

Zen and the art of artmaking: Goldsworthy and Kapoor

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This article focuses on the work of two contemporary artists and the ways in which their work can be shown to relate to Zen Buddhist philosophies and aesthetics. It aims to examine the interpretation of Western art by using Eastern thinking and aesthetics as an interpretative strategy, and in particular, aims to examine the application of Zen philosophy and aesthetics to contemporary artists Andy Goldsworthy and Anish Kapoor. The artists have been selected for their varied backgrounds, unique styles, diverse forms of art and varying media, and because in spite of differences their work shows a noteworthy similarity in the manifestation of Zen aesthetic principles, whether intended or unintended.

Key words: Zen Buddhism, Zen aesthetics, tea ceremony, Andy Goldsworthy, Anish Kapoor

Zen en die kuns van die maak van kuns: Goldsworthy en Kapoor

Die artikel fokus op die werk van twee kontemporêre Britse kunstenaars en die wyse waarop hulle werk ooreenstem met die estetika en filosofie van Zen-Boeddisme. Die artikel beoog om die invloed van Oosterse denkwyses, Zen-filosofie en estetika op Westerse kuns uit te wys, en aspekte daarvan te gebruik as strategie vir interpretasie veral soos gevind in die werk van die Britse kunstenaars Andy Goldsworthy en Anish Kapoor. Die kunstenaars is gekies weens hulle veelsydige agtergrond, unieke styl en groot variasie van media. Ten spyte van die verskil in hulle fisiese werk toon die werk steeds 'n opmerkbare ooreenstemming ten opsigte van die Zen-filosofie, het sy dit opsetlik of te nie.

Sleutelwoorde: Zen-Buddisme, Zen-estetika, teeseremonie, Andy Goldsworthy, Anish Kapoor

Zen originated from Buddhism,¹ which taught that the material world was simply an illusion, and that pain and suffering were rooted in desire. Suffering ended when one reached a state of nirvana. Liberation from the continuous cycle of life, death and rebirth was attainable by giving up desires and worldly ties. Buddhism may be described as a process of enlightenment attained through practices such as committing no evil, cultivating goodwill and purifying one's mind (Kaviratna 1980: 73). Buddhism entered China around the time of Christ, where it fused with Chinese Daoism,² to become Zen. The concept around which all of Daoist mystical philosophy revolves is the infinitely mysterious one of the Dao. The Dao is the 'way of final reality', which is described as the 'Way of the Universe', the rhythm, creative force, the subtle dance of nature and the 'Way of Authentic Human Life' (Harvey 1998: 17).

Daoism's central teaching is a way to live in harmony with nature, through the practice of *wu wei* (non-action). It can therefore be said that the way of Daoism is to leave things to take their natural course. Additionally, one should not try to manipulate the thoughts of others, but leave them to find their own way to enlightenment, through their acceptance of the Dao. This means working with rather than against nature. Thus the *Dao de Jing*³ proposes that a wise person or leader may accomplish much by not doing anything in particular and may achieve a great deal through silence.

The Dao may be known by no thoughts or reflections. It may be approached by resting in nothingness, by following nothing and pursuing nothing. The Dao is thus realized by abiding in silence and the way to silence is found by letting go. To search for knowledge means to acquire day after day; to seek the Dao means to let go day after day (Hoover, 1977:99).

Eastern philosophy can be difficult to define in Western terms. The difficulty associated with defining Daoism is evident in the *Dao de Jing*. The poetic nature of the text makes it too vague to relate to in a practical manner. The text begins by stating, “The Dao that can be trodden is not the enduring and unchanging Dao. The name that can be named is not the enduring and unchanging name” (Thomas, 2010). Much Zen writing takes a similar approach.

Zen is thus a school of Buddhism which developed in China in the sixth century and, after combining with Daoism, spread to Japan. The word Zen has its origins in the Sanskrit word *Dhyana*, which means meditation. It proposes that salvation and self-realisation may be reached through the path of consecrated meditation (Blyth 1977: 28). Zen is not a religion, but is instead an indefinable, incommunicable path to a meditative state, free from names, descriptions and concepts, (although it may currently manifest in Japan as an organized religion with its own hierarchies, ambitions and political aspects, much like organized religion in the west). Zen in its purer, philosophical form can only be experienced by each individual (Okakura 1991: 67). In this sense, it is ideally not bound to any religion or to Buddhism per sé. It foregrounds experience of the primordial perfection of everything that exists, referred to by various names, experienced by many great sages and founders of the religions of the world.

Zen, like Daoism, appreciates the seeming contradictions of relativity (Ross 1973: 140). Truth can be reached only with an understanding of opposites. The yin-yang symbol in Daoism demonstrates this, with two nestling commas in black and white, symbolising two principles of change, yin being the passive female principle and yang being the active male principle (Yamamoto 1982: 53). In Buddhism, the value of non-dualism rather than dualism arises when contemplating the balance between good and evil, mind and body, earth and sky, etc. Another aspect of Buddhism and Zen is characterised by Buddha’s vision of reality as ‘empty’, as devoid of any inherent permanence or meaning.

Zen Buddhism is one of the Buddhist sects that advocates relying on oneself to attain enlightenment, thus the doctrine is essentially individualist, commanding its disciples to discipline themselves by relying on their own powers until enlightenment is reached (Suzuki 1993: 9). Zen is neither an intellectual philosophy nor a quest, but emphasises daily life practice, along with intensive periods of meditation (Okakura 1991: 22). In explaining Zen Buddhism, Japanese Zen teachers have made the point that Zen is a ‘way of life’. Suzuki emphasised a life of humility, labour and service as well as a life of gratitude and meditation. Zen emphasises that seemingly tedious, everyday tasks, like drinking tea, present opportunities to experience truth. The natural and reverential simplicity of paying attention to everyday activities finds its consummation in the *cha-no-yu* (hot water for tea), an art form that lies between the everyday and the artistically artificial, based on the act of drinking tea (Varley & Isao 1989: 235).

The tea ceremony and Zen aesthetics

Japanese followers of Zen are deeply appreciative of the beauty of nature and of the simplicity of everyday tasks. It is out of this reverence for the beauty of everyday activities, often taken for granted and relegated to the mundane, that the tea ceremony, which originated in China, was adapted by Zen practitioners after the sixteenth century (Dumoulin 1990: 143). Turner (1996: 335) points out that drinking tea may be an ordinary experience, but to focus on the activity elevates the simple act of drinking tea to ceremonial status, rather like the Catholic mass, encouraging introspection and presenting new pathways for discovery to participants. It occurs when participants come together to share in tea drinking, and guests and hosts conduct

themselves according to the strictest code of etiquette in an atmosphere of spiritual discipline and harmony.

One of the earliest explorations into the real meaning of the Japanese tea ceremony was by Okakura (1862-1913), a Japanese scholar and author, who defined and praised the tea ceremony as the religion of aestheticism, the adulation of the beautiful and as a work of art. According to Okakura (1991: 69), tea masters studied Zen and tried to introduce its practices into their daily lives: “Zen and tea are one.” The ideal of the tea ceremony is a result of the Zen concept of seeing greatness in the smallest of life’s incidences.

In the tea ceremony, although some masters and periods favoured highly perfect, ornate tea bowls, those that are commonly used and have become associated with the ceremony (figure 1) are usually not commercially fashioned, but are hand-made. They are utilitarian and are appreciated for their rough beauty, inherent flaws and uniqueness. A penchant for irregularity can engage participants in the tea ceremony, who contemplate the oddity of a flaw in a bowl, and manifest an appreciation of uneven, coarse surfaces and the use of natural and commonplace materials.⁴ This appreciation of accidental effects, irregularity and asymmetry reflect the potter’s individuality and free spirited approach to the finish of a vessel. This ceremony gave rise to a unique aesthetic approach which integrates the rituals of Zen and the beauty of art in simple everyday objects.



Figure 1

Kōetsu Hon’ami (1558-1637), Japanese tea bowl known as ‘Seppō’, Momoyama period (beginning of the 17th century), red Raku ware, Hatakeyama Collection Tokyo (source: Fahr-Becker, 1999:574).

The respect for simplicity and one’s ability to see beauty in imperfection, according to Okakura (in Yanagi 1982: 115), is the larger issue and it is here that the foundation for aesthetic expression in *cha-no-yu* exists. Authentic beauty, according to Zen principles, may be realised and experienced by one who completes the incomplete mentally (Okakura 1991: 95). So objects used in the tea ceremony are not often selected for their conformity or perfection of form. The ceramic utensils used in the ceremony confirm this. Their shapes may be irregular, with dry or sandy surfaces and glazes of uneven thickness. Pieces placed in the kiln remain unglazed where the pots rest on one another and even fire cracks are accepted. These characteristics are not merely tolerated or overlooked, but are accepted as an integral part of pot making and therefore

potentially beautiful (Yanagi 1982: 119). The tea masters saw and appreciated unusual beauty in commonplace, simple and ordinary utensils. They were connoisseurs who selected items that the Japanese describe as showing *shibui* – literally, ‘tastefully astringent’, better described by Yanagi (1982: 184), as having a “profound, unassuming, and quiet feeling”. The tea masters were among the earliest to consciously appreciate the beauty of irregularity and take it as the principle underlying the tea ceremony and this is can be seen in many of the bowls used in the tea ceremony.

There are more considerations regarding the taste for imperfection in the tea ceremony. Yanagi (1982: 120) argues that perfection carries no overtones and communicates nothing. Perfection is static and regimented. Humans, imperfect, are repelled by perceived perfection, since everything is apparent from the outset and there is no suggestion of anything beyond.⁵ Beauty requires an association with the incomplete.

Zen aesthetics encompass a complex assortment of terms that include words like *shibui*, *wabi*, *mu* and *miyabi*. Okakura (1991: 124) highlights the fact that these Japanese terms are not easily translated into English. *Shibui* means a lack of pretence or the absence of adornment. The appreciation of *shibui* might bring about enlightenment, as it leaves the viewer to experience aesthetics through reflection and appreciation of natural beauty, rather than through suggestion or distraction. *Wabi*, according to Okakura (1991: 156), is the feeling of detachment and simplicity which Japanese tea masters looked for in objects associated with the tea ceremony. It implies solitude, suggesting the Zen and Daoist concept of liberation from material and emotional strife. It is the supreme submission to the non-existent. This non-existence is known as *mu*.

At the heart of Zen is an aesthetic characterised by the word *miyabi*, which refers to the sedate pleasures or aspects of beauty, appreciated only by the so called refined or cultured sensitivity for pale colours, fragility and fine textures (Baholyodhin 2000: 84). This is in part, the awareness of gestures – such as a stroke of the calligrapher’s brush (Ross 1973: 143). When one responds to such nuances, one may be more receptive to the transience of material things and also the experience of spiritual or soul consciousness. When an artist adopts an introspective approach, creativity and spontaneity are allowed to emerge more easily, in an approach that differs from alternate beliefs that creativity is inspired by outward or worldly efforts. The consequent expression is often one of simplicity, with work produced with little apparent interference from the artist. It can therefore be said that Zen believes in the inherent beauty of an object in its rudimentary state without theoretical framing, and an appreciation of the unambiguous reality or inner nature of things (Yanagi 1982: 120).

Zen philosophy prizes the purity of natural objects and appreciates the value of the grain of wood, the texture of matting and the irregularity of natural rock (Stanley-Baker 1992: 861). Ornamentation in the Western sense has little place in Zen traditions as it stems from the superficial, prettifying elements in the mind – the part that sees nature and arrogantly seeks to improve it. To be truly artistic in a Zen sense is to pay homage to, rather than enter into a contest with, nature (Dumoulin 1990: 243). In this sense, Zen continues the Daoist belief in non-action, which both link to the laws of nature, suggesting that a harmonious relationship with one’s surroundings and others is important and that the balance ought not to be disturbed, but left to its natural flow. The value of this belief is replicated in art and is demonstrated by the importance of suggestion (Okakura 1991: 67). In allowing something to be incomplete or unfinished, the viewer or critic is provided with an opportunity to complete the idea, which is how a work of art may engage its beholders until they seem to become an essential part of it. The artist thus does not strive for completion. The concepts of transience or impermanence, spontaneity and

flexibility or adaptability are important Zen ideals, and place emphasis on the journey rather than the destination. So Zen aims at producing objects that seem to simply 'be', to come into being without intervention, action or effort on the part of the artist, to be 'self-made' objects.

The principle of non-action or detachment is related to the notion of the void. The doctrine of the void, according to Suzuki (1996: 26), is a means of escape from worldly attachment and asserts that things have no self, that is to say, they are empty. The void, therefore, signifies and communicates the all-inclusive, thereby negating dualism. It is a place where emptying out and filling up are synonymous. The reality of a room, for example, could be found in the unoccupied space, rather than the restrictive walls, roof or floor. Similarly, according to the *Dao de Jing*, the usefulness of a vase resides in the emptiness within, that might hold water, not in the shape of the vase or the substance out of which it was fashioned. The formless void is a powerful metaphor in Buddhism and Zen. The notions of the void, non-dualism and non-action are therefore intertwined.

These subtleties of Zen aesthetics may be interpreted generally as *qi*. In art, *qi* is that which merges the self and the mind completely. The space between subject and object is diminished (Beittel 1989:23). This harmonious union of the mind and the body is the aim of art practice from a Zen perspective. It is not easy to achieve and is not accomplished by an act of will, nor by taking someone else's work as a standard. Zen in the art of pottery, for example, involves the centring of the body and mind. It is meditation in action, in which the humblest bowl arises from some deep space, where one's forms and decorations seem no longer one's own but appear as though they were already there to begin with and all one needed to do was complete this union of body and mind to reveal it. The trick is to use no tricks and be completely present-minded in the activity occupying one (Beittel, 1989:35). The Zen approach is different from that of other cultures, for example, the Greek search for perfection, hence the general antithesis between East and West in matters of beauty. In the field of ceramics, Western pots are almost always patterned and perfectly finished. The beauty of the plain pot was almost unperceived in Western ceramics,⁶ and shapes were rooted in symmetry (Yanagi, 1982:124), as the ideal of Greek beauty scarcely permits irregularity or asymmetry, because it was founded upon the symmetry of the human body. By contrast Eastern practitioners found irregular beauty in nature.

The key issues emerging from the overview of Zen Buddhism include, but are not limited to, simplicity and reflection, living in harmony with one's surroundings and nature and being aware of the natural flow of events. Zen encourages spontaneity and self cultivation. Furthermore, there are a number of subtleties that are not easily translated from Japanese to English. Words like *wabi-sabi* communicate the depth of many of the concepts and Zen's favouring of incompleteness, as the importance placed on suggestion shows.

The notion that art resides in the mind of the viewer, rather than in the mind of the artist or in the artwork, is a parallel drawn by Grande (1994:60) with Buddha's realisation that suffering resides not in events or objects, but in one's mind. Similarly, art influenced by Zen Buddhism affords the viewer an opportunity to explore non-dualistic ideas in a direct and intimate way. The distinctive philosophies of Buddhism, such as fluidity, detachment and spontaneity, could be argued to be useful in interpreting the works of artists Andy Goldsworthy and Anish Kapoor. This article does not intend to imply that there are no Western philosophical or aesthetic systems that acknowledge impermanence, transience, imperfection or an accord with nature, but seeks merely to find fresh ways of interpreting important contemporary works by selected artists.

Andy Goldsworthy

Andy Goldsworthy (born. 1956) lives and works in Scotland. Goldsworthy combines his skills as a photographer, sculptor and environmentalist to create location specific land art and sculptures. He worked as a farm labourer in his youth and has likened the rhythmic activities associated with farming to his sculpting. Inspired by Joseph Beuys and Yves Klein, Goldsworthy considers his artistic career to have begun in 1976, when he was still a fine art student and snow was an available medium with which to work (Goldsworthy 2001: 8) (figure 2).



Figure 2
Andy Goldsworthy, *Bright Sunny Morning*, 1987, frozen snow scraped away with stick, Izumi-Mura, Japan (source: Goldsworthy, 1990: s.p.).



Figure 3
Andy Goldsworthy, *Mud Covered Snowball*, 1979, snowball covered with mud, placed on frosted lake, 100cm x 100cm, High Bentham, Yorkshire (source: Goldsworthy, 2001: 11).

Using materials from nature, he allows the elements to constitute his creations, as his constructions of wood, leaves, stone and ice move and erode over time (Goldsworthy 1990: 11). He pays close, patient, devoted attention to nature's rhythms, cycles and phases, creating temporary structures from natural materials found on location, which he then leaves for nature to reclaim and transform. What takes these natural materials into the realm of art is that they show creative intervention, and might have an aesthetic effect that could leave the viewer wondering how they came to be, albeit temporarily. A finished work can last for as long as a few days or as briefly as a minute, before a breeze or a tide undoes it. The lack of permanence and accord with nature can be seen to accord with Zen aesthetics.

Goldsworthy is interested in the nature of things, in their colour, form and composition, their taste and smell and their place within nature. He works in remote locations (although some locations allow people to interact with his work), and factors seasonal cycles and weather conditions into his projects, which range in scale and size. Obtaining colour from leaves and flowers or icicles, he forms star or snake-like sculptures that sometimes last a few moments before they begin to melt. Using a variety of materials including driftwood, stone, leaves, wilted fern stems, sticks, mud, pinecones and thorns, he is able to express himself in a unique way in complete harmony with nature (Lailach 2007: 48), in works that can be said to reflect *shibui* (are quiet and unassuming), *wabi* (have simplicity) and finally *wu wei* (seem to have appeared naturally, not to be the result of human action or effort).

However, this Zen aspect is somewhat diluted by the photography that is vital to Goldsworthy's art, as many of his works have a finite lifespan. Consequently much of his work is exhibited in galleries in the form of photographs, either as a series of images or of the works at the height of their completion. This process raises issues of memory and transience. While Goldsworthy is able to travel to remote parts of the globe and experience the results of his labours before leaving his work to the elements, he records his work mechanically, in order to share it with others. The photographs give permanence to his completed but temporary artworks. This might not accord with Zen ideals of transience, as it engages the oppositions of permanence and impermanence by creating art in harmony with nature, yet Goldsworthy is able to extend its longevity and share it afterwards through the use of modern photographic technology. The photographs capture his work either decaying, being reclaimed by the ocean, melted by the sun or blown away by the wind, leaving powerful and striking images that depict incompleteness and leave space for one to complete the picture in one's mind, although they themselves are permanent.

From a Zen perspective, the themes that surface in Goldsworthy's art have to do with harmonising with nature, making art that is at one with its environment, with transience and a lack of action, harnessing the energy or *qi* and the union of opposites which goes beyond dualism. In one of Goldsworthy's earliest snow works (figure 3) the artist created an illusion of a black void on a white void, by completely covering a metre high snowball in black peaty soil and placing it in the centre of a frozen pond.



Figure 4
Andy Goldsworthy, Untitled, 1987,
Japanese maple leaves stitched
together to make a floating chain,
Ouchiyama-mura, Japan
(source: Goldsworthy, 1990: s.p.).



Figure 5
Andy Goldsworthy, Wall, 1998, Wood
and stone, Storm King Art Centre,
(source: Goldsworthy, Baker &
Thompson, 2000: 48).

Goldsworthy often erases footprints and other evidence that his artworks were manufactured, adding to the mystique that characterises his artworks and allowing them to act as a medium for deeper thought. In the case of *Mud Covered Snowball*, he was pleased that the pond surface appeared undisturbed upon completion of the artwork, as if there was no human involvement, no action, in its making and placement (Goldsworthy 2001: 12).

The desire for his audience to experience an emotional response in nature (Cempellin, S.a.), as well as a moment of concentration and awareness, has inspired the *Untitled* work (figure 4), featuring a floating chain made up of stitched maple leaves. The leaves, stitched together with grass, form a series of concentric circles around a small opening, suggesting either human intervention or a pattern that was formed by chance occurrences in nature, for example by water currents. In a sense, in this suggested balance between intervention and non-intervention, the work is both dualistic and potentially non-dualistic, or suggests a liminal space between these two states.

One of Goldsworthy's more permanent works titled *Wall* (figure 5) continues a dialogue, this time between wood and stone, which characterises many of his works. Asked to re-construct a dilapidated wall, Goldsworthy traced its foundation through the local woods. Rather than stick to man-made boundaries, he opted instead to follow an edge naturally set by the trees, accepting that they might someday destroy the wall. Completely immersed in its surroundings, the wall changes character and appearance with the seasons, as snow and ice cover the stone, as it meanders its way through the trees in a river-like manner, creating the illusion of movement and energy that a straight wall would be unlikely to do (Goldsworthy, Baker & Thompson 2000: 89). The Japanese words *wabi-sabi* come to mind in relation to *Wall*, which is completely at one with the environment, the loose rocks balancing their material strength with the flexibility and fluidity required to coexist with the trees beside them in a simple and non-invasive manner. The dry stone wall was constructed with stone quarried from the surrounding areas and, where possible, included dead tree trunks as well as live root material. This allows a natural and harmonious interaction between the trees and the wall: as tree growth occurs, the wall recedes in places, whilst restricting growth at the same time (Goldsworthy, Baker & Thompson 2000: 10). The result, according to Goldsworthy, is a wall as an enclosing gesture, rather than a physical barrier.

Furthermore, the wall takes on a life of its own each time it changes, as a result of weather conditions, human intervention or new growth from the forest, and gives continuity to its relationship with its surroundings. In the work a compromise between risk and fragility is highlighted, which mirrors the creative tension between the wall and its surroundings (Goldsworthy, Baker & Thompson 2000: 77). Also noteworthy is Goldsworthy's admission that the final form of the wall remained unknown until it was almost completed. The Zen-like manner in which potential for growth is left, as well as the apparent incompleteness of the wall, further highlights the potential of Zen aesthetics for its interpretation.

The artworks by Andy Goldsworthy examined here can be said to show Zen aspects, as they incorporate key elements, including harmonising with one's environment, being aware of the interconnectedness between all phenomenon and that a simple unity exists between different things. Some of Goldsworthy's works reflect spontaneity in conception, however their construction requires patience, perseverance and a knowledge of how various elements work together, in order to work successfully with the elements in nature. The themes however can be related to Zen teachings, with his works showing humility, remaining unsigned, leaving no formal legacy and little or no trace that the artist was ever there.

Anish Kapoor

British artist Anish Kapoor (born. 1954), explores the concept of immateriality (or the immateriality of material) and the void in his sculptures. He cuts holes into blocks of stone,

sometimes coating the exterior or interior surfaces with a rich pigment, transforming the void into a charged, dark space. He also works with reflective surfaces, which mirror and engulf or eliminate the viewer and the surrounding space. His evocative sculptures provoke an intense perceptual and physical response (Kapoor, Bhabha & Tazzi 1998: 11), one might almost say a spiritual response. In diverse religions one finds expressions of 'emptiness': mystics have often used the notion of emptiness to allude to their experiences of God or the Divine (Foreman & Winston 2008: 44). It is in religions of the East that this notion is explicit, particularly within Buddhism and Daoism. The immediacy of Kapoor's sculptures cannot be ignored and can be said to allude to nothingness or immateriality, a distinctive trait of Zen philosophy.

Kapoor was born in Mumbai to a Jewish-Iraqi mother and an Indian father and states that inspiration for his sculptures is drawn from both the Middle East and India (Brown 1996: 151). He moved to the United Kingdom in 1972 where he studied art. He works with a variety of media, including coloured pigment, stone, steel, glass, fibreglass, concrete and PVC. Kapoor's artistic career began with his first solo exhibition in Paris in 1980, after returning from India, where he was struck by mounds of pigment for sale in street markets and their use in temple rituals (Anfam 2009: 92). The series he subsequently produced consists of bold shapes and curved forms covered in brightly coloured pure pigment (figure 6). This was to characterise Kapoor's work throughout the eighties. In these works, Kapoor uses wood and plaster covered in raw red and yellow pigment and the geometric, globular, curved and sharp surfaces dissolve into the powdered pigment surface that extends from the shapes to the floor (Bracewell & Renton 2011: 12). The shapes compel the viewer to question their materiality as they have an insubstantiality and yet a solidity about them. Speaking to *Interview* magazine in 1990, Kapoor described pigment as, "colour in its rawest form with incredible materiality" (Brown 1996: 152), yet it is insubstantial. The use of powdered pigment disrupts the relationship between the surface of the object and its volume, reflecting an in-between state. These kinds of pieces allow Kapoor to enter the realm of non-duality, or alternatively a very solid duality, as simplicity is harmonised with complexity and materiality contrasted with immateriality. So one could see these works as suggesting a subtle relationship between duality and non-duality, between reality and non-reality. This installation conveys a feeling of transience, with objects appearing partially submerged and liable to change their powdery forms.

According to Kapoor (in Foreman and Winston 2008: 33), the singular, pure, dense and matt qualities of raw pigment allow the viewer to perceive the symbolic objects directly, as the objects awaken in the viewer a high state of awareness with their optical intensity, appearing to dissolve volume into an illusory colour (Baume 2008: 15). This dissolving and illusory quality has characterised Kapoor's works, as their physical status is always brought into question. Throughout his career, Kapoor has been acclaimed for his exploration and expression of matter and non-matter by exploiting the properties of pigment and for his use of the void. The void, according to Kapoor, (Brown 1996: 152), represents a vast emptiness, yet also contains everything and draws the viewer into another state of mind. Kapoor (In Kapoor et al 2009: 173) has spoken of the space in his works being "bigger than meets the eye." In a conversation between Kapoor and Homi Bhabha, Bhabha (in Kapoor, et al, 2009: 173) explains that the "sudden disappearance of the surface into a deep dark hole literally cuts the ground from one's feet".

In the late eighties, Kapoor began working with quarried stone, making blocks with carved apertures and cavities. This medium served Kapoor's desire to explore non-duality in new ways, as many of his works hint at the relationship and connection between the earth and the sky, matter and non-matter, darkness and light, emptiness and fullness. In Kapoor's own, Zen-like, words about this in-between or non-dualistic state: "The most creative words I know are, I don't

know. If you know, then there is no yearning and no art. Because knowing is finite and false. Not knowing and yearning is infinite and truth revealed. Yearning is Art” (Kapoor, Bhabha & Tazzi 1998: 29).



Figure 6

Anish Kapoor, To reflect an intimate part of the red, 1981, mixed media and pigment, 200cm x 800cm x 800cm, artist's studio, London (source: Baume, 2008: 20).

This statement suggests that Kapoor understands the Buddhist concepts of incompleteness, imperfection and non-dualism, and explores these in his work. The Buddhist notion of emptiness is present in free standing sculptures as well as his more ambitious installation pieces. “There is a fullness to Buddhist emptiness,” writes Mark Epstein (in Baas & Jacob, 2004:34), “a spaciousness that both saturates the physical world and expands to allow access to the dimension of intermediate experience.”

Kapoor’s 1989 work *Adam* (figure 7) features a solitary sandstone block approximately two metres high, inset with an oblong area of blue pigment. The pillar has an archaeological, mystical yet industrial feel. Similar to Kapoor’s pigment pieces, *Adam* develops the concept of manifestation, taking the work beyond form, implying a sense of presence and place in a space beyond the gallery space. The disappearance of the rock’s surface into an open, dark space highlights the Zen notion of the void (Baas & Jacob 2004: 72) with a play on materiality and non-materiality (Brown 1996: 152). Furthermore, according to Kapoor (in Baume 2008: 50), *Adam* introduces an additional complexity to the problem of space, as it deals with dark emptiness in a way that is introspective and evocative. The use of sandstone evokes universal forces in nature, according to Bracewell (in Bracewell & Renton 2011: 17).

Unlike classic sculpture which manifests as volume in space, Kapoor’s *Cloud gate* (figure 8) is very much a volume in space and yet the non-object manifests in the presence of the viewer and in the context of his/her perceptions. Kapoor’s work explores the notion of the non-intrusive as well as his interest in the expression of presence and absence. Many of Kapoor’s works recede

or seem to fall away into emptiness, and *Cloud Gate* is a striking example of this, where Kapoor makes a vast object that seems to transcend the physical world by dramatically exploiting the reflective properties of stainless steel, resulting in a work that is apparently neither material nor non-material, neither solid nor void, without boundaries.



Figure 7

Anish Kapoor, Adam, 1989, sandstone and pigment, 236cm x 119cm x 102cm, on loan to Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield, UK (source: Bracewell & Renton, 2011: 41).

Many of his works in this period distort reflections and the space around them, providing an engaging experience from different angles and perspectives. In *Cloud Gate*, the sensual form and reflective surface feature prominently, this time as the centrepiece at AT&T Plaza in Millennium Park in Chicago. *Cloud Gate*, with a mass of one hundred and ten tonnes, is made up of one hundred and sixty-nine stainless steel hand-rolled plates (Foreman & Winston 2008: 91), welded together using plasma technology with no evident seams, then hand polished.

Distortion plays an important role in Kapoor's work, often engaging viewers and bringing an immediacy of awareness of the environment, as the piece merges with the environment. The distorted images defy definitions such as up or down, right or left and in or out and dissolve these forms of dualism. It can therefore be argued that what appears to be real is just an illusion, as Kapoor presents a physical embodiment of non-dualism, just as the tea ceremony does. This work manifests non-dualism more clearly, it could be concluded, than any of the other works discussed in this article. It enables a state of reflection and offers multiple levels of experience. This is reflected in the brief and transient appearance of the viewer, other people and objects reflected in its surface. Kapoor (in Baume 2008: 131) notes that in using the artwork as an object

of devotional practice, deeper thought may be cultivated. *Cloud Gate* is thus about the self and beyond the self. The distorted images, even though transient, allow viewers to experience the interconnectedness of everything around them. In the words of the artist (in Brown 1996: 152): “My work has to do with the coming to immateriality. One of the most important questions that has arisen for me as an artist, is the question of the status of the object, the uncertainty of the object.”



Figure 7
Anish Kapoor, Cloud Gate, 2004-2006, stainless steel, 1000cm x 1300cm × 2000cm, Chicago USA,
(source: Baume, 2008: 127).

We would argue that some of Kapoor’s early works defy logic, as might a Zen koan,⁷ while his larger and more ambitious pieces transcend into objects of devotion or conduits through which one may connect to the space beyond the physical. The Japanese term *shibui* is appropriate as many of Kapoor’s works not only communicate beauty, but do so by harmonising the complexity associated with their materials and construction, with very simple shapes and forms in their final presentation.

Conclusion

This article set out to examine the potential of applying Zen philosophies and aesthetics to interpreting the work of Andy Goldsworthy and Anish Kapoor and began by sketching a background on Buddhism, Daoism and Zen. The emphasis in Zen is on direct intuitive experience and Zen holds the conviction that penetration to the heart of life’s meaning is not brought about by the mind alone but should be incorporated into one’s lifestyle. The basic principles include

non-action (*wu wei*), the concept of detachment carried forward into the doctrine of the void, the Buddhist metaphor for emptiness equating emptying out with filling up, the connection of all phenomenon, the importance of selflessness.

An examination of the Japanese tea ceremony demonstrated Zen beliefs in everyday action, where the simple act of drinking tea is elevated and accorded ritualistic status, cultivating an aura of simplicity, beauty, peace and tranquillity. The ceremony lays a foundation for aesthetic expression and provides participants with the space to reflect on life's simplicity contrasted with the complexity often taken to be an inescapable reality. The Japanese concepts of *wabi-sabi* and *shibui* provide insights into Zen aesthetics and the associated rituals and utensils. One of the aspects of Zen aesthetics was the spontaneity and willingness, on the part of the artist, to accept an end result that was perhaps not fully crystallised in the mind of the artist at the time of conception. At the beginning of this article, the idea of objects making themselves was touched upon. This suggests that when artists concede that the final form of the work is not fully planned, they are indeed at a point where they have committed to a journey of discovery toward the inevitable object. The analysis of Goldsworthy's and Kapoor's artworks has shown this achievement of the apparently inevitable object, the 'self-made object'. Both the artists, at some point in their careers, have admitted to either not knowing what their artworks are, that is to say, leaving viewers to experience them, or are open to a wide variety of interpretation. This study suggests that, whether or not an artist explicitly adopts Zen principles, he or she can allow creativity to emerge in a spontaneous way, which can be interpreted by the application of Zen principles.

Kapoor's artworks in the form of modern day koans or visual paradoxes act as objects of devotion and as medium for deeper thought, and could be said to defy the laws of physics. Goldsworthy's creations, on the other hand, show a special interest in and appreciation for nature and allow those who experience his work directly to experience the self as part of the fabric of nature, as they may be said to defy the laws of biology. As the tide came in and swept away one of his works, Goldsworthy (1990: 45), noted, "The very thing that brought it to life, will bring about its death," demonstrating detachment from the material world and accepting the natural flows and rhythms of life, that carry one to the point beyond attachment.

All these works engage the viewers and transport them through this journey of creation, toward the inevitable object. That the artists possess some understanding of Zen principles is not the point of this article, although one might speculate that they might indeed find a rapport with Zen doctrines insofar as these might suggest interpretations for their work, which might however arise from different, western artistic conventions. These works often confound one and provoke a powerful aesthetic experience. Such works can act as channels for reflection and contemplation.

Notes

1. Buddhism was founded in North East India by Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha or 'Enlightened One'. It then spread through Asia, influencing and mixing with many cultures along the way. Buddhist 'mysticism' began with the Buddha's own enlightenment in Bodhgaya (Littleton 1999: 65), in approximately 528 BC. So unshakable was Buddha's faith that he devoted the rest of his life to instructing others on how to accomplish this, leaving his followers to propagate his values long after his death (Klostermaier 2002: 47).

- 2 Daoism is a philosophical system developed by Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu advocating a simple honest life and non-interference with the course of natural events (Griffiths & Keenan 1990: 132.)
- 3 The *Dao de Jing* is a classic text of Chinese philosophy dating to the sixth century BC. It deals poetically and philosophically with ideas such as non-dualism, emptiness and the unnameable.
- 4 One might understand the variety of tea bowls, of which many are irregular and imperfect while others are highly perfect and decorated, with the Shin-Gyo-So system: this categorises design, such as gardens or tea bowls, as either Shin (formal, perfect, symmetrical), as So (informal, imperfect, asymmetrical) or Gyo (a mixture) (Richie 2011: 95).
- 5 Of course, there are western thinkers who appreciate and emphasize imperfection. For example, John Ruskin in an essay titled “The nature of Gothic” in the book *The stones of Venice* (1853) explains in some detail the value of imperfection.
- 6 There are exceptions to this, for example English slipware is very plain and often rough, while some contemporary Western pots, such as those of the so-called Leach school, much influenced by Japanese ceramics, also seek for simplicity and naturalness.
- 7 A Koan is a paradoxical anecdote or riddle, used in Zen Buddhism to demonstrate the inadequacy of logical reasoning and to provoke enlightenment.

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