

Valuing Illusion: A Comparative Analysis of Jean Baudrillard and Eihei Dogen

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the overlapping themes, ideas, and strategies of Jean Baudrillard and Eihei Dogen. The rationale for such an endeavor lies in the absence of any comparison of Baudrillard and Dogen, when there is a plethora of scholarship that places their respective philosophies into conversation with post-structuralism and Zen Buddhism. I approached this project from the perspective of examining how Dogen's enigmatic ideas helped in understanding Baudrillard's complex theory, and vice-versa. By looking more closely at each philosopher's writing, themes, and concerns, I highlight ideas from separate and distinct socio-historical situations and find ways of comprehending these ideas both individually and together. Though Baudrillard and Dogen each apply their respective philosophy to distinct cultures, environments, and times, I find that there are some overlaps that may begin any number of new conversations in the fields of comparative academics, Dogen studies, Baudrillard studies, Zen Buddhist studies, post-structural philosophy, new media and technology, ecology, and beyond.

Introduction

Buddhism found me in a formal sense some fourteen years ago. My personal journey toward suffering's cessation has colored, in one sense or another, all the events I have encountered since first hearing of the Dharma – academia is no exception. In Western theory and philosophy I found a platform from which to compare ideas that have come to form much of my ideology of the world. Buddhism and other Eastern modes of thought, Zen in particular, offers a curiously close rendition of what I feel these Western theorists and philosophers were trying to say at times. I found inspiration from comparative philosopher Alan Watts and popular commentator Joseph Campbell before I entered the university. In retrospect, it seems my approach to theory and philosophy was destined to be of a comparative nature. To “compare” anything (from the Latin *comparare*, meaning “make equal with, liken, bring together for a contest”), an original state of duality is necessary. Alterity is the center of the wheel that makes any philosophical comparison move, whether traveling towards similarities or differences. In his book *Zen and the Art of Postmodern Philosophy*, Carl Olson provides an important explanation of comparative philosophy that reverberates with a much deeper meaning regarding any search for understanding through cross-cultural/cross-ideological dialogue. Olson writes:

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. (18)

Keeping in mind the idea of “a mutual self understanding” through experience with the other, how do the thoughts, writings, and philosophies of the twentieth/twenty-first century French philosopher and social theorist Jean Baudrillard compare with those of the thirteenth-century Zen Buddhist monk Eihei Dogen? My thesis offers a glimpse into the overlapping themes, ideas, and rhetorical strategies of Jean Baudrillard and Eihei Dogen in a comparative analysis of their philosophies. These overlaps demonstrate an alternative method for navigating the constant influx of information that technology has introduced and continues to proliferate in our Global Digital Era. Social media, as a technological agent that traffics in the multiplication of identity, is a force that can be better understood through looking more closely at how Baudrillard and Dogen approach the ideas of writing, systems, and thought. Their overlapping ideas offer a space of calming stillness

for the twenty-first century mind to abide within amidst the rapid turmoil of increasing technological advancement.

While there is a plethora of scholarship comparing postmodern philosophy with Zen Buddhism and other forms of ancient Eastern thought, much of which revolves around Jacques Derrida, there is no extensive exploration of Jean Baudrillard's thought and writing in relation to Zen. For example, Harold Coward's book *Derrida and Indian Philosophy* compares Derrida's philosophy of deconstruction with that of the second-century Indian Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna. Likewise, Takeo Hagiwara's article "Derrida and Zen: Desert and Swamp," from the journal *Philosophy East and West*, discusses similarities between Derrida's deconstruction and D.T. Suzuki's ideas on Zen Buddhism. A more general example of scholarship investigating the comparisons between postmodern thought and Zen Buddhism, outside of strictly Derridian research, includes the previously cited book by Carl Olson, *Zen and the Art of Postmodern Philosophy*. Olson arranges the text into a dialogue between postmodern thinkers and Zen practitioners, comparing the similarities and differences of each on related topics: language, art, the gaze, logic, reality, and time. He concludes that while there are many similarities, specifically each path's "radical skepticism" towards logical thinking, Zen offers an avenue for the reintegration of philosophy into life that postmodern philosophy does not.

I have chosen to place Jean Baudrillard into conversation with Dogen not only to fill this empty space, but also to show the re-emergence and importance of Dogen in the fields of comparative academics, philosophy, and Eastern religion. For example, both Toby Foshay's book *Derrida and Dogen*, and Garret Bredeson's article "On Dogen and

Derrida”compare the philosophy of Dogen with themes from Derrida’s deconstruction. In her article “Plato and Dogen on literature and enlightenment,” Carol Gould offers a more unique comparative analysis of Dogen in the form of Plato, rather than another Derridian comparison. There is also a multitude of recent scholarship that has attempted an analysis of Dogen without any comparison. Hee-jin Kim’s book *Dogen on Meditation and Thinking* approaches Dogen from a philosophical perspective, while Steven Heine’s book *Dogen: Textual and Historical Studies* makes a more historical and cultural argument for Dogen’s relevance. Although these texts lead to the advancement of specialized studies in Dogen, there has yet to be a comparison between Dogen and Baudrillard.

While it is fun and interesting to put the unique approaches of Baudrillard and Dogen into conversation, an analysis of any post-structural theory with Zen or Zen Buddhism is not without its pitfalls. There is an ancient Eastern parable called the Parable of the Blind Men and the Elephant that begins to demonstrate the dangers of such a comparative approach. The story tells of a group of blind men who each touch a different part of an elephant and quarrel about what an “elephant” is like – each arguing that it is like the subjective part that they touch (touching the tail makes it like a rope, the tusk makes the elephant like a plough, etc.) . In the Buddhist version of the story, the Buddha tells this tale in response to his students who raise the issue of different wanderers and scholars giving different understandings of the nature of the world. After retelling the story, the Buddha responds with the following stanza:

O how they cling and wrangle, some who claim,
 For preacher and monk the honored name!
 For, quarreling, each to his view they cling.

Such folk see only one side of a thing. (Udana, 68-69)

To see only one side of a thing or one part of a whole is to be as the blind men, ignorant of, and blind to the remaining parts that make a thing what it is. The popular practice within contemporary academics of comparing concepts from Zen Buddhism to ideas from post-structuralism is like the parable of the elephant. To call Zen Buddhist ideas post-structural or post-structural concepts Zen Buddhist is to mistakenly equate a single part of each individual elephant for the whole – ignoring each mode of thought’s separate and unique temporal, historical, and cultural parts – as well as their individual purpose. Removed from their distinct historical and cultural contexts, concepts from Zen Buddhism or post-structuralism cannot legitimately be used to analyze each other.

Post-structuralism is an answer to the structural problem of presenting meaning. This concern is a response to the structuralist movement and their attempt to shape and understand the world through the abstract and limiting phenomenon of language. The narrative of post-structuralism begins post-Saussure, where later thinkers after World War II were faced with understanding a world that the current theories of culture could not explain (although Nietzsche foreshadowed such issues of language, culture, and meaning much earlier in his essay *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense*). Post-structural theories respond to structural understandings by destabilizing, and since Derrida, deconstructing meaning. Catherine Belsey points out in her book *Poststructuralism* that deconstruction is an intellectual exercise made possible by “the simple inference that meaning is differential, not referential” (10). From the post-structural perspective, deconstruction and *differance* (as Derrida suggests) are built into the very fabric of language and meaning itself. This leaves post-structuralism with, as

Jean-Francois Lyotard defines in his book *The Postmodern Condition*, “an incredulity toward metanarratives” (qtd. in Belsey, 99). The distinct historical, temporal, and cultural factors of post-structuralism, along with its doubt of over-arching narratives of any kind, make it not as smooth a comparison to Zen Buddhism as the multitude of overlapping scholarship on the subjects would have their audience believe.

But what is Zen Buddhism? To fully understand Zen it is necessary to go back 2500 years to the story of the historical Buddha’s time that started Zen’s journey from India, to China, to Japan, and then to the West. In the sermon known to the Western world as the Flower Sermon, the Buddha is asked the nature of reality, to which he replies by holding up a flower and winking. Among his disciples, only Mahakasyapa responds – by smiling. The silent transmission of wisdom through understanding *tathata* (suchness) that would become Zen Buddhism is thus born. From this moment, Zen (or Chan in Chinese) Buddhism eventually journeyed from India to China with (if the historical accounts are correct) Bodhidharma, taking on a completely new set of historical and cultural circumstances and adopting a Taoist and Confucian flavor. From China, Zen Buddhism began to flourish in Japan around the thirteenth-century, particularly with the Soto school of Zen Buddhism and its founder Eihei Dogen. From Dogen, the Soto school eventually brought Zen Buddhism to the West through Japanese Zen master Shaku Soen and flourished under the writings and teachings of his student D.T. Suzuki. Throughout Zen Buddhism’s experiences with various temporal, historical, and cultural settings, real Zen Buddhism has never been divorced of either its underlying exigency as a practice or its connection to the structural system of Buddhist thought. These factors create a problem in comparing Zen Buddhist concepts to ideas found in post-structuralism.

The underlying and fundamental differences in purpose and foundation make Zen Buddhism unique from post-structural theories. In their essay “Buddhism and Post-Modernity,” Martine and Stephen Batchelor articulate a fundamental historical difference between Buddhism and post-structuralism when they explain that “Whatever features of post-modernity may be apparent in Buddhism, it would be foolish to describe Buddhist thought as ‘post-modern’ – for the simple reason that Buddhism has undergone no phase of modernity to be ‘post’ of. Buddhist cultures have evolved according to the grand narrative of their own Enlightenment Project” (stephenbatchelor.org). To mistakenly deconstruct the grand narrative of Buddhism that Zen Buddhism is a part of would be like naming the elephant from the above parable by only blindly examining its eyes. There is an inherent structure of Buddhism that Zen is not “post” of. This structure is complete with a grand narrative of the story of the Buddha (in a Joseph Campbell-like hero’s quest) and a numbering system that includes the four-noble truths, the three-jewels, the twelve-links of dependent origination, the eight-fold path, and so on. In reference to the structure of a path, Martine and Stephen Batchelor imagine a post-structural Buddhism that completely reformulates its purpose when they write, “They will try to rearticulate the guiding metaphors of Buddhist tradition in the light of post-modernity. An attitude of incredulity would itself tend to resonate more with the metaphor of wilderness than with that of path, with the possibilities of unbounded landscape as opposed to the secure confinement of a highway” (stephenbatchelor.org). This reformation of Buddhist thought completely undermines the very history, culture, and foundation of both Buddhism and Zen Buddhism as religions concerned with attaining refuge from suffering. Where is there refuge in the wilderness?

As a practice-centered religion, Zen Buddhism can be misunderstood when compared to the intellectual theories of post-structuralism. Although some later post-structuralist ideas have been concerned with issues of morality and ethics (Baudrillard and Derrida are examples), post-structural thought does not have its foundation grounded in these concerns as religion does. Belsey highlights this difference when she points out that “Much of Derrida’s later work has been concerned with ethics, the problem of right action in a world without foundational truths to constitute a ground for choice. Religion, in contrast, depends on such grounding” (90). “Right action” is even included as one of the eight steps of the eight-fold path in the Buddhist doctrine. Rather than destabilizing meaning and foundational truths in regards to morality through the process of deconstruction, as does post-structuralism, Zen Buddhism aims at stabilizing these “truths” in an ultimate medium, known in Buddhist terminology as the Middle Way. This balancing act is not an intellectual exercise, but completely the contrary; it is a spiritual practice concerned only with the eradication of suffering. The “Zen” aspect of the Buddhist structural path is characterized by an expression of the truth that is free from craving and suffering. Dogen’s articulation of the Zen aspect of the Buddhist path is described in Jack Kornfield’s book *Teachings of the Buddha*. According to Kornfield, “Zen is simply the expression of truth” (156). As the expression of a truth that is free from craving and suffering, Zen Buddhism offers a credible ideology that post-structural thought would question, due to its incredulity towards truth.

The incredulity towards overarching Meaning and Truth that represent post-structural ideologies and theories makes its comparison to Zen Buddhism a dangerous and slippery slope. Likewise, the search for Truth, its expression, and a freedom from

suffering that characterize the Zen Buddhist path are difficult to follow in Zen's true and pure form when likening its ideas to those of post-structuralism. Buddhism was born from a historical and cultural tradition of Hinduism and takes on much of its ideas, terminology, and concerns. Meanwhile, post-structuralism has its roots in the concerns and theories of Western structuralism and philosophy – not religion. There is a story in Buddhism of a student who came to the Buddha seeking the answer to all his philosophical questions. The Buddha replied with a simile of how these questions are like a man who was wounded by an arrow and refused to be treated by his physician until he knew all there is to know about the person who wounded him. He would die before he learned all this. The Buddha explains the simile when he says, “I will not follow the teachings until the Blessed One has explained all the multi-form truths of the world’ – such a person would die before the Buddha had explained all this” (Kornfield, 35). This parable of the arrow articulates the important difference in the aim of Zen Buddhist practice and post-structural theory. Nevertheless, comparative academics is, as Olson pointed out above, founded on the very alterity and difference that separates discourses in the first place. A scholar who is aware, responsible, and ethical can skillfully negotiate these pitfalls with, hopefully, a valuable reward of scholarship waiting on the other end. With this awareness in mind, I approach Jean Baudrillard and Eihei Dogen in a cautiously comparative fashion.

The enigmatic and paradoxical writings of Dogen offer an interesting comparison to Baudrillard's poetic “theory-fiction.” Both Baudrillard and Dogen write in a manner that attempts to subvert – and at the same time – play with ideological reality using the tools of language, uncertainty, vivid imagery, and culture. A comparison of the two will

serve to add to the richness of each other's thought, extend the conversation between post-structuralism and Zen into a new realm, give contemporary value to Dogen's thought (particularly because of Baudrillard's emphasis on the technological and media related issues of contemporary Western culture), and contribute to the ontological discussion of contemporary life. I discovered that putting Baudrillard into conversation with Dogen addresses issues of ecology, authenticity, agency, and subject-object duality that technology has radically changed for today's global digital era. The overlapping ideas of Baudrillard and Dogen offer a space to confront these issues that technology is impacting, while teaching the twenty-first century human being to better understand the effects technology has on the human mind and how to harness a sense of well-being amid an increasingly virtual existence. My comparison will span three distinct chapters (along with an introduction and conclusion), each covering an overlapping theme, approach, or idea, beginning with a rhetorical analysis of key texts.

Chapter 1 performs a rhetorical analysis of Dogen while considering the rhetorical moves and themes from Baudrillard's essay "The Perfect Crime." I closely examine Dogen's "self-rhetorical" language, which is characterized by his use of startling imagery intended to crush stereotypical thinking, his use of paradoxical language and how it relates to the idea of a non-dual dialectical process of awakening, his backward interpretation of conventional Buddhist similes and his purpose for this unconventional logic, as well as his detailed emphasis on everyday activities and how this relates to his idea of non-dual practice-enlightenment. While examining Dogen's non-dual rhetoric (rhetoric that attempts to present non-duality), I show how Baudrillard's notion of writing about writing as the production of illusion employs similar rhetorical moves to Dogen's

in order to subvert empirical and ideological models of both the world and the self. I discuss how Baudrillard's writing exemplifies "a poetic resolution" to the search for meaning and reality and how his call for "radical thought" is answered through reading Dogen. Dogen's non-dual rhetoric calls for a "dropping away of body and mind" and "going beyond discriminatory thoughts" in order to attain (or non-attain) a release from restricted self-experience. A rhetorical analysis of Dogen offers an interesting perspective from which to approach Baudrillard's ideas from "The Perfect Crime," and to solve, as Baudrillard writes, "the irresolvable relationship between thought [and language] and reality" (267). The comparative rhetorical analysis raises some interesting parallels between Dogen and Baudrillard's recurrent theme of "reversibility."

Chapter 2 explores the theme of "reversibility" that Gerry Coulter highlights in his recent book, *Jean Baudrillard: From the Ocean to the Desert, or the Poetics of Radicality*. Reversibility is an important concept which runs through much of Baudrillard's work. The concept of reversibility can be traced back as far as Herodotus and is discussed in Book I of his *History*. Coulter writes, "Reversibility works to undermine all systems so that, through the proper functioning of what is, its reversal is produced" (6). Baudrillard posits the idea of reversibility as a challenge to Hegel's dialectical and linear notions of progress. Working in a circular and cyclical fashion, rather than in a linear manner, I examine the benefits and exigency of this approach using the cyclical Buddhist ideology of rebirth, and more specifically, Dogen's thoughts on the non-separate process of birth, death, and rebirth. I highlight the importance of irony and death to Baudrillard's reversibility and discuss overlapping statements from Dogen. I look more closely at the notion of duality, which is an idea that is of utmost importance to

both Baudrillard and Dogen, and is intimately rooted in the reversibility of systems. I discuss Baudrillard's elusive notion of "impossible exchange" in relation to duality, reversibility, and illusion, and how Dogen's approach to these ideas relates to Baudrillard's. The concept of reversibility is further brought to light through Dogen's commentary on and use of the Zen koan, as well as his emphasis on seated meditation over other ritualistic systems of practice. I also examine the idea of a "mirror," a space where Baudrillard, Dogen, and reversibility find a significant place for common reflection. These overlaps highlight the duality of subject and object as well as Baudrillard's idea that "theory precedes the world."

Chapter 3 takes a closer look at Baudrillard's idea that "theory precedes the world" while examining Dogen's emphasis on the non-separation of the subject-object process. In his book *Passwords*, Baudrillard writes, "What we have here, then, is no longer a subject-thought, which imposes an order by situating itself outside its object, keeping that object at a distance. Perhaps that situation has never existed... Thought then becomes a world-thought, no territory of which can boast an analytical mastery of things" (91). Baudrillard's notion of "going over to the object" makes an interesting comparison to Dogen's ideas on the non-separation of subject-object and mind-body phenomenal experience. Dogen echoes Baudrillard's transfer of perspectives between the subject-object experience when, in *Moon in a Dewdrop* he explains that "To carry yourself forward and experience myriad things is delusion. That myriad things come forth and experience themselves is awakening" (69). To further clarify both Baudrillard's and Dogen's subject-object reversal, I draw from Buddhist ideas of the mind-body process, which is most clearly and systematically represented in the Buddhist notion of the five

skandhas. By examining how the five *skandhas* function as a creative, theorizing agent, I examine how the process of perceiving and conceptualizing external stimuli relates to Baudrillard's notion of theory preceding the world and the relationship between the subject-object phenomena. To further illustrate these connections, I will introduce theories from the field of embodied cognition, which hypothesizes that we physically experience the world through mental simulations that are dependent upon previous experiences and various ontological assumptions about the world. Finally, I examine Baudrillard's pataphysical angle in solving the post-structural problem of theory preceding the world while showing Dogen's imaginary solution to this issue.

Chapter 1

A Rhetorical Analysis: Dogen's Non-dual Rhetoric and Baudrillard's Writing as the Production of Illusion

So, too, the value of thought lies not so much in its inevitable convergences with truth as in the immeasurable divergences which separate it from truth. – Jean Baudrillard, “The Perfect Crime”

This chapter performs a rhetorical analysis of Dogen while considering some overlapping rhetorical strategies in Jean Baudrillard's essay “The Perfect Crime.” A close analysis of each thinker's language begins to bring many similarities to light that are helpful in navigating our increasingly virtual world of technological communication. First, there is an underlying tone of ambiguity that runs through the writing of both Dogen and Baudrillard. Second, their enigmatic writings often seem to resemble poetry more than philosophy or social commentary. Third, their writings are more often than not paradoxical and counter to the conventional logic of the social and cultural norms inherent in their respective time and place. These similarities give value to a form of communication that is beyond the limitations of contemporary technological sharing apparatuses such as email, twitter, Face book, texting, and so on. By emphasizing the ambiguous, enigmatic, and paradoxical aspect of language, meaning, and communication, Dogen and Baudrillard simplify the complex abundance of information that is received

on a day to day basis in our twenty-first century world. This simplification is accomplished by Dogen's encouraging of detachment through mediation and his use of paradoxical statements, as well as Baudrillard's fictionalizing of theory and reality. In other words, Baudrillard and Dogen each create a separation between the experiencing subject and the turmoil of the phenomenal world, making both sense of non-sense, and non-sense of sense. While Dogen's rhetoric can be characterized as non-dual rhetoric (rhetoric that attempts to present non-duality), Baudrillard's language follows a similar path through his use of radical rhetoric and attempts to subvert, through language, ideological reifications of reality that language itself creates. Dogen's language reflects the ultimate eloquence of a self-rhetorical path that cuts through all dualities and utilizes metaphorical imagery, paradoxical language, and unconventional commentary on conventional Buddhist scripture. In "The Perfect Crime," Baudrillard attempts to articulate a poetic resolution to the world through writing about writing as the production of illusion and what he terms "radical thought."

Before embarking upon an analysis of the rhetorical tools Dogen and Baudrillard utilize to express the inexpressible – that moment between and behind the discrimination of things – it is helpful to take a closer look at the tools I will be utilizing to uncover Dogen's instruments of non-dual production. Due to the cultural and historical distance of Dogen and Zen Buddhism, it is necessary to first clarify a few of these Eastern ideas as well as expand on the traditionally Western notion of rhetoric. Rather than approaching the ancient idea of rhetoric from the Aristotelian perspective of the "art of persuasion," I am instead referencing the idea of sharable phenomena. By rhetoric I mean any idea, thought, sign or identity that can be made sharable from subject to subject. I also discuss

the somewhat abstract idea of non-duality (as this idea is Dogen's aim to share). Non-duality is the elimination of that imaginary line that separates all opposite extremes. For example there is the duality of subject and object, self and other, high and low, and so on. Non-duality is an understanding that the barriers that represent the differences of these ideas define and connect each to the other just as much as they separate them. I will use non-duality interchangeably with Dogen's key idea of non-separation, which gives a more distinct idea of what this line of terminology is attempting to share.

One particular duality that is characterized by the Buddhist terms *samsara* and *nirvana* is important to get across to a Western audience. *Samsara* is a Sanskrit term which means "ceaseless wandering." *Samsara* represents the idea of cyclical existence and is generally understood as pointing to the endless cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth that pervades the condition of sentient beings according to Buddhist ideology. The burning of suffering throughout each moment, each life, and each rebirth – over and over endlessly – is the ceaseless wandering of *samsara*. *Nirvana* is the end of *samsara* and is literally translated as "blowing out," as in the blowing out of a candle or a blowing out of the burning of suffering. Traditionally understood as opposites, *nirvana* and *samsara* are important Buddhist terms for understanding the subtle nature of what Dogen's non-dual rhetoric is attempting to share. In his rhetoric, Dogen utilizes what in Buddhist terms is known as *upaya* (in Sanskrit), or "skillful means" or "expedient means" (in English). It was first referenced in a chapter of the Mahayana text known as the *Lotus Sutra*. Skillful means (as I will reference *upaya* from now on), is an idea that is concerned with the skill of language as employed in pedagogical action. Skillful means is also used to explain the leading of students in such a way that occasional rest stops are offered along the path to

ultimate realization. Another way of understanding the idea of skillful means is as the way a parent convinces a child to do what is good for them. The parent may lie, strike, imprison (time-out), promise gifts, etc., all to get the child to do and see what is good for them. Dogen's use of skillful means is extremely evident throughout much of his writing.

When reading Dogen, it is important to keep in mind the transcendent spirit of religion, Buddhism, and Zen. Religion (from the Latin root *religio*, meaning to re-link) will always have an undertone of non-dual rhetoric at its core, the aim of which is to eliminate the separation between the individual self and the divine, hence holy (or whole). This meaning of religion is of course outside any dogmatic distortion of its intended utility, or any other possible etymologies of "religion" that approach the term from various ideas of '*relegere*' (re-reading), or '*religiens*' (careful). There is also '*religionem*,' which denotes a re-bonding/linking as well, but more in the sense of allegiance or respect – rather than that unspeakable connection that transcends the power human notions and ideas are capable of codifying. Nevertheless, there exists the idea known as "religion," as well as the set of various practices known as Buddhism. Buddhist culture is set up and designed as an ideology that attempts to eradicate – in the end – even the duality of itself. The two major schools of Buddhist thought, Mahayana and Hinayana, are translated as "Great Vehicle" and "Lesser Vehicle" respectively. A popular simile in Buddhism is that of a ship crossing an ocean, the ship here being the *yana* or vehicle. The "ship" in the metaphor refers to the entire canon of Buddhist teachings, the ocean is the dangers and pitfalls (suffering in Buddhist terms) from which the ship is protecting its occupants. The simile suggests that once the other shore of the ocean is reached using the ship, the ship is not picked up and carried onto the shore. Therefore,

upon enlightenment, even the path and the vehicle used to travel the path are to be let go of. The distinguishing characteristic of Zen Buddhism that sets it apart from other holy paths is that it attempts to directly arrive on the other shore, with an immediate experience of the non-duality of subject-object, self-other, God-Universe, and so on. Zen forgoes emphasizing structure and systemic rhetorical erasure of the phenomenon of “I,” to an extent, and is best characterized as using skillful means to achieve an immediate experience of non-duality, or awakening. Approaching the ideas of religion, Buddhism, and Zen as tools or practices used to bring about a non-dual experience of the human condition will help make the enigmatic writings of Dogen much more accessible and useful.

The act of writing is particularly important for both Dogen and Baudrillard. Dogen is unique for a Zen Buddhist practitioner of his time in that he wrote extensively. His master work, *Shobogenzo*, or *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye*, is constructed of ninety-six fascicles, or essays, which range in topic and title from “Washing the Face” and “Instructions on Kitchen Work,” to “The Time Being” and “One Hundred Eight Gates of Realizing Dharma.” Another text I will draw from, *Moon in a Dewdrop*, is an edited collection of four chapters with twenty-four of these ninety-six fascicles along with a fifth chapter that translates many of Dogen’s Japanese and Chinese poems. *Moon in a Dewdrop* is organized under the headings of “Practical Instructions,” “Philosophical Works,” “Poetic Imagery,” “Transmission of the Teaching,” and “Poems.” I have chosen these essays in particular because they reflect most clearly Dogen’s image and idea of the non-duality of practice and enlightenment while highlighting ideas similar to Baudrillard’s non-separation of writing as the production of illusion and reified

ideological reality. In Gerry Coulter's book *Jean Baudrillard: From the Ocean to the Desert, or the Poetics of Radicality*, he demonstrates the importance and utility of *writing* for Baudrillard when he explains that "Writing for Baudrillard was also a challenge to morality and to reality, seducing and playing with them" (80). So, too, Dogen's writing utilizes a multitude of rhetorical tools to produce an experience of the illusion of dualistic thinking.

When analyzing the non-dual rhetoric of Dogen, it is important to keep in mind his audience. Examining Dogen's rhetoric from the confines of space and time, it is easy to see that it was structured in a way that would produce an experience of "awakening," "non-duality," or some form of liberation from dualistic thinking in general for his Buddhist audience of thirteenth-century Japan (through an oral monologue or dialogue). However, the nature of writing and its journey as an artifact through space and time, along with Dogen's deconstruction (to borrow a postmodern Western idea) of the objectivity and duality of "time and being," very much complicate the idea of his audience. In his introduction to Dogen's *Treasury of the True Dharma Eye*, renowned calligrapher and contemporary Zen practitioner Kazuaki Tanahashi illustrates Dogen's non-dual perspective of space/time and being when he explains that "The distance from here to there is no longer concrete. A meditator walks on the top of a high mountain and swims deep in the ocean... time is not apart from the one who experiences it: time is the self. Time flows in 'I,' and 'I' makes the time flow. It is selfless 'I' that makes time full and complete" (xxiii). For Dogen, the timelessness of a moment means that "I" am always now, and the fullness of space means that "I" am always everywhere. To experience the "selfless I" is to experience a timeless-everywhere, beyond the limitations

of all dualities: here and there, past and future, self and other. If we who inhabit the space/time of today are to take the idea of subjective space/time as reality – as a paradoxically objective and subjective experience – then we, here and now, could also be considered Dogen’s audience. The writing down of non-dual rhetoric in general, and Dogen’s thoughts on the non-duality of space/time/being in particular, have a timeless quality that transcends the limitations of a particular audience and expands the rhetorical scope of Dogen’s writings.

The idea of Baudrillard’s audience crosses over the limitations of boundaries as well. Addressing Baudrillard’s unique audience, Coulter writes, “As a writer he was his own ideal audience, refusing to become caught up in the coercive culture that compels a writer to write, and an intellectual to think” (81). Baudrillard states, “I write for myself. I no longer pretend to that privileged position of a person who has the right to know and write for others” (qtd. in Coulter, 81). Baudrillard’s writing breaks through the barriers of traditional philosophical or academic writing and eliminates dualistic distinctions between writer/audience, theory/fiction, and scholar/artist. His approach to writing for the audience of himself, along with the publication and critique of his writings in academic circles, propels his work beyond the confines of his stated audience and the limitations of academic critique. Similarly, the barriers of writing are further broken through by Dogen’s unorthodox use of paradox and memorable imagery.

Dogen’s use of startling imagery skillfully adapts to the context in which it is placed in order to eradicate dualistic and logical thought. Startling imagery is typical within Zen discourse, as Tanahashi notes: “absurd images that are intended to crush stereotypical thinking are not uncommon in Zen heritage” (xxx). Images that do not

conform to the logics of physics and grammar are employed by Dogen in order to blur the distinction between the self and its environment. Dogen accomplishes this non-duality through the use of language that startlingly personifies nature, as when he says, “The green mountains are always walking; a stone woman gives birth to a child at night... Mountains’ walking is just like human walking. Accordingly, do not doubt mountains’ walking even though it does not look the same as humans walking. The buddha ancestors’ words point to walking” (97). Dogen gives human characteristics to one of the most omnipotent phenomena found in the world of nature (mountains) to emphasize that in the realm of non-duality, human beings and mountains are not separate. The reference at the end of the quotation to the “words of the Buddha ancestors” points to another way in which Dogen utilizes imagery to transcend the dualistic boundaries, this time between subjective experience and religious symbolism. Dogen shows this utilization when he explains that:

If a doubt arises and you think that plum blossoms are not Gautama’s eyeballs, consider whether anything other than plum blossoms may be seen as eyeballs. If you seek the eyeballs elsewhere, you will not recognize them even though you are facing them, because meeting is not consummated. Realize right now plum blossoms as eyeballs. Stop seeking any further! (121)

Dogen’s emphasis on seeing plum blossoms as Gautama Buddha’s eyeballs highlights the non-distinction between subjective reality and the “religious” or “holy” experience. The imagery of nature (here represented by plum blossoms) is combined with that of the holy figure’s field of perception (Gautama’s eyeballs, or what he sees). This combination

creates a non-dual experience for the reader/listener who holds the religious figure of Gautama Buddha in high regard.

Baudrillard's search for a "poetic resolution" to the world through his writing makes an interesting comparison to Dogen's utilization of poetic imagery. In "The Perfect Crime," Baudrillard's criticism of utilizing logical thinking to resolve the world can be seen as he explains that:

There is a twofold, contradictory exigency in thought. It is not to analyze the world in order to extract from it an improbable truth, not to adapt to the facts in order to abstract some logical construction from them, but to set in place a form, a matrix of illusion and disillusion, which seduced reality will spontaneously feed and which will, consequently, be verified remorselessly. For reality asks nothing other than to submit itself to hypotheses. And it confirms them all. That, indeed, is its ruse and its vengeance. (270)

For Baudrillard, the world will never be understood through thought's logical manipulation of it. Any and all ideological hypotheses of reality will falsely be confirmed by the very tools used to understand them, thought and language. Instead of utilizing language in a logical construction of ideas and facts to resolve the world, Baudrillard calls for a "poetic resolution" to the rhetorical shaping of the world when he writes, "Whatever its object, writing must make the illusion of that object shine forth, must make it an impenetrable enigma...The objective of writing is to alter its object, to seduce it, to make it disappear for itself. Writing aims at a total resolution – a poetic resolution... that resolution indeed of the rigorous dispersal of the name of God" (271). Baudrillard's

enigmatic language about writing as the production of illusion transforms his theoretical ideas into the realms of fiction or poetry, rather than theory. Likewise, Dogen's use of startling imagery extends his spiritual ideology beyond a logical understanding of such ideology and resolves the world through poetic imagery. While each thinker's poetic resolution to the world serves to transgress the linguistic form their writing take and bridge the gap between signifier and signified, it is the underlying paradox the language/image is put into that gives movement to the rhetoric.

The heart of Dogen's "non-dual" rhetoric can be found in his use of paradoxical language, which itself paradoxically contains the logic of enlightenment and utilizes a non-dual dialectic to express this logic beyond logic. Dogen, like many Zen teachers before and after, makes full use of the paradox as a rhetorical device to liberate the listener from logical thinking. Zen rhetoric in its essence is basically a trafficking in paradox. In his introduction to *Moon in a Dewdrop*, Tanahashi points out that "In order to help students break through the barrier of intellectual thinking, Zen masters express themselves in all sorts of unconventional ways: enigmatic statements, non sequiturs, repetitions, and tautologies" (16). Dogen follows the Zen tradition of using paradoxical language as a rhetorical device to produce the experience of reality in a non-dualistic way. At the same time, Dogen sublimates the Zen tradition by self-reflexively giving detailed, yet still paradoxical explanations of the original paradox –bypassing any logical explanation of the paradox and going directly to reality itself. Dogen produces this non-dual experience of reality through using paradoxical language to create an affirmative statement, negative statement, and then another affirmative statement. In the beginning of Dogen's essay, "Actualizing the Fundamental Point," he explains that:

As all things are buddha-dharma, there is delusion and realization,
 practice, and birth and death, and there are buddhas and sentient beings.
 As the myriad things are without an abiding self, there is no delusion, no
 realization, no buddhas, no sentient beings, no birth and death. The
 buddha way is, basically, leaping clear of the many and the one; thus there
 are birth and death, delusions and realization, sentient beings and buddhas.
 (69)

In the first line there is an affirmative statement of discrimination between delusion and enlightenment (subject and object, duality and non-duality, *samsara* and *nirvana*, and so on). The second line negates the first in a seemingly paradoxical anti-affirmation. The third line, while appearing to be a re-affirmation of the first line is actually a negation of the second line's negation, a separate and positive statement. Tanahashi elucidates this seemingly dialectical process when he points out "Thus the first step is discrimination, the second is denial of discrimination, and the third is beyond discrimination and denial of it... unlike Hegel's thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, [Dogen's dialectic] does not develop from a lower to higher level; rather each step is given an absolute value, and each step is inclusive of others" (18). The paradoxical process is intended to both create a state of understanding and at the same time contradict its own creation in an attempt to express the "beyond" – the reality that exists before reasoning in duality and non-duality arise. The subjective "truth" that each individual statement conveys is no less true than its own negation. However, the apparent contradiction (or paradox) is necessary in order to experience whatever is outside of affirmation and negation, or discrimination and denial

of discrimination. The idea of a radical “beyond” is further explored through Baudrillard’s notion of “radical thought.”

There is an underlying paradox that runs through Baudrillard’s idea of “radical thought” that connects it to Dogen’s paradoxical rhetoric. Baudrillard begins to define radical thought, explaining that “radical thought, for its part, wagers on the illusion of the world. It aspires to the status of illusion, restoring the non-veracity of facts, the non-signification of the world, proposing the opposite hypotheses that there is nothing rather than something, and going in pursuit of that nothing which runs beneath the apparent continuity of meaning” (269). Radical thought seeks to expose logical reality, its facts and their meaning for what they are – pure illusion. To avoid taking the signifier that is language or thought for its signified, radical thought employs language as a paradoxically real illusion. Baudrillard’s radical rhetoric begins to sound similar to the paradoxical rhetoric of Dogen when he explains:

That is to say, they [facts] are never more than what they are, and they are, never only what they are. The irony of the facts, in their wretched reality, is precisely that they are only what they are but that, by that very fact, they are necessarily beyond. For *de facto* existence is impossible – nothing is wholly obvious without becoming enigmatic. Reality itself is too obvious to be true. (269-70)

The enigma of the paradox both refutes and validates the real. For Baudrillard, language itself is a paradox, and radical thought seeks to bring this contradiction to light. Like Dogen’s use of the paradox, Baudrillard’s radical thought is intended to produce something both beyond and at the same time within the limitations of writing. The

contradiction and the meaning are both paradoxically in the material form of language itself. Baudrillard expresses this dual and non-dual role of language when he points out that “the resolution of meaning is to be found there – in the form itself, the formal materiality of expression” (273). While Baudrillard’s application of paradoxical language is found in his notion of radical thought, Dogen’s use of the rhetorical technique is highlighted when he applies it to traditional Buddhist teachings

Dogen’s backward and paradoxical commentary on traditional Buddhist similes highlight an unconventional Buddhist logic through the use of skillful means to produce an awakening or non-dualistic view within the Buddhist practitioner. While Dogen’s language is full of paradoxical and backward statements characteristic of Zen, as Tanahashi illustrates, he also:

Conducts a thorough investigation of phrases from a number of sutras, which makes him unique as a Zen teacher. His writings provide a synthesis of these two traditional aspects: studies of scripture which contain vast systematic expressions of the Buddhist teaching, and Zen, which emphasizes direct experience of the essence of Buddhist teaching through meditation. (xxix)

Dogen’s seamless weaving of these two traditionally separate ways of practice makes his writing particularly special and unique in that he brings the sutras (religious texts) and Buddhist ideologies to life with a direct experience of his unique interpretation of the texts.

An example of Dogen’s expressive non-dual logic between scripture and innate reality is found in his chapter entitled “Painting of a Rice-cake.” There is a Buddhist

metaphor discussed by Dogen that states that “a painting of a rice cake does not satisfy hunger” or “a painted rice cake does not fill an empty stomach.” This is usually interpreted as “studying words and letters does not help realize ultimate truth” (317). The idea of a painting in its traditional interpretation represents the signification of reality in all its forms (a painting, language, thought, etc.). The idea that these significations do not satisfy hunger is meant to show that they do not stand in for the real thing (a real rice-cake). Traditionally, the proverb is supposed to liberate the practitioner from their shackles of signifiers, or representative reality (images, words/letters, etc.). However, in Dogen’s usage, a painting, or picture (along with words, letters, and thought) are the true expression of enlightenment. Dogen’s interpretation is that words and letters found in Buddhist teachings, as an expression of enlightenment, cannot be separated from the ultimate truth. Dogen illustrates the non-duality of Buddhist scripture and innate reality when he writes:

You should examine a painted Buddha, and examine a painted rice cake...
which is form and which is mind? Pursue and investigate this in detail.
When you penetrate this matter, the coming and going of birth and death is
a painting. Unsurpassed enlightenment is a painting. The entire
phenomenal universe and the empty sky are nothing but a painting. (136)

Dogen flips the traditional idea that a painting of a rice-cake cannot satisfy hunger on its head. For Dogen, a real rice-cake is already a painting, satisfaction is a painting, and hunger is only a painting. Therefore, that there exists a duality between the painting of words and images in a Buddhist sutra and the painting of our phenomenal existence at this moment, at home or in the office is completely absurd. To Dogen, the sound of the

wind, the running of a river, or the computer screen in front of you is exactly the same as the sound of the sacred OM (AUM). Dogen's paradoxical and skillful use of this traditional Buddhist metaphor eliminates the duality that exists between scripture and direct holy experience, creating an unorthodox, yet truly profound non-dual interpretation of both traditional Buddhist scripture practice and Zen practice. Dogen's unconventional logic is employed to produce an awakening in the practitioner from their reified perspective of even Buddhist ideology – the means used to achieve this end (awakening). This technique shows the dynamic nature of skillful means in action, much like the simile of the ship (*yana*) mentioned previously. Like Dogen's application of skillful means to traditional Buddhist thought, Baudrillard dedicates his radical thought to undoing conventional understandings of existence.

Baudrillard employs similar rhetorical moves to Dogen in order to subvert empirical and ideological models of both the world and the self. Baudrillard opens "The Perfect Crime" with a quote from R.L. Stevenson: "The novel, which is a work of art, exists, not by its resemblances to life, which are forced and material... but by its immeasurable differences from life" ("Perfect Crime," 266). Stevenson's idea of the novel as existing only through its divergences from reality is juxtaposed with a comparative quote from Baudrillard on the value of thought: "So, too, the value of thought lies not so much in its inevitable convergences with truth as in the immeasurable divergences which separate it from truth" (266). He begins his radical attack on thought's alignment with waking life by countering the fabricated supposition of believing that "I am alive." Baudrillard's countering of rational empiricism is evident in the opening sentence of his essay when he points out that "It is not true that, in order to live, one has

to believe in one's own existence" (266). Like Dogen, Baudrillard skillfully adopts the opposite stance of his culture's empirical logic. He places the value of thought in this radical space that, like Dogen's unconventional logic regarding Buddhist scripture and analogies, transgresses conventional interpretations of facts and their meanings.

Baudrillard asks for thought and language to be dedicated to the production of illusion. In a closing paragraph that sounds as if it could be instructions for the teaching of Zen, Baudrillard writes, "The absolute rule is to give back more than what you were given. Never less, always more. The absolute rule of thought is to give back the world as it was given to us – unintelligible. And, if possible, to render it a little more unintelligible" (275).

The enigma and the value of each thinker's irrationally logical rhetoric are found in the very language they use to transform the world. Dogen offers an internal rhetoric of the self that may be utilized to produce an understanding of the non-distinction between the external world of phenomenon and the "I" that experiences it. Baudrillard also presents a radically subversive rhetoric aimed at producing a transformation in empirical understandings of reality through language. Dogen's rhetorical toolkit of imagery, paradoxical language, and unconventional interpretations of conventional Buddhist ideas, and Baudrillard's attempt at a poetic resolution to the world through radical thought are each utilized to produce an experience of non-duality and awakening from the ideology of meaning. These experiences are not easily shared through traditional rhetorical means, and find value today in a world where logic and technology have surpassed humanity. When looking more closely at the overlapping rhetoric and language of each

thinker, a recurring theme begins to arise. The theme is what Baudrillard termed reversibility.

Chapter 2

The Illusion of Progress: Reversibility and Dogen's Buddhism

Being and non-being create each other.

Difficult and easy support each other.

Long and short define each other.

High and low depend on each other.

Before and after follow each other. – Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching

These words, attributed to the Chinese Taoist master Lao Tzu, reflect the dependent relationship between dual ideas within systems of meaning. Duality is an issue that is very important to both Baudrillard and Dogen. For Dogen, duality offers the soil from which enlightenment may blossom. For Baudrillard, duality rests at the center of what Coulter calls Baudrillard's "one great thought" (51), reversibility. As a twenty-first century sociologist (in his later works), Baudrillard is concerned with what he characterizes as the irreversibility of contemporary Western culture and its continuing linear synthesis and absorption of counter culture. This concern extends to our culture's reliance on technological systems of communication and value as well. Baudrillard deployed reversibility to, as Coulter explains, "poetically transfigure the world [by reinforcing its original illusion] in his thought and writing" (2). Approaching Baudrillard's concept of reversion from the perspective of Dogen's Buddhism highlights

many similar patterns of thought that help in understanding Baudrillard's abstract ideas. For example, the cyclical, poetic form of reversibility is further brought into the space of the spiritual when considering the Buddhist idea of rebirth, along with its poetic irony. To connect the circular, ironic, and quasi-spiritual space of Baudrillard's reversibility to Dogen further, the idea of "impossible exchange" is helpful. Baudrillard's notion of impossible exchange, which is intimately connected to the idea of reversibility, is more easily grasped when looking at the idea of the Zen koan. A koan is a riddle or question that is usually in the form of a dialogue, and is utilized as a test by the teacher to determine the level of understanding the student has. Also, reversibility is further appreciated in understanding the various systems of thought in Dogen's Buddhism, such as *zazen* (sitting meditation practice, which for Dogen was emphasized over other ritualistic systems). Baudrillard's important idea of reversibility brings together many of the enigmatic concepts he emphasized throughout his work: irony, duality, and impossible exchange. Approaching these ideas from Dogen's Buddhist perspective is helpful in understanding how reversibility functions in removing the veil of linear notions of progress, reinforcing the more circular play of illusion (from the Latin, *il-ludere*, "in play").

Reversibility is an idea that rejects Hegel's dialectic, going beyond any notion of linear progressive synthesis. Reversibility is an ancient concept in Western thought that is traced back to Herodotus. In his essay on reversibility in *The Baudrillard Dictionary*, Gerry Coulter writes, "Herodotus speaks of those who were 'great long ago' but who have now 'become small'" (Coulter, 181). Beyond any simple reversal of fortunes, reversibility for Baudrillard's contemporary Western audience refers to the seed of

destruction woven into the very fabric of systems themselves. For Baudrillard, irreversibility, rather than reversibility, is the evil to be avoided. Coulter articulates both the intrinsic destabilizing mechanism of reversibility and the value Baudrillard attributes to it when he writes:

Reversibility is predicated on Baudrillard's belief, and his observation, that systems have within them a kind of built-in ability to undermine themselves by their very functioning. Hence, when advanced corporate and scientific medical systems develop antibiotics we find virulent viruses quickly develop which would not otherwise have done so... In his distinctive poetic fashion Baudrillard deploys the concept of reversibility to broaden our intellectual horizons concerning development, progress, and systems... It is the concept which he deploys to argue that modernity is a mythology devoted to the irreversibility of time, production, and history. (182-83)

Baudrillard employs reversibility to go beyond what he sees as the linear, progressive, and absorbing functions of systems. It is a spiraling, circular pattern that may move in any direction at any moment except upward (towards progress). For Baudrillard, progress is an illusion that only simulates itself as progress. To further illustrate Baudrillard's idea of reversibility, it is helpful to look at the Buddhist concept of birth, death, and rebirth.

The cyclical and dependent Buddhist idea of birth, death, and rebirth is a system of thought that, like Baudrillard's idea of reversibility, has the seed of its own destruction sewn into the soil of its creation. The Buddhist concept of *samsara* (literally translated as

“ceaseless wandering”) highlights the cyclical essence of birth, death, and rebirth found in Buddhist thought. The concept of *nirvana* (literally translated as “blowing out”) is *samsara*’s reversal. This complex, circular system that represents both the goal and the path of Buddhist practice is best characterized by the Tibetan Buddhist image known as the Wheel of Becoming or the Wheel of Life. In his book *The Path of Individual Liberation*, Chogyam Trungpa explains:

In Tibetan iconography the activity of *samsara* is depicted as a wheel of life. The wheel of life is a portrait of *samsara*. Therefore, it is also a portrait of *nirvana*, or the undoing of the *samsaric* coil. The wheel of life represents the compulsive newness in which the universe recurs, as the death of one experience gives birth to the next within the realm of time. In this continual experience of birth and death, each new experience contains the quality of the previous one. (66)

Within the Tibetan Buddhist wheel of life, there is no linear progression between birth, death, and rebirth. Each part of the system is dependent on the other, and moves in a connecting circular fashion; hence the metaphor of a wheel. The Tibetan wheel of life highlights an apparent irony through its depiction of opposites (*samsara* and *nirvana*) co-existing within a circular process. The irony that *nirvana* is found within the very soil of *samsara* is an irony that resonates with Baudrillard’s idea of reversibility.

Irony and death play an integral role in Baudrillard’s reversibility and are further supported by Dogen’s commentary on birth and death. The irony of death helps Baudrillard to articulate how reversibility functions within systems. This subtle and ironic

phantom is hinted at by Coulter: “From his first use of the term in a more analytical manner to his last (in a more ironic way), reversibility remains a quasi-spiritual entity in Baudrillard’s thought – a kind of evil spirit that would ensure that every system will be overturned” (183). For Baudrillard, the irony of death and a system’s destruction is found within the idea that a person or system creates the very opportunity for its opposite’s (life and death, creation and destruction) fruition by attempting to avoid it. The ironic evil spirit of Death is no more evident than in the story called “Death in Samarkand,” which Baudrillard articulates when he explains:

Consider the story of the soldier who meets Death at a crossing in the marketplace and believes he saw him make a menacing gesture in his direction. He rushes to the king’s palace and asks the king for his best horse so that he might flee during the night far from Death, as far as Samarkand. Upon which the king summons Death to the palace and reproaches him for having frightened one of his best servants. But Death, astonished, replies: ‘I didn’t mean to frighten him. It was just that I was surprised to see this soldier here, when we had a rendezvous tomorrow, in Samarkand.’ (qtd. in Coulter, 73)

This story is an example of the irony of reversibility in action. By setting up an irreversible, linear idea of birth and death, in which all functions of the system are striving towards the erasure of creation’s reversal, Baudrillard enjoys the comical irony of arriving exactly where one is trying to avoid going. This irony springs forth from the fact that each and every system has within it both its creation and destruction, each person both their life and death. Like the example from the Tibetan wheel of life in which

samsara and *nirvana* both reside within the same process, birth and death are one and the same. Each carries with it the other's reversal. Dogen illustrates this invisible layering of reversibility when he writes:

Coming and going of birth and death is the true human body means that even though birth-and-death is where ordinary people drift about, it is where great sages are liberated... Not abandoning birth, you see death. Not abandoning death, you see birth. Birth does not hinder death. Death does not hinder birth... Accordingly, birth and death are the study of the way. Birth is not like one sheet of cloth; death is not like two rolls of cloth. Death is not the opposite of birth; birth is not the opposite of death. (93-4)

Dogen highlights the circular irony of birth and death by emphasizing their intimate and layered relationship. Examining how Dogen shows birth and death to be non-oppositional highlights the non-linear aspect of a circular process that places birth and death on the always reversible and always connected vantage point of a circle. Likewise, the circular process of birth and death, known as *samsara* ("where ordinary people drift about") is ironically the same process "where great sages are liberated," known as enlightenment or *nirvana*. The irony of *nirvana* for a Buddhist is that it is not separate from *samsara*. Tanahashi illustrates this irony when he writes, "It is ironic that when one observes the tremendous difference between awakening and delusion and seeks awakening, one suddenly comes across the teaching" (17). Approaching reversibility from this Buddhist perspective begins to show the importance of duality in general for the concept.

Duality plays an integral role in formulating Baudrillard's thought on reversibility and is more easily understood by grasping Dogen's take on the term. Baudrillard connects duality and reversibility in his book *Passwords*, asking, and "Should we see duality – of which reversibility is, in a way, an applied form – as a principle?" (85). Therefore, to understand reversibility, it is necessary to examine the principle of duality. In her essay on duality in *The Baudrillard Dictionary*, Ashley Woodward expands on the importance of duality to Baudrillard's thought:

Duality is one of Baudrillard's most central ideas, with which many of his other concepts and contentions have an integral relation.... He deploys this principle in contrast to the metaphysical principle of unity, which, he contends, has been dominating in the history of religious and philosophical thought and continues to pervade thought today. (60)

For Baudrillard, duality is the connecting idea from which many of his other concepts come, including reversibility. Baudrillard's duality is most frequently applied in order to reverse reified notions of morality within social systems. His primary concern is with "evil's" subordinate position to "good," as well as "good's" connotation to unity.

Jonathan Smith argues in his essay "Manichaeism" that Baudrillard's alternative dualism draws from Manichaeism, an ancient doctrine from the Persian philosopher Mani (C.E. 215-77) that helped Baudrillard, "locate his thinking within the dual form" (115). This minor religion allows Baudrillard an example of a dualistic hypothesis in which Good and Evil are positioned in a necessary and fundamentally oppositional relation.

Baudrillard articulates this primordial duality in *Passwords* when he writes:

For my part, I find it more fascinating to posit an irreversible, irreconcilable duality as the underlying principle. We set good and evil against each other in dialectical terms in such a way that a morality is possible – that is to say, in such a way that we can opt for one or the other... I regard duality as the true source of all energy, without, however, passing any verdict on which of the two principles – good or evil – has primacy. The key thing is the antagonism between them, and the impossibility of founding a world order and, at the same time, accounting for its total context of uncertainty. We cannot do that, and that is what evil is. (86-87)

Baudrillard's insistence that duality itself is primary, over Good or Evil individually, as well as his remark that the impossibility of unifying a moral reality is itself evil highlights a paradox that is reminiscent of Dogen's non-dialectical system of thought.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, typical of Dogen's rhetoric is an affirmation, a negation, and a negation of the negation. This process is demonstrated in its most simple form when Dogen writes, "An ancient Buddha said, 'Mountains are mountains'... These words do not mean mountains are mountains; they mean mountains are mountains" (107). The first two statements set up a duality that the third statement, rather than synthesizing into a unified whole, uses to create a paradox that avoids unification by giving absolute value to each statement, while remaining, at the same time, inclusive of the others. Examining Baudrillard's Manichean dualism from this perspective reveals that Baudrillard emphasizes the evil of duality in order to maintain both the inclusive and absolute value of the duality principle in a world where unity and

good have pervaded the realm of thought for so long. Baudrillard's attempt to negate the good of unity through the evil of duality allows the reversal of a moral system that has placed primacy on unity and good, while through the very paradox he creates, reestablishes the principle of duality itself where morality is concerned. This reversal can also be seen in Dogen, who subverts Buddhist morality. Dogen's subversion is paradoxical to the preconceived stereotypes of a Buddhist system in which compassion and philanthropy play such an integral role. This misconceived belief is particularly true for contemporary Western audiences. Dogen attempts to cut the roots of stereotypical morality and "good" when he writes, "Proceed with the mind which neither grasps nor rejects, the mind unconcerned with name or gain. Do not practice buddha-dharma with the thought that it is to benefit others" (34). Dogen is here pointing to a practice and way that is outside of the symbolic world of gain and loss, referencing a moral exchange that cannot be valued by the illusory ideas of gain and benefit. Baudrillard echoes Dogen's reference to the illusory nature of gain when he coins the idea of "impossible exchange."

Impossible exchange highlights the importance of duality and illusion in regard to reversibility. Baudrillard posits the idea of impossible exchange to show the radical unexchangeability of our current system of globalized capitalism and reality itself. In his essay on Impossible Exchange found in *The Baudrillard Dictionary*, Rex Butler frames the context Baudrillard is speaking from when he points out that:

Our contemporary, self-referential systems of simulation have no external point of reference and can be judged only in their own terms. Or, more precisely, because these systems have no external point of reference they

can no longer be judged at all. They can continue to expand, increase in size or become more efficient, but only in their own terms. (107)

What Butler is alluding to here is Baudrillard's hypothesis that systems today attempt to account for everything, even their opposite. This leaves reality without a referent, without a dual, and therefore un-exchangeable. Butler highlights this process of systematizing extrapolation stating that, "There is nothing that can be held against these systems of simulation that is not revealed to already be part of them, indeed possible from the beginning only because of them" (107). Because the system itself has no dual, the exchange of reversibility is impossible. To articulate the idea of impossible exchange, Baudrillard turns to our reified, ideological understanding of the world itself. In *Passwords*, Baudrillard remarks on the all-inclusive non-equivalency of the world, writing that "The world is un-exchangeable because, overall, it has no equivalent anywhere. Since everything is part of the world, there is nothing external against it which it could be measured, to which it could be compared and hence by which it could be assessed in value terms. In a certain sense, it has no price" (78). It is at this point, the point of the world's impossibility of exchanging it for anything else, the point where all uncertainty disappears and everything becomes "real," that the very reversal of the world becomes possible through the "Nothing" that runs behind it. It is the very illusion at the heart of exchange, the world, and the real that Baudrillard shows to be the world's reversible dual. Baudrillard emphasizes this fundamental illusion when he writes, "In my opinion, exchange is a delusion, an illusion, but everything conspires to have us act as though ideas, words, commodities, goods and individuals can be exchanged... That death itself can be exchanged for something" (77). For Baudrillard, the Real is that which

cannot be grasped at all. The Real is beyond our capacity as humans to exchange for anything else, and is therefore an impossible exchange. The world, the real, and their illusions of exchangeability hide behind appearances. It is this illusory anti-matter that represents impossible exchange which helps us more clearly see Dogen's Buddhism.

Comparing Dogen's reversal of reified ideas of the self through the koan with Baudrillard's idea of impossible exchange reinforces the non-veracity of facts and the underlying illusion of the "real." The fundamental idea of illusion that represents impossible exchange is emphasized by Baudrillard in his book *Impossible Exchange*, where he argues that "Being without possible verification, the world is a fundamental illusion. Whatever can be verified locally, the uncertainty of the world, taken overall, is not open to debate. There is no integral calculus of the universe... This is how it is with any system" (3). It is from the perspective of uncertainty as a valued way of understanding the world that the Zen tradition of the koan can be seen as helpful in decoding Baudrillard's idea of impossible exchange. The koan is usually characterized as an enigmatic and paradoxical use of language in the form of a riddle or story. Dogen's commentary on traditional Chinese and Japanese koans makes up a large part of his writing. This idiosyncratic commentary reflects the depth and spirit of the original Buddhist story and is characterized by further releasing its audience from the certainty it thought it had captured from the original story. For example, a popular question found in many Zen koans concerns the story of the first Zen patriarch, Bodhidharma. Dogen frames the original story in his book *Shobogenzo*, asking:

What if you were hanging by your teeth from a tree branch on a one-thousand foot cliff, with no place for your hands or feet to reach? All of a

sudden someone under the tree asks you, “What is the meaning of Bodhidharma coming from India?” If you open your mouth to respond, you will lose your life. If you don’t respond, you don’t attend to the question. Tell me, what would you do? (Dogen, 638)

Dogen goes on examining this story that represents the impossibility of exchanging words, or thought, for the experience of enlightenment. As soon as we open our mouth to ask the question, or respond to the question, we lose it. If we do not ask or respond we miss the opportunity to understand the unique situation of the human condition. Dogen’s commentary goes on to explain the meaning of this koan in his idiosyncratic and paradoxical way, stating “Thus, know that buddhas and ancestors who respond to [and ask] the question, *What is the meaning of Bodhidharma coming from India?* all respond [and ask the question] at the very moment of hanging by their teeth from a tree branch” (641). By pointing to the impossible idea of speaking on this important Zen question with a closed mouth, Dogen is articulating the idea of seeing beyond the limiting and dualistic functioning of thought and language, in essence, the non-verifiable nature of the world. To bring this logic back to the idea of impossible exchange, there is a similar uncertainty in Baudrillard’s language when he writes, “One cannot conceive life and the ultimate purpose of life at one and the same time” (5). Like Dogen’s utilization of and commentary on the koan to elucidate the illusion of having understood the meaning of the original story, Baudrillard posits the notion of impossible exchange to also highlight the phantasm of “certainty.” He references this idea of missing the target of understanding when he writes, “The illusion of having ‘overcome’ this uncertainty is a mere phantasm of the understanding – a phantasm which lurks behind all value systems and

representations of an objective world” (14). To further illustrate the illusion of meaning that impossible exchange represents, Baudrillard explores the idea of a double, or mirror; a concept also found in a classic Zen story.

The metaphor of a mirror is utilized by both Baudrillard and Dogen’s predecessor Hui Neng to show the illusion of the world’s verification. In *Impossible Exchange*, Baudrillard shows the inseparable relationship between thought and the world when he points out that:

There is no equivalent of the world. That might even be said to be its definition – or lack of it. No equivalent, no double, no representation, no mirror. Any mirror whatsoever would still be part of the world. There is not enough room both for the world and its double. So there can be no verifying of the world. This is, indeed, why ‘reality’ is an imposture. (3)

Speaking outside of the symbolic order of things and their referents, Baudrillard posits illusion as the fundamental principle of the world. He sees a seductive play of duality on a cosmic and microcosmic scale as creating only the illusion of a “real.” Where impossible exchange as a term comes into play for Baudrillard is in attempting to define a world in which any definition of the world is already a part of the world, because we are part of the world. This paradox is evident when examining the idea of a sword cutting itself, or an eye seeing itself. The eye that sees itself must utilize a mirror, but the image that it sees is only a reflection. This paradox is more closely examined in the Zen tradition. Hui Neng, the sixth patriarch of Chinese Buddhism, articulates the underlying illusion of reality in the autobiographical section of his sutra, *The Sutra of Hui Neng*. The

story goes that the fifth patriarch, searching for his replacement to transmit the true teaching, asks the monks of his community to submit a stanza reflecting their understanding of Buddhism. Shin Shau, the elder monk of the community composes the following stanza:

Our body is the Bodhi-tree,
 And our mind a mirror bright.
 Carefully we wipe them hour by hour,
 And let no dust alight. (15)

Hui Neng, (who was a poor, illiterate beggar) upon hearing this stanza and realizing that its author did not truly see into the nature of reality, asked a fellow community member to write a reply stanza. Hui Neng, the future sixth patriarch responded:

There is no Bodhi-tree,
 Nor stand of a mirror bright.
 Since all is void, Where can the dust alight? (18)

Hui Neng's reply illustrates the underlying emptiness and illusoriness of ultimate reality. He bypasses the metaphorical signification of mind as a mirror reflecting the world and emphasizes instead the mind's fundamental illusoriness. While the Zen tradition is concerned in particular with the self that understands the world, Baudrillard focuses more on the artificial spheres that make up the world the self both creates and inhabits. "Impossible exchange" is a term that allows Baudrillard an articulation of the uncertainty that lies outside the systemization of thought and the world. Baudrillard shows the application of impossible exchange when explains that:

The illusion of the economic sphere lies in its having aspired to ground a principle of reality and rationality on the forgetting of this ultimate reality of impossible exchange. Now, that principle is valid only within an artificially bounded sphere. Outside that sphere lies radical uncertainty. And it is this exiled, foreclosed uncertainty which haunts systems and generates the illusion of the economic, the political, and so on. It is the failure to understand this which leads systems into incoherence, hypertrophy and, in some sense, leads them to destroy themselves. (6-7)

Everything in the symbolic order, such as the economic, political, thought, and technology eventually will reach the point of impossible exchange. These spheres will meet the shadowy void that runs parallel to them. This meeting at the point of impossible exchange is what the Zen tradition of Dogen attempts to reinforce. By understanding the way in which Zen approaches the reified ideologies of thought's systemization, Baudrillard's notion of reversibility becomes much clearer. Zen takes into account Baudrillard's notion of the uncertainty of the world through his idea of impossible exchange, and highlights the reversibility of all things within the symbolic order. For Dogen, the uncertainty and reversibility of systems is highlighted in his emphasis on the simple practice of "sitting."

Dogen taught the practice of *zazen*, literally translated as seated meditation, over the multitude of other Buddhist practices popular at the time. Dogen inherited this formula for practice from his teacher in China, Rujing, whom he encountered during his travels while searching for an "authentic" teacher of Buddhism. Tanahashi elaborates on Rujing's "single minded" system of practice when he writes:

Rujing taught that studying Zen is ‘dropping away body and mind’ and that students should not engage in such other practices as reciting Buddha’s name, chanting sutras, or holding rites of repentance. He taught a method of meditation called *zhigandazuo* (*shikantaza* in Japanese) – a single-minded sitting meditation wherein one does not try to solve questions or attain realization. (6)

Dogen’s and Rujing’s efforts to simplify the complex systems of practice found throughout Buddhism reflect the heart of the understanding achieved by the Buddha and this reflection attempts to avoid the formulation of meaning found in other ritualistic systems. In other words, the method or system itself is the goal. The non-dialectical system of Dogen’s *zazen* is articulated by Tanahashi when he explains that “Dogen teaches that this practice, called *zazen*, is not merely a method by which one reaches awakening, but is itself awakening... In Zen particularly, this understanding is regarded not as a step-by-step achievement but as an immediate and complete experience” (12). Dogen’s formulation of a human system, simplified to the point of “just sitting” in single-minded awareness, escapes the ideological structuring of meaning. Any meaning that becomes attached to the system will eventually be “dropped away,” and all that will remain is an abiding within an impossible exchange and endless reversibility.

Baudrillard’s theme of reversibility challenges dialectical and linear notions of progress. As we become progressively reliant on computers, smart phones, and other virtual networks, reversibility is an idea that is important to keep in mind. The circular pattern of reversibility’s dualistic functions within systems holds at all times the seed of its own undoing. The exigence of reversibility is highlighted by Dogen’s commentary on

traditional Zen Buddhist koans and his emphasis on seated, single-minded meditation as well as the Buddhist idea of rebirth. The various ideas and terms that Baudrillard employs to show the reversibility principle are further elucidated by approaching them from Dogen's Buddhist perspective. Duality is at the core of each thinker's philosophy and the theme of reversibility shows this fundamental principle in action. Another duality that finds an overlapping between the philosophies of Dogen and Baudrillard is the reversal of subject and object and its relationship to Baudrillard's idea that "theory precedes the world."

Chapter 3

Going Beyond the Object: The World as Embodied Theory

When you ride in a boat and watch the shore, you might assume that the shore is moving.

But when you keep your eyes closely on the boat, you can see that the boat moves.

Similarly, if you examine myriad things with a confused body and mind you might suppose that your mind and nature are permanent. When you practice intimately and return to where you are, it will be clear that nothing at all has unchanging self. – Dogen

Dogen's metaphor of the shore and the boat is a fine example of theorizing the nature of the world through one's limited subject-object experience. It raises many important questions concerning the relationship between subject and object, mind and body, organism and environment, theory and the world. Coulter articulates a very interesting post-structural perspective of these ideas when he points out that "It is in these deserts [of postmodernity] that we become aware, as did Baudrillard and other poststructuralist thinkers, that theory precedes the world (there is nothing that can be said of the world that is not already framed by our approach to it)" (5). For Baudrillard, theory preceding the world culminates in the World and the "Real" as lost and forever contaminated referents (from the classic form of the sign, theorized by Saussure and consisting of the signifier and the signified). For Dogen, theory preceding the world

highlights his acknowledgment of the world's illusory and endlessly subjective nature as well as adds a much more physical aspect to the equation through his emphasis of mind/body non-separation and the Buddhist idea of the self. As theories of the world are increasingly shaped by the technological tools used to portray meaning and identity (such as twitter and Face book), examining how Baudrillard and Dogen approach the phenomena of the object shows how easily these purely artificial and illusory simulations can come to stand in for the original. This has devastating consequences for issues of authenticity, agency, and privacy. In approaching Baudrillard's idea that "theory precedes the world," it is helpful to look more closely at his emphasis on the object, Dogen's non-separation of the object and the body-mind phenomenon, the Buddhist idea of the body-mind as a process of five aggregates, the field of embodied cognition, and Baudrillard's pataphysical perspective.

The importance of the "object" to Baudrillard highlights a contemporary culture in which the ultimate object of the "World" will never again come before a theory of it. Baudrillard positions the "object" (or that which is not traditionally thought of as the subject) as his most pivotal concept when in *Passwords* he explains that:

I chose that angle from the beginning, because I wanted to break with the problematic of the subject. The question of the object represented the alternative to that problematic, and it has remained the horizon of my thinking. There were also reasons linked to the time we were living through: in the 1960's, the transition from the primacy of production to the primacy of consumption brought objects to the fore. (3)

This positioning of the idea of the object over its alternative notion of the subject begins to show the historical, temporal, and cultural importance of the object to the transition from the twentieth to the twenty-first century in Western philosophy. According to Baudrillard, the movement from modernity to post-modernity completely transfigured the traditional subject-object relationship that defined modernity. Social and cultural phenomena such as television, broadcast media, and consumption-based advertising reshaped the status of the object as a mirror for the subject (inherited from the Enlightenment) to the object as a screen or scene for the network of subjects. Ryan Bishop points to a fatal and obscene transformation of the object for Baudrillard in his essay “Modernity” in *The Baudrillard Dictionary* when he explains that:

The mirror... has yielded to the screen and the network enacted in a non-space called ‘the obscene.’ The scene, too, is disappearing and is being replaced by the obscene, a term he uses in an unusual manner while also maintaining elements of its common usage in that the obscene is the space where all difference is obliterated and everything is viewable. (134)

The object as a scene and experienced through the screen had the effect of creating notions of a dual reality that is separated into the private and public scenes. Sometime in the 1970’s, Baudrillard argues, these separate scenes began to become diffuse and disappear into what he calls the “obscene.” Baudrillard’s use of “obscene” is meant to show an invasion of the “performative” public scene with the “real” private scene – the results of which creates a space where nothing is any longer hidden or private and, subsequently, everything is real. Rather than referencing the unknowable “real” that is typical of post-structural thought, Baudrillard instead posits a “real” that is entirely

viewable. This transformation has fatal consequences for the object. In his essay “Object,” William Pawlett points to the fatal strategy of the object when he points out that “Objects elude the regimes of control erected by subjects, becoming ‘pure’ or ‘fatal.’ Language itself becomes a fatal object; its materiality or literalness prevents or suddenly shatters the development of coded, referential meanings which dissolve in wit, poetry, slips of the tongue, nonsense and aphorism” (142-43). Here, the fatal strategy of the object is shown to encompass an impossible reference to what the subject intends; the object takes on a life of its own. The object is forever separated from the subject and its intended meaning. Like Baudrillard, Dogen’s approach to the object has ramifications for the meaning of the world as well.

Dogen’s commentary on the object dissolves its apparent duality, highlighting that any theory of the world would already precede it. Tanahashi illustrates the relativity of an object theory for Dogen when, in the introduction to Dogen’s *Moon in a Dewdrop* he explains “An object is big or small according to one’s viewpoint. If one becomes free of viewpoints, objects are no longer experienced in terms of comparisons” (15).

Tanahashi is showing Dogen’s emphasis on becoming free from theories through the elimination of their dualities. This non-duality of theories leaves the world clear and apparent as what it is, empty. Therefore, for the world to have any appearance at all, theory would necessarily need to precede it. Dogen illuminates both the subject and the object through the metaphor of moonlight when states that “The mind moon is alone and full. Its light swallows myriad forms. Moonlight does not illuminate objects. Objects do not exist. Light and objects both disappear” (130). Dogen attempts to point to a reality beyond the limiting subject-object experience. He uses the perspective of the subject and

the object interchangeably to highlight both their dependence and non-separation to each other, and also to connect this understanding with that of the goal in his Buddhist practice. Dogen demonstrates the subject-object switch, explaining that “This mind is the moon. This moon is itself mind. This is penetrating and comprehending the mind of Buddha ancestors and Buddha heirs” (130). In the first sentence, the duality between the traditional subject (mind) and the traditional object (moon) is erased. In the second sentence, the object becomes the subject, and in the third, this non-duality is referenced to the ultimate understanding of Buddhist practice. This shifting back and forth between subject and object shows that, for Dogen, there is an inescapability and non-separation between the subjective theorizer and the objective world. For Dogen, the object-subject relationship of the body-mind phenomena is where the theory begins to take on a more empirical aspect in preceding the world.

Rather than the traditional Cartesian duality of the mind as subject and the body as object, Dogen posits the object-body as equal to, and not separate from the subject-mind. In his book, *Zen and the Art of Postmodern Philosophy*, Carl Olson elaborates on Dogen’s perspective of the body when he points out that:

The human body, for Dogen, is not a hindrance to the realization of enlightenment; it rather serves as the vehicle through which enlightenment is realized by the aspirant. Dogen argues that those aspiring to become enlightened strive with their bodies, practice seated meditation (zazen) with their bodies, understand with their bodies, and attain enlightenment with their bodies. Thus the body attains a metaphysico-religious status in Dogen’s thought. (93)

Dogen's anti-Cartesian approach to the body-mind phenomena has important consequences for the traditional subject-object experience and for theorizing the world. For Dogen, the body in Zen meditation transcends its definition as object in the Cartesian sense, as well as subject – it is both subject and object. Olson argues that Dogen's approach to the body even brings it beyond a subject-object duality when he writes, "For Dogen, the body is both subject and object, and more. What does Dogen mean by more? Dogen answers, 'What we call the body and mind in the Buddha Way is grass, trees, and wall rubble; it is wind, rain, water, and fire'... Therefore, the body and mind represent the entire world" (95). Now, understanding this in an intellectual capacity is missing Dogen's point. The body is emphasized because Dogen's non-dual meditation of body, mind, and world is an existential practice that is concerned with eradicating the illusion of demarcation lines between the world and the body. In his book *Attunement Through the Body*, Shigenori Nagatomo points to the importance of the experiential and practical aspect of Dogen's meditation practice, rather than a theoretical understanding, when he writes that "A person must allow the practical to take precedence over an intellectual or theoretical understanding of the Buddha Way" (80). To ignore the physical aspect of Dogen's spiritual practice is to simply embark upon another intellectual exercise of theorizing the world into existence. The body plays an integral part in Dogen's Buddhist practice, and to better understand the traditional Buddhist notion of the body it is important to take a closer look at its fundamental parts – known in Buddhism as the five *skandhas*.

In Buddhist ideology, the bodied self is made up of five *skandhas* or aggregates that function in a process that creates the illusion of a separate and individual "I." The

term *skandha* is best understood from the perspective of a “heap,” or aggregate. The five *skandhas* are individual parts of a whole process that produce the illusion of an ego.

These aggregates are identified as the following: (1) form, (2) feeling, (3) perception or impulse, (4) mental formation or concept, and (5) consciousness. Nagatomo breaks these five parts down in a much more metabolic fashion, including their original Sanskrit terminology when he defines them as:

(1) the physical form (*rupa*), with its six sense organs [eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind], (2) their corresponding faculties of receiving external stimuli (*vedana*) [sight, sound, smell, taste, tactile sensation, and thought or mind], (3) the faculty of synthetically representing what is received (*samjna*), (4) the dispositional tendency as a potential formative energy (*samskara*), and finally (5) discriminatory consciousness (*vijnana*).
(82-83)

The important thing to keep in mind when looking at these aggregates more closely is that they work together as abstract parts of an abstract whole, without one part having more importance or playing a more responsible role in creating the illusion of an “I.” Nagatomo reinforces the equality of each part when he writes, “One must observe in understanding these five aggregates that there is no one aggregate singled out as having a ‘privileged’ status in the constitution of the human body” (83). This is an important aspect of Dogen’s view of the body that, again, separates it from the Cartesian privileging of the mind. The Buddhist notion of the five *skandhas* includes a complex system of both mental and physical processes throughout each of the five parts of the whole, without a privileging of the intellect over the physical. Dogen’s holistic approach to the body,

which includes the concept of consciousness as part of the embodied self, has interesting ramifications when comparing it to Baudrillard's idea of the object and his post-structural notion that theory precedes the world.

The Buddhist approach to the thinking subject as a process of five aggregates highlights a physical aspect to the thinking subject's precedence over its so-called objective world. In his book *The Path of Individual Liberation*, Chogyam Trungpa illustrates the connection of the five *skandhas* to the theorizing subject, or "I," when he points out that "The skandhas present a complete picture of ego. According to Buddhist psychology, the ego is simply a collection of skandhas or heaps – but actually there is no such thing as ego. It is a brilliant work of art, a product of the intellect, which says, 'Let's give all this a name. Let's call it I'" (6). As a product of the creative intellect, the "I" that perceives the world as a separate and individual entity is thought into existence. Baudrillard echoes this paradoxical sentiment in *Passwords* when he writes, "The world thinks us, but it is *we* who think that" (91). The psychological aspect of thinking the physical "I" and its separate physical world is a co-dependent process in which the third and fourth *skandhas* can offer some help in clarifying. The third skandha, "perception or impulse," or, as Nagatomo characterizes, "the faculty of synthetically representing what is received," articulates the psychological and physical process of creative perception. This is where the heart of the Buddhist theoretical precedence over the world is found. While the first *skandha* – namely physical form with its six sense organs – covers the phenomena that are eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind, the second *skandha* – feeling, or the six sense organs corresponding faculty of receiving external stimuli – covers the process of receiving sight, sound, smell, taste, tactile sensations, and

information. The third *skandha* represents, or theorizes, the received stimuli, thereby already establishing a precedence of theory before the world. The fourth *skandha* creates an even larger gap between theory and the world. Characterized as “mental formations or concepts,” the fourth *skandha* is much more profoundly understood through the idea of subjective likes, or dislikes. This is the part of the five-step process of “being” in which labels like “good,” “bad,” “beautiful,” or “ugly” come into play. Nagatomo’s notion of the fourth *skandha* – the dispositional tendency as a potential formative energy – shows how the subjective individual is responsible, from a karmic perspective, in shaping the definition of their physical world. The fifth and final part of the process, “discriminatory consciousness,” solidifies the individual’s theory of the world, as well as the idea of a separate ego that experiences it. To demonstrate the abstract nature of intellectualizing the physical world, it is helpful to turn to the contemporary field of embodied cognition.

The field of embodied cognition offers a perspective in which the subjective individual, the mind, body, and lived experience, come together to create a meaning of the world. Cognitive scientist Benjamin Bergen eliminates the demarcation lines between language, physical experience, and thought when he explains:

The sights and sounds, the actions, perhaps even the smells and tastes – you bring them to life through simulation. To do this, you pay close attention to the details of grammar, and you simulate early and often. These simulations are based specifically on your cognitive style and on your personal history of experiences, siphoned through your language and culture. (248)

Bergen's example here points to the idea of the individual subject's responsibility and role in creating meaning through external stimuli – in Bergen's example that external stimuli is language. The mind-body process reads a passage and, depending on history, experience, and culture, simulates an embodied experience of the passage, including activation within the parts of the brain that are reserved for those physical sensations. For example the word "rose" would typically activate the experience of smelling a rose, or the physical representation of seeing a "rose," or the pain of touching a rose's thorns – all depending upon the individual's history, experience, and/or culture. Embodied cognition argues that the neurological pathways that activate in the brain upon reading the word "rose" are exactly the same neurological pathways that activate upon seeing an actual object that is designated "rose." This idea begins to bring clarity to Baudrillard's problem of the "real," as well as his idea of the object.

The idea of "simulation," as a copy of an original, is important for Baudrillard because it designates a disappearance of the distinction between a simulation and the real. Andrew Werner, in his essay "Real" echoes the idea of phenomenal existence as a simulation of the real for Baudrillard, explaining that "the simulacra which have come to proliferate are not just mediatized, but embodied in objects, the built environment, bodies, everything. Through design, modeling, and typifications, the tangible real of the human-made world becomes increasingly a blemish-free clone of itself" (179-80). The "rose" example is again helpful in showing the mediatization of objects and their relationship to an embodied reality that is lost and transfigured through the process. Taking into account the historical and mediatized aspect of embodied cognition built into the objects – the word "rose" for somebody who grew up in the 1990s could come to

embody the sound of the pop singer Seal and his hit song “Kiss from a Rose.” Baudrillard articulates the process of the object’s removal from the real in *Impossible Exchange* when he points out that “initially, the real object becomes sign: this is the stage of simulation. But in a subsequent stage the sign becomes the object again, but not now a real object: an object much further removed from the real than the sign itself... a fetish... a double abstraction” (129). Embodied cognition, through its inclusion of subjective history, experience, and culture in “real time,” theorizes and creates a world using these simulated and re-simulated objects and signs. This process brings the removal of the real back to the plane of the physically lived experience and creates quite a problem for an undiluted “real world” to be found through contemporary, postmodern theorizing. Baudrillard’s solution to the problem of presenting the world is an imaginary one, and is strongly influenced by Alfred Jarry’s pataphysics.

For Baudrillard, the discourse of pataphysics marks the only legitimate theory of the world left in our postmodern desert. Pataphysics, Alfred Jarry’s science of imaginary solutions, offers Baudrillard a space to show theory’s inability to conquer the world. Coulter posits that the desert of postmodernity gives Baudrillard the ripe soil in which to plant his pataphysical perspective when he points out that “The desert challenges even science by its imaginary scale. If pataphysics is the science of imaginary solutions then perhaps the desert is the closest we come to the experience of the imaginary science of excess” (179). In a space and time where the world is preceded by an endless maze of theories and discourses, each claiming to represent the “world’s” true referent, pataphysics offers Baudrillard a theory that is (by its own definition, and like the world) imaginary. Like a reverse *trompe l’oeil*, pataphysics does not attempt to hide the fact that

it is only an illusion. In a spirit seemingly akin to the pataphysical view, Dogen too posits the underlying imaginings of the world:

There is no remedy for satisfying hunger other than a painted rice-cake. Without painted hunger you never become a true person. There is no understanding other than painted satisfaction. In fact, satisfying hunger, satisfying no-hunger, not satisfying hunger, and not satisfying no-hunger cannot be attained or spoken of without painted hunger. (138-39)

This interesting overlap between Baudrillard and Dogen highlights the underlying illusion of even the most natural human feeling – hunger. In the desert of postmodernity in which we find ourselves, theory will always precede the world. All that is left for us is to make both theory and the world, as Baudrillard writes, “a little more unintelligible” (275). In dealing with an increasingly virtual world, where communication, images, and thoughts travel at the speed of the digital, it is helpful to see, as Baudrillard and Dogen suggest, how far removed these virtual realities are from reality. In making these modes of communication and sharing more unintelligible, the world becomes more like what it is and how it was given to us – unintelligible and unknowable. The remainder of this mode of thinking leaves questions and implications that suggest further issues to be explored that are beyond the limited scope of this thesis, such as ethics, morality, and balancing the mundane tasks of everyday life with the super mundane understanding of life itself.

Conclusion

The value of Baudrillard's and Dogen's philosophies is found in the very matrix they use to awaken from philosophy itself – language. A rhetorical analysis of their writings shows the important emphasis they place on writing as well as unique and unconventional approaches to the craft. Both transgress the idea of “audience” and posit a notion of paradox to show a meaning “beyond” meaning. Dogen's use of poetic imagery and Baudrillard's search for a “poetic resolution” to the world highlight an enigmatic style of writing that prefers the radical, ambiguous, and abstract over the literal. Each thinker's writing is also concerned with the subversion of cultural ideologies (Baudrillard with contemporary Western culture, and Dogen with Buddhist culture) and a reversal of systems of meaning.

Baudrillard's underlying theme of “reversibility” transfigures dialectical and linear notions of progress in order to subvert the irreversible path Western culture has been on since the Enlightenment. The cyclical and circular process of reversibility is highlighted by the Buddhist system of rebirth as well as Dogen's commentary on the process. Irony and death play an integral role in Baudrillard's theme of reversibility and are supported by Dogen as important aspects of illuminating his unique system of thought. “Duality” is an important concept for each thinker and is brought to the forefront through the understanding both Baudrillard and Dogen have of how duality relates to

cyclical existence and systems. Dogen's emphasis on *zazen* practice, as well as his insistence that "dropping away body and mind" is the essence of the Buddhist way, offer insight into how reversibility functions to undermine systems of thought and reified ideologies of the World.

In approaching Baudrillard's idea that "theory precedes the world," his and Dogen's ideas about the "object" highlight a similar challenging of empirical, phenomenological and ontological notions of the "Real." Each thinker's unique approach to the "object" shows an anti-Cartesian notion of the body-mind complex and the problem with positing a "world" before a theory of it. Baudrillard's emphasis on the fatal aspect of the object shows a contemporary culture in which the Real and the World cannot be known. The Buddhist idea of the five *skandhas* and the field of embodied cognition contribute to the discussion of the phenomenological mind-body experience and the problem with seeing an objective world before a subjective theory is formed. Baudrillard's pataphysical approach to the post-structural problem of theory preceding the world offers an angle from which to solve the problem of reality's magic trick through – like Dogen – illusion.

Though this thesis covers some of the overlapping concepts and ideas of Baudrillard and Dogen, the large gap in comparative scholarship of these two thinkers offers a space for research and inquiry for which I simply did not have sufficient time or space. Though a self-proclaimed "nihilist," in his writings Baudrillard often contradicts his self-imposed label. The always interesting debate between "nihilism" and the Buddhist concept of *sunyata*, or emptiness would prove a fascinating endeavor when approached from the respective angle of Baudrillard's nihilism and Dogen's emptiness.

Also, Baudrillard's concept of "symbolic exchange," derived from Marcel Mauss's anthropological study in *The Gift*, would make an interesting comparison to the Buddhist notion of "karma," as well as Dogen's take on this idea. Baudrillard's concept of "seduction," too, could prove helpful in a continued examination of Baudrillard's idea of "reversibility" through various Zen Buddhist traditions that relish the removal of material and abstract hindrances in favor of the "play" of illusion.

Baudrillard and Dogen essentially are philosophers who traffic in illusion. Their rhetorical tools consist of ideas like paradox, duality, reversal, and simulation. Like skilled abstract painters who if they so choose could create the most accurate and mimetic copy of an image, Baudrillard and Dogen instead choose to abstract the image, because, that is what "it" is – an image, a copy. Baudrillard himself experimented with photography, and an examination of this aspect of his work could prove fruitful in comparison to some of the more abstract and experimental Zen Buddhist painters.

Baudrillard's themes and concepts may also find a more suitable companion in some of the other Zen Buddhist and Buddhist philosophers. For example, the Zen poetry and commentary of Ekai or Hakuin could make an interesting comparison to Baudrillard's attempt at a "poetic resolution to the world" or his use of fiction to support his theoretical arguments. The use of similes and parables to demonstrate meaning within Buddhist discourse could also prove a worthwhile comparison to Baudrillard's theory-fiction.

While the method, approach, purpose, and aim of Baudrillard and Dogen are essentially unique to their respective cultures and times, the apparent overlapping of their

thoughts highlights a relevant and hermeneutical discussion. Faced with a civilization today that is becoming increasingly reliant on virtual tools and images to communicate notions of meaning, identity, value, and truth, a paradoxically “real” trafficking in illusion is taking place at a frantic pace. Examining the overlapping ideas of Baudrillard and Dogen offers a space to approach these technological and virtual tools that emphasizes their illusory qualities and softens the deafening volume at which they operate today. Like a snow-globe whose joyful figure is hidden behind the shaken snow and is only revealed when the disturbed particles are allowed, in stillness, to settle – so too, the overlapping thoughts of Baudrillard and Dogen suggest a stillness from which the icy snow of technology may melt away, revealing, not the truth, but as Baudrillard suggests in “Simulacra and Simulations” through a translation of Ecclesiastes, “the truth which conceals that there is none” (169). As our attachment to technology continues to proliferate, with its digital distractions and virtual gardens of identity, Dogen offers a warning that is fitting of both an ecological and spiritual concern in regard to technology when he warns that:

... Yet in attachment blossoms fall, and in aversion weeds spread. (69)

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