”⁶⁴ The vision of the end of metaphysics by Heidegger in his latter works serves as a philo-

sophical inspiration for postmodern thinkers, as well as the Dionysian vision of Nietzsche with its call for frivolity, artistic creativity, and playfulness. Some writers trace the term postmodernism to changes in architectural design or history.

Mark C. Taylor gives postmodernism a historical grounding: "Modernity ended and postmodernity began in Hiroshima on 6 August 1945."⁶⁵ A closely related spirit is expressed by Jameson who describes postmodernism as the disappearance of the past, which includes the sense of historicity and collective memory.⁶⁶ Jameson perceives something ironical in this contemporary form of forgetfulness because the concept of the postmodern is an attempt "to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place."⁶⁷ In contrast to historical consciousness of Taylor and Jameson, Lyotard thinks that we are confronted with a crisis of narratives, the quintessential form of knowledge. From Lyotard's perspective, knowledge became altered in the postindustrial age into a commodity to be produced and sold like any other product of industrial production, a process that causes knowledge to lose its utility and value.⁶⁸ It is necessary for us to become more sensitive to the heterogeneous character of the rules of language games and to improve our ability to tolerate their incommensurability.⁶⁹

Lyotard does not use the term postmodern to characterize a period of cultural history because the term would exclude consideration of the present moment and any grasp of chronological succession.⁷⁰ Lyotard thinks that the term postmodern is always implied in the term modern "because of the fact that modernity, modern temporality, comprises in itself an impulsion to exceed itself into a state other than itself."⁷¹ Temporal succession does not then play a major role in the meaning of the term postmodern. The "post" of postmodernity suggests more a matter of tone, style, experimentation, and multiplicity. Beardsworth offers us a lucid statement on this matter:

The 'post' of 'postmodernity' is not only neither a socio-historical category nor a fanciful, 'post-structuralist' play on the 'signifier'; it is also not a concept which can be thought of in terms of linear time. In this sense it is probably not a *concept* at all, subsuming under itself the unity and stability of a referent (a 'postmodern' case). Rather, the term should be seen as itself an *experiment* which is trying to witness reflectively the difficulty of 'presenting' *events*.⁷²

If Lyotard's work and that of other postmodern thinkers represents a series of experiments, postmodernism should not be viewed as a radical departure from modernism. In fact, an interpreter of Lyotard's work views it as not representing a radical break with modernity, but "instead a dialectical intensification of its democratic impulses."⁷³ This same author sees Lyotard's work as responding to a need for renewal and further development of the modern democratic tradition.

An example of an experiment by Lyotard is his notion of rewriting, which represents a new beginning that is exempt from any prejudice. The second sense of rewriting reflects Freud's term *Durcharbeitung* (working through), which suggests working with a hidden thought obscured by past prejudice and future dimensions.⁷⁴ Within Lyotard's philosophical context, postmodernity can be grasped as not a new epoch but rather a rewriting of aspects of modernity. This process of rewriting is writing again and making modernity itself real: "Modernity is written, inscribes itself on itself, in a perpetual rewriting."⁷⁵ This rewriting does not result in knowledge of the past because it is more concerned with the anamnesis of the thing. This type of experiment de-emphasizes the importance of grand theories. This type of thinking experiment results in a "postmodern epoch devoid of all truth-claims, all standards of valid argumentation or efforts to separate a notional 'real' from the various forms of superinduced fantasy or mass-media simulation."⁷⁶

If one takes a more economic view of the phenomenon of postmodernism, it represents a cultural reification, which represents an effacement of the traces of production, an objective commodity that is produced. Evolving from a protracted period of ossification, postmodernism represents a renewal of production.⁷⁷ For the consumer, this means freedom from the guilt associated with the exploitative aspects of the process of production because the consumer is able to forget the laborious work that is expended in order to produce his/her product. An important consequence of this forgetfulness is that it "generates a radical separation between consumers and producers."⁷⁸

From a more philosophical perspective, postmodernism is a reaction against the philosophy of the Enlightenment and its values like tolerance, individual freedom, reasonableness, and confidence in the inevitable nature of progress due to scientific discoveries and rationality, which served as the criterion of measurement for progress and as a reliable guide in a universe that could be gradually understood. The vision of the Enlightenment period was that of human beings capable of learning the

secrets of nature and the laws that governed the physical world and gaining control over nature in order to improve human life. At an elevated position in the center of the world stood the rational, self-determined, autonomous, human being, reflecting an epistemological optimism and anthropocentrism that is anathema to many postmodernists.

Within the context of postmodern thought, the self disappears to the margin of the world instead of occupying its center. Although there was a skeptical spirit in Enlightenment philosophy especially with respect to metaphysics, postmodernists develop this trend even further by stressing that meaning and knowledge are uncertain and that one cannot rely on texts for certainty. For a postmodern thinker like Foucault, knowledge becomes an act of power. Since there is no longer any truth or certainty that can be established by a correspondence between the human mind and objective reality, and since it is impossible to gain any vantage point outside of the world in order to conceive of a unified worldview, not only is an all-encompassing worldview untenable, but Rorty claims that we should give up the search for truth and be satisfied with interpretation.

In contrast to the static world envisioned by Kant and Descartes, postmodernists emphasize becoming, contingency, and chance. Some of the consequences of such a position are elucidated by Gilles Deleuze: "To become is never to imitate, nor to 'do like,' nor to conform to a model, whether it's of justice or of truth. There is no terminus from which you set out, none which you arrive at or which you ought to arrive at."⁷⁹ Within the world of flux, there are no universal and timeless truths to be discovered because everything is relative and indeterminate, which suggests that our knowledge is always incomplete, fragmented, and historically and culturally conditioned. Therefore, there can be no foundation for philosophy or any theory, and it is wise to be suspicious of any universal claims to validity made by reason. Moreover, there is no center of society, culture, or history. There is instead an emphasis on pluralism that is, for instance, expressed by artists by deliberately juxtaposing different styles for diverse sources in the way that the *bricolage* reconfigures different objects or images. The use of irony exemplifies a preference for aesthetic categories and a different style of writing that Julia Kristeva thinks is an attempt to expand the signifiable, human realm to the very limit of experience.⁸⁰ Instead of irony, a writer can use humor, an art of pure events, for instance, to undermine "games of principles or causes in favor of the event and games of individuation or subjectivation in favor of multiplicities."⁸¹ Another scholar recog-

nizes the shift in sensibility, practices, and discourse formations that represents a transformation in Western culture.⁸²

The postmodern era is characterized by discontinuity, irregularity, rupture, decenteredness, and lack of hope for any type of utopia. With respect to utopian nostalgias, Taylor states, "In theological terms, this means that we must let go of the dream of salvation."⁸³ There is no trans-historical value for many postmodernists because of the death of God, an example of the postmodern iconoclastic spirit. Nonetheless, a person can be a revolutionary because anyone who can write can play such a role. But writing involves a wandering, erring, marginal lifestyle in which one experiments with words and thoughts. Deleuze advocates, for instance, becoming a nomadic thinker with neither past nor future.⁸⁴ Where does this wandering, nomadic, erring type of journey lead? According to an acknowledged postmodernist thinker, the future destiny of modernity is decadence, which anticipates an unpredictable postmodernism, "diverting the vague sense of a future into more fantastic forms, all borrowed from the misfits and eccentrics, the perverts and the Others, or aliens, of the present (modern) system."⁸⁵

There is a tendency in postmodern philosophy to prolematize time because it is uncomfortable with the past that tends to embody the roots of logocentrism and other undesirable things like authority, the scientific worldview, hierarchy, hegemony, and grand narratives. There is a desire in postmodernism to be devoid of tradition "to stand outside of all traditions and view the play of heterogeneous discourses with an attitude of neutrality if not outright indifference."⁸⁶ There is a tendency to emphasize the present moment in postmodern thought over the past and future. The future offers little hope and makes even fewer demands on the individual. From his perspective on postmodernism, Schrag makes the following observation: "As the past is the residuum of authority, hegemony, and ideology, so the future is viewed principally as a projection of utopian dreams and unrealizable ideals."⁸⁷ If postmodernism is a series of experiments within time that emphasizes the present moment, it shares something important with Zen Buddhism, and this will be discussed in a later chapter at greater length.

In a sense, the practice of *zazen* (seated meditation) by Zen practitioners is also an experiment with the body and mind, representing a new path of thinking, which makes it akin in spirit to a goal that some postmodern thinkers are attempting to reach. Zen Buddhism and many postmodern thinkers share a radical skepticism with respect to the powers of

reason; they provide a challenge to rationality and even problematize it because neither party accepts any universal claims made by reason. Although they both share a radical skepticism with respect to reason, Zen allows for the possibility of a radical certainty that postmodern philosophy does not. An autobiographical account by Hakuin, the great reformer of the Rinzai branch of Japanese Zen Buddhism in the seventeenth century, gives us an excellent illustration of this from references to three separate enlightenment experiences:

One day when I was passing through southern Ise I ran into a downpour and the waters reached to my knees. Suddenly I gained an even deeper understanding of the verse on the Roundness of the Lotus Leaf by Ta-hui. I was unable to contain my joy. I lost all awareness of my body, fell headlong into the waters, and forgot completely to get up again. My bundles and clothing were soaked through. Fortunately a passer-by, seeing my predicament, helped me to get up. I roared with laughter and everyone there thought I was mad. That winter, when I was sitting at night in the monk's hall at Shinoda in Izumi, I gained an enlightenment from the sound of snow falling. The next year, while practicing walking meditation at the monk's hall of the Reishō-in in Mino, I suddenly had an enlightenment experience greater than any I had had before, and was overcome by a great surge of joy.⁸⁸

From the Zen Buddhist perspective, there is nothing that can logically refute the enlightenment experience. Zen Buddhist philosophers and most postmodernists agree that there is no substantial self. Both parties also agree that time and history are characterized by a radical contingency. There are numerous other differences and similarities that will become evident as we proceed in future chapters.

Comparative Philosophy and Cross-Cultural Dialogue

In a summary fashion, it can be affirmed that comparative philosophy is inherently about alterity. The other always remains external and mysterious to us, even though his/her thoughts and actions might resemble our patterns. The fact of alterity within comparative philosophy is indicative of the necessity for engaging in it within the context of a life-world that

calls into question the world inhabited by each participant, although we are placed into a common milieu by means of language. This encounter with the other refrains from reducing the other to the same, and it summons participants in the dialogue to take responsibility for each other in such a way that each person becomes radically significant for mutual self-understanding.

Comparative philosophy is a promiscuous activity because the participants experience a broadening of cultural horizons, and try out new connections, new directions, new ideas, new thoughts, and different ways of thinking and being human. The comparative thinker must remain intellectually promiscuous because of the possibility of the fusion of divergent horizons. This promiscuity takes place on the margins of philosophy, which is indicative of the uncertainty, riskiness, and dangers associated with comparative philosophy and one's willingness to venture one's self-understanding in the presence of the other. An advantage of being on the margin is that it can offer one a perspective and freedom that one might not have in normal circumstances. The marginal nature of comparative philosophy does not exclude anyone from active engagement in the life of more than one culture. By the nature of its location on the margins of culture, the comparative philosopher is a liminal being, struggling with revealment and concealment on the margins of different philosophical cultures trying to make sense of the hermeneutical dialogue in which one is engaged.

Hermeneutical dialogue is both honest with itself and necessarily incomplete. It is honest because it admits the existence of certain presuppositions, preunderstandings, and prejudgments by the participants under discussion and interpretation. It also admits that there is no definitive interpretation or dialogical exchange because hermeneutical dialogue is always incomplete by nature, which points to the necessity for continued dialogical exchange. Hermeneutical dialogue is also incomplete because there is never a conclusion to the dialogue due to its inner dynamic as a continual process within the context of temporality. Not only is there the normal give and take of an dialogical encounter, but agreeing and disagreeing, correcting and being corrected are also continually taking place. Comparative philosophy can be conceived as an incomplete game that engrosses us, draws us to it, and holds us in its spell in a repetitive pattern that constantly renews itself. If the true spirit of play is without any goal or purpose, hermeneutical dialogue is different than play at this point because its goal is mutual understanding. If we correctly play the game of

hermeneutical dialogue and are an integral part of it, we must necessarily interpret what we encounter from within the game.

There are some advantages to this approach that include building cross-cultural bridges of understanding, acknowledging the other, comprehending the value of foreign philosophical insights and positions, enabling participants to transcend spatial and temporal separations, enhancing a search for common ground on which to construct mutual understanding and appreciation, and helping us to share similar concerns and problems common to all human beings. Hermeneutical dialogue also involves the participants in a comparative realm of meaning, regardless of what some postmoderns think about a lack of meaning. It also possesses the potential to set the individual on the path to truth. Moreover, it can provide us with possible insights with which to solve philosophical problems.

A secondary motivation for entering this particular dialogue between postmodern philosophers and representatives of the Zen Buddhist tradition was prompted by the work of some contemporary scholars. Within the same realm of discourse as this work, Magliola argues that Nāgārjuna's middle path follows the Derridean trace, and it even goes beyond the postmodernist in that it approaches the unheard of thought, and allows the reintroduction of the logocentric. Magliola also argues that Nāgārjuna's notion of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) is the equivalent of Derrida's *différance*, and represents the absolute negation which both constitutes and deconstitutes the directional trace.⁸⁹ Although one can find some similarities between Derrida's notion of *différance* and emptiness, to claim that they are the same is to miss the more important differences between them. There are also problems with another part of Magliola's discussion of Derrida as a representative of postmodernism and Zen Buddhism. Referring to D. T. Suzuki's work as support for his position, Magliola claims that logocentric Zen is its most popular form, which relies heavily on the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra* of the Yogācāra School of Mahāyāna Buddhism.⁹⁰ By relying on Suzuki, Magliola is necessarily very misinformed about the history of Zen Buddhism and the importance of the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra* because Suzuki claims that Bodhidharma, the legendary founder of the Ch'an tradition brought the text from India, gave it to his first disciple, and the text was studied and commented upon continuously by monks in China for centuries.⁹¹

More recent scholarship demonstrates the inaccuracies of Suzuki's position. David W. Chappell, for instance, argues that the Ch'an Buddhist

dynastic line of transmission of the teaching of Bodhidharma in China was not based on exegetical preoccupation with the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra*.⁹² This position contradicts Suzuki's claim of a long tradition of continuous study of and commentary upon the text. Moreover, Philip Yampolsky writes that there is no evidence to support the claim that Bodhidharma used the text or wrote a commentary on it.⁹³ This is not to imply that the text was unimportant to the Chinese. There is evidence that the text inspired the Chinese about the value of synthesizing Buddhist doctrine.⁹⁴

Besides the problems associated with the work of Magiola, there are also problems connected to the attempt by Newman Robert Glass to rethink the Buddhist notion of emptiness. In his lucidly argued book, Glass attempts to reinterpret emptiness through the postmodern philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. Although he is certainly entitled to do this, the emptiness that he discusses possesses little resemblance to the Buddhist understanding of emptiness. Moreover, during the course of his attempt to re-read and reinterpret emptiness through the perspective of Deleuze, Glass misinterprets the philosophy of the Zen philosopher Dōgen. We will discuss the work of Glass at greater length in the final chapter of this work. Moreover, there is a tendency in these kinds of writings to make some postmodernists more akin to the spirit of Zen Buddhism than they really are in fact.

In addition to the scholarly contributions of Magiola and Glass, I also want to briefly consider the work in comparative philosophy of David Loy and David A. Dilworth. The overall purpose of Loy's book on nonduality is to support the Mahāyāna Buddhist assertion that *samsāra* is nirvana. Loy's book includes an interesting criticism of Derrida that should be considered after we have compared the philosophy of the deconstructionist with various Zen philosophers, which will be attempted in the final chapter. Dilworth offers an interesting typology of Eastern and Western philosophy that includes some of the postmodern thinkers like Derrida, Foucault, and Deleuze who will be considered in subsequent chapters. After considering these postmodern thinkers and others, it will be necessary to return to the typology of Dilworth and test his four major types (perspective, reality, method, and principle) in order to discern if they enhance our understanding of these figures in comparison to Zen philosophy.

In the following chapters we will attempt to correct some of the misperceptions created by the work of these scholars by looking at the similarities as well as the differences between various postmodern thinkers

and Zen philosophers. This will be accomplished by comparing the two parties with respect to the following central topics: language; ways of thinking; radical skepticism and doubt; body; self and other; time and death; and nihilism and metaphysics. This study will argue that many postmodern thinkers move in the direction of Zen Buddhism, but they do not make the final leap or transition to the Zen philosophical position or something akin to it, even though both parties perceive shortcomings in the representational mode of thinking, which is a type of thinking that assumes a correspondence between appearance and reality and is supported by a metaphysical edifice. The various topics for the dialogical and comparative encounter that will follow in subsequent chapters have been chosen to illustrate the different attempts and strategies for overcoming representational thinking by Zen thinkers and postmodern philosophers.