

TRANSFERENCE AND THE GATELESS BARRIER

Abstract

While contemplative approaches have recently garnered much attention in different areas of transformative education, the interpersonal and relational aspects of contemplative training have received less scrutiny. This article examines the relational dynamics involved in contemplative education from a Lacanian viewpoint. The concept of transference is used to unpack the fantasies, desires and errors involved in contemplation, a process aimed at deep existential realization.

Transcripts of Zen Buddhist kōan training from Philip Kapleau's classic book *The Three Pillars of Zen* are used as a case in point.

Keywords: Contemplative education, Zen Buddhism, psychoanalysis, ethics of teaching

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Transference and the Gateless Barrier: A Relational Approach to Contemplative Education

Introduction

Since the turn of the millennium, contemplative traditions have vigorously re-engaged with discourses and practices of transformative education (Duerr, Zajonc, & Dana, 2003; Morgan, 2015). Mindfulness meditation and yoga, among other contemplative practices, are seen to resonate with the basic tenets of transformative pedagogies as they emphasize the educational role of experiences that transform the perception of reality – how we know and give meaning to our existence (Byrnes, 2012; Morgan, 2012). In particular, contemplative approaches have resonated with the holistic view of understanding transformative experiences in learning. Whereas transformative learning in the Mezirowian view takes place when one’s “frame of reference” – attitudes, thoughts – is changed through critical self-reflection (Mezirow, 1997), holistic approaches accentuate the emotional and extra-rational processes of personal transformation (see e.g., Dirks, 1997; Taylor, 2000). It is often stated that contemplative training changes not only one’s own habits of mind and points of view but also nurtures deep empathy and existential fulfilment (Morgan, 2012).

Within the wider spectrum of contemplative studies beyond transformative education, psychoanalytic theories have linked clinical views on depression and forms and treatments of anxiety to Buddhist philosophical traditions and their notions of suffering, healing and enlightenment (Epstein, 1995; Loy, 2003; Magid, 2013). Since the early twentieth century, Zen Buddhist ideas have deeply influenced notable psychoanalytic theorists such as Carl Jung, Erich Fromm and Karen Horney (D’Amato, 2014, p. 73). However, owing to the peripheral presence of psychoanalysis in mainstream education discourses (Bainbridge & West, 2012; Kucukaydin & Cranton, 2012; Taubman, 2012), its role in contemplative approaches to transformative education has been marginal.

In instances of psychoanalytic theories used in the philosophy and theory of transformative education, their import lies in disrupting the image of the rational and transparent self through

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concepts, models and theories that map unconscious processes in education. Psychoanalytic approaches may contribute to an understanding of the unconscious forces driving or resisting transformative learning (Dirkx, 2012; Kucukaydin & Cranton, 2012). For example, it is well established that students may disavow what they have already learned if it is too traumatic or does not correspond to how they conceive of themselves (Alcorn, 2010; Atay, 2013).

In this article, I use the concept of transference to analyze transformative processes in Zen Buddhist contemplative education. My approach follows a relational strand in studying contemplative practices that accentuate the interpersonal dynamics within such processes (Gunnlaugson, 2011; Schneider & Keenan, 2015; Stanley, 2012). In textbook accounts of psychoanalysis, transference refers to the unconscious tendency to project feelings and expectations regarding close relations — such as parents — onto other people. Although considered a normal feature in interpersonal relations, transference can also take pathological and otherwise socially or personally harmful forms. While it has proven a significant concept especially in Freudian and Jungian traditions, my interpretation of transference and its presence in contemplative training draws from the Lacanian psychoanalytic and philosophical tradition and its widely recognized resonances — although not always direct influences — with Buddhist views of the ego and the nature of suffering (Jagodzinski, 2002; Moncayo, 2003; 2012; Purser, 2011). With the concept of transference, I seek to highlight the dynamic, relational nature of personal transformation; irreducible to individualistic and rationalistic constructions of learning.¹

As a case in point for analyzing transference dynamics in contemplation, I focus on the *kōan* practice associated with various Zen traditions. Despite their familiarity in popular representations of Zen, *kōans* have received surprisingly little scrutiny in contemplative approaches

¹ For the sake of concision, I shall not go into detail regarding such other key Lacanian concepts as *jouissance*, the Real or drive. Being subject to a wide array of interpretations and debates, and having undergone revision many times in Lacan's own oeuvre, they would require extensive discussions in themselves.

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to transformative education. Kōans are questions or anecdotes often with a paradoxical, seemingly unsolvable nature. They can be used as foci of contemplative practice in Zen training to push the practitioner toward *kenshō*: an existential realization. The relational nature of the use of kōans is depicted here through transcripts of exchanges between a Zen teacher and a student in Philip Kapleau's *The Three Pillars of Zen* (1965/2001); a classic of Western Zen literature. The book's transcripts offer Western audiences insight into the interpersonal reality of contemplative training.

My analysis will advance two key claims. First, I argue that a unique transference relation can be identified between the Zen teacher and the student, in which the student errs as to the epistemic nature and possession of an existential truth in kōan practice. Second, I claim that transference as an interpersonal dynamic can be harnessed to usher the student toward a state of deep personal transformation.

Where is my head? Desire and spiritual questioning

Although its precise nature, levels and methods of (non-)attainment are frequently debated and reinterpreted, a common aim in Zen schools is enlightenment: a deep understanding of the nature of the self, and liberation from suffering. Those embarking on spiritual quests in Zen often feel that something is amiss in life or the world. Biographies of the spiritual development of Zen master Dōgen, among others, describe his initial anguish and puzzlement about death, suffering and the meaning of existence. Such feelings are what lead to a life dedicated to deep contemplation and the search for answers (Bodiford, 1993). Yet many Zen schools share the conviction that fundamentally every living being is already enlightened and that everything is perfect as it is (Maezumi, 2002).

Thus, there is a paradox: If everything is perfect as it is and if every being is already enlightened, why does Zen still demand stringent contemplative practice? What is to be gained? Although traditional Zen stories, parables and sayings provide some elaboration, Zen literature is surprisingly rich in comical, surreal and sometimes grotesque content. This points to the

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confounding of deep-seated misconceptions about existence and enlightenment. This is apparent in the oft-cited Chinese Zen parable from the *Lin-chi lu* (Jap. Rinzai roku) collection. Master Lin-chi tells of a man who one day could no longer see his head in the mirror. Terrified that he had lost it, the man scrambled around in search before coming to the realization that, of course, his head had been there all along: it was his head itself that had been doing the looking (Lu, 1976). This parable is often used in Zen to highlight the paradoxical nature of a spiritual quest. Ultimately, we have lost neither the meaning of existence nor our spiritual connection with the world. Nevertheless, the illusion of something lost keeps us unsatisfied, always desiring and looking for that *something* (Magid, 2013; Osaka, 2002a). According to one of the Four Noble Truths in Buddhism, desire for and attachment to things that are non-existent or impermanent — such as objects, emotions and oneself — are the main drivers of *dukkha* — constant discontent and suffering. Buddhist approaches to contemplative education often highlight the importance of understanding the impermanence of all existence as well as the illusoriness of attainment as a prerequisite to wisdom (Orr, 2012). Yet what the parable conveys more subtly is that we will not realize that we are looking in vain unless we have the illusion of loss in the first place. Sometimes an illusion is a necessary catalyst and driver of spiritual development (Magid, 2013).

Psychoanalytically oriented Buddhist scholars have found resonances between the illusory nature of loss and Lacanian notions of ego and desire (D'Amato, 2014; Moncayo, 2012; Purser, 2011). Lacanian theory on the formation of the ego in childhood in the so-called mirror-phase (Lacan, 2001) is a case in point. When a child is born, her relationship with her mother is psychically non-discriminated. As she is treated by her parents as a person with her own needs and desires — “mirroring” a separate individual — the child eventually develops a conception of herself as an independent, coherent psychophysical entity, separate from her caregivers and capable of self-control. However, this sense of the autonomous, separate and knowable self is only

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imaginary: neither the child nor the adults can ever control and be the sole origin of their own thoughts, needs, desires and bodily functions (Lacan, 2001; Cho, 2009).

In the formation of the ego, the subject loses its sense of non-separated existence and immediate satisfaction. This lost thing — in Lacanian parlance, the object *a* — haunts the subject's existence: A normal subject is in a state of repetition, endlessly desiring and searching for this lost object. However, in a strict sense, the subject has not really lost anything, since subjectivity, which reflects and desires, is itself constituted through this very separation and loss. Without loss, there would be no subjectivity. Furthermore, *a* as an “object cause of desire” does not really exist either: Once a person believes that she has acquired the object of desire — the meaning of life, a lover, a steady job — it ceases to elicit desire. The lost thing, thereafter, seems to reside elsewhere (Lacan, 2001, 1977; Fink, 1995). Object *a* thus has a ghostly essence: it does not really exist, yet it strongly affects how the subject conceives of the world and acts in it (Zupancic, 2001).

This Lacanian depiction of an illusory loss finds resonance in the illusion of attainment and the nature of suffering in the Zen Buddhist tradition. Both traditions help in understanding that by default, the subject is in a state of error concerning her own ego and existence. Both also deem the ego to be misconstrued as bounded and having a lasting, independent existence (D'Amato, 2014). Finally, both the parable from the Lin-chi collection and the Lacanian account of the formation of the ego arrive, albeit in different ways, at accounts of illusory loss as the cause of an erratic search for something lost (Magid, 2013; Moncayo, 2012).

Transference and the “subject supposed to know”

In a clinical context, transference is a psychoanalytic concept that refers to an analysand's tendency to re-enact previous close relations — especially with the analysand's own parents and significant others — and the conflicts therein with the analyst. Following Freud (1981), several notable theorists such as Melanie Klein, Wilfred Bion and D. W. Winnicott have sought to refine the term.

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Transference has also been studied in transformative education as a complex dynamic between teachers and students. In positive transference, a teacher may be idealized as a wise, protective and accepting figure; in negative transference, feelings of resentment, disappointment or rejection are projected onto the teacher (Felman, 1982; Knights, 1993; Robertson, 1996). Several psychoanalytically trained Buddhist intellectuals have noted that these transference illusions are also common in Buddhist teacher-student relations. Students may fantasize that their spiritual teachers are parental figures, expecting them to provide care, recognition and an existential sense of security (Magid, 2013; Moncayo, 2012).

Lacan sees transference not only in terms of a positive or negative affect on the analyst but also its general function in the development of clinical relationships (Lacan, 1977). Here, transference assumes an epistemic quality: It follows from the Lacanian ontology of the subject that what determines transference is the ego's search for certainty. In a psychoanalytic relationship, the analysand expects that the analyst, by listening to the analysand's speech, will determine the true meaning of her ailments and provide a certain explanation and cure. The analyst thus assumes the position of a "subject supposed to know" (pp. 230–233). This means that the analyst is seemingly in possession of object *a* — that which the analysand desires. For example, this might be an answer or a solution to deep spiritual questions or longings.

This transference desire is also indelibly etched in adult education. The positioning of the teacher as a "subject supposed to know" is a catalyst of learning as it carries with it the illusion that knowledge is something that can be possessed and acquired like a tangible object (Knights, 1993; Robertson, 1996). However, the Lacanian theoretical tradition also highlights that the subject supposed to know does not really possess the truth that the analysand/student desires. As a subject, she is barred from acquiring object *a*. It is therefore one of the aims of psychoanalysis to help the analysand realize the nature of this transference fantasy (Fink, 1995).

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Lacan emphasizes that it is not the healthy, rational ego that should be addressed or allied with when dealing with transference relationships. Such dialogue would only support the imaginary sense of the ego as capable of stepping outside itself to judge its own transference (Lacan, 1977). This means that in treatment, essential truths cannot be constructed through rational discussion, but rather by channeling transference desire — often by confusing and frustrating the analysand — thus allowing the truths to finally unravel. It is here that Lacan’s approach differs from psychoanalytic object-relations approaches that seek to make an alliance with the rational ego. As I shall note, this also has repercussions for our understanding of transformative experiences in contemplative education.

The kōan Mu

Using *The Three Pillars*, I now analyze in greater detail the way in which a transference dynamic can be teased out in Zen Buddhist training and even become a crucial element in its success. The pedagogical backdrop of kōan training in *The Three Pillars* is the *sesshin*, a week-long period of intensive seated meditation — *zazen* (Kapleau, 2001). *Zazen* takes place in the *zendo*, a monastery hall where students engage in seated and walking meditation and follow the lectures of the *roshi*, the Zen teacher. When students embark upon kōan training — having first completed a meditative practice of counting or following their own breath — they often receive the kōan Mu from the roshi. In the *Mumonkan* collection, the kōan Mu reads as follows:

A monk once asked Master Joshu, “Has a dog the Buddha Nature or not?” Joshu said, “Mu!”
(Shibayama, 1974, p. 19)

According to the *Mumonkan*, the student must provide an answer to the question “What is Mu?” Literally the word “Mu” translates as “no” or “nothing.” Yet it is obvious that when a teacher asks a student “What is Mu?” she cannot simply retort “no” or “nothing” (Shibayama, 1973, p. 21). Often

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receiving such a kōan may be puzzling for the student: “What is it that is expected of me? How am I supposed to solve this?” As such, the kōan is reminiscent of the Mezirowian “disorienting dilemma,” an experience that does not fit with the learner’s pre-existing frame of reference (Mezirow, 1997). This dilemma is often a necessary catalyst to a transformative learning process. Yet in kōan practice, mere rational reflection and argumentation will not do. Instead of providing an explanation of the Buddhist principle of emptiness, students must be able to express immediate insight in the way they breathe, sit and speak. For example, certain effortlessness and spontaneity in quotidian conduct may express insight into the nature of Mu. To achieve it, the *Mumonkan* implores, “concentrate yourself into this ‘Mu,’ with your 360 bones and 84,000 pores, making your whole body one great inquiry” (Shibayama, 1974, p. 19).

In *The Three Pillars*, the kōan practice commences with receipt of the kōan Mu from the roshi during a private conversation called *dokusan*. The first phase in practicing this kōan involves repeating “Mu” with each breath during zazen. This is thought to build the power of concentration required in subsequent practice. The second stage involves constantly asking “What is Mu?” The aim of this practice is to make Mu the most profound existential question that presses the student, day and night, during the sesshin. By asking about Mu, the student also asks “What is reality?” and “What does it mean to exist?” (Kapleau, 2001; see also Osaka, 2002b).

The ideal aim of sesshin is attaining *kenshō*, which refers to realizing or “seeing the nature” of one’s own existence. This is not the same as ultimate enlightenment but an initial breakthrough in spiritual transformation, and it is further deepened by a curriculum of other kōans (Kapleau, 2001). In the process, Mu becomes the sole focus of the student’s desire and longing and, seemingly, a passageway toward an answer to her spiritual questions. In time, this questioning is supposed to reach a “critical point, the stage where a student feels encased in a ‘block of ice’ or immured in a ‘crystal palace’” (p.104). This point of extreme frustration and anguish is thought to be the stage that will eventually lead to kenshō. Allegedly, when the time is ripe, something small –

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a shout, a ring of the bell — may be all it takes to catapult this tension into deep realization of the nature of one's own existence (Kapleau, 2001).

The above reveals how the student's desire is channeled in kōan training. Mu envelops object *a*; the lost object and the cause of desire. The desire to gain an answer, as shown above, is buttressed by the very structure of subjectivity and the role of imagined loss in the foundation of desire. Thus, rather than highlighting that there is nothing hidden and nothing to be gained and that everything is perfect as it is, the practice of Mu intensifies and channels desire and striving for the lost object. Obviously this is supposed to be extremely frustrating — the more the student exerts herself, the more evanescent the answer becomes (Kapleau, 2001).

Transference in *dokusan* discussions

The desire for object *a* is also cultivated in transferential relations between the teacher and the student. During *dokusan*, a student can ask questions concerning the practice. Usually, the roshi also asks questions that probe the student's understanding of the kōan. The social and material aspects of *dokusan* can be seen as supporting the emergence of a transferential relationship between the student and the roshi. Students prostrate themselves before addressing the roshi, who is solemnly seated on the floor, baton in hand, listening, observing, questioning and sometimes suddenly barking and shouting fiercely (Kapleau, 2001). This is reminiscent of what Cranton (2016, p. 84) calls “position power” in adult education: the teacher has formal, institutionalized authority and control over rewards and punishments as well as information. The roshi also has “personal power” (p. 84) as he radiates an aura of spiritual superiority, while the student aspires to acquire his qualities (Engler, 2003). From a Lacanian viewpoint, this transferential relation entails the roshi occupying the role of the subject supposed to know, seemingly in spiritual possession of something that the student desires: the “correct” answer to the question “What is Mu?”

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The roshi often probes the student by asking “What is Mu?” or by tapping on the floor, asking “What is this?” Sometimes the roshi startles the student by immediately scolding her if her answer suggests she has not attained Mu (Kapleau, 2001). In the transcripts concerning the kōan Mu, the student is usually utterly puzzled as to precisely what the roshi expects of them. A typical dokusan conversation in the initial stages of Mu proceeds as follows:

STUDENT: I can't seem to get anywhere with Mu. I don't know what I am supposed to understand or not understand.

ROSHI: If you could truly say “I don't understand” after profound reflection, that would be convincing, since in truth there is nothing to understand. In the deepest sense, we understand nothing. What can be known by philosophers and scientists through reasoning is only a fraction of the universe. (p. 120)

Thus, the roshi may give away the Buddhist idea of non-attainment, reminding the student that “Mu is not only a means to enlightenment, it is enlightenment itself” (p. 241). However, the clarity and intellectual finesse of his words do not seem to help the student at all. The student may “know” all of this already from reading Buddhist philosophy and listening to the roshi's lectures, yet does not really “get” it in a way that satisfies the roshi. Thus the roshi sends the student back to further practice zazen. In the next dokusan, the student may arrive with a tentative new answer:

STUDENT (EXCITEDLY): I know what Mu is! This is Mu in one situation (picking up the roshi's baton). In another this would be Mu (lifting another object). Other than that I don't know.

ROSHI: That is not bad. If you really knew what you meant by “I don't know,” your answer would be even better. It is still obvious that you still think of yourself as an entity standing apart from other entities. (p. 120)

Here, the student no longer tries to explain Mu using words only, but hopes that some other demonstration would qualify. She may express her understanding that Mu is not about propositional

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knowledge — knowing *that* — but more like *wu wei* in being effortless and intuitive action unhindered by intellectual reflection or hesitation. Yet again, the student is sent back to meditate and ponder on Mu. On another occasion, the roshi admits: “You know how to do zazen properly. You also have an excellent mental picture of Mu. But to actually experience Mu, you must discard this portrait of it lodged in your discursive mind” (p. 124).

What exactly is needed to give the teacher what he wants? Initially the student cannot help but try to understand Mu intellectually. However, the roshi bluntly reminds her that trying to understand it is merely “adding another head to the one you already have,” recalling the story of the man who thought he had lost his head (p. 132). The roshi confuses another student by questioning whether she requires any further practice given that she is already enlightened. The student is left dumbfounded. She is also reminded that she must exert herself to the utmost, but avoid anticipating *kenshō*, for it comes suddenly if at all (Kapleau, 2001).

With such mixed messages, students are often thrown into confusion and even deep anxiety. They cannot help but try to think and verbally express their understanding of Mu. At the same time, they try desperately not to think, not to be separate from their existence. Neither way seems to lead anywhere. It is no wonder that one student describes his desperate state as like being “bound in chains, in a prison from which I can’t escape” (pp. 129, 244–247).

This state of anxiety is named Zen sickness: The student is caught in a loop of desperately seeking to attain something that she does not have — happiness, harmony or deep understanding — which seems to only result in further disappointment and self-criticism. According to Buddhist psychoanalytic theorists, this kind of attunement may only support the ideal ego (Moncayo, 2012; Phillips, 2015) “as the acme of personal perfection, with all mental defilements . . . and fetters . . . eradicated” (Engler, 2003, p. 37). However, while an inflated ideal ego may hinder spiritual development in Zen training, I shall now illustrate that anxiety and frustration may also indicate inevitable transference errors that pave the way toward transformative experience. In other words,

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one must sometimes go through the fantasy of attainment before a deep existential realization can materialize.

Overcoming transference

Some psychoanalytically oriented Buddhist scholars have noted similarities between Zen training and Lacan's own controversial therapy sessions — including their aims. It is also well known that Lacan himself was influenced by Zen and may have adopted from it some of his cryptic ways of speaking and behaving in therapy and seminars (D'Amato, 2014; Purser, 2011). As in the kōan training described above, Lacanian therapy also has elements that confuse and frustrate analysands, such as aborting sessions abruptly with a contradiction or dilemma to which the analyst does not provide an explanation, thus leaving the analysand uncertain of precisely what is expected of her. Moreover, the analyst may assume a “Socratic” disposition, professing to have no solutions to the analysand's predicament (Moncayo, 2012, pp. 214–215). This may be a strategy for disrupting transference fantasies in which the analyst is viewed as holding the answer or cure *qua* the subject supposed to know.

Psychoanalytically oriented theorists of education have pointed out that some of the deep existential truths of human life cannot be taught by direct verbal persuasion or arguments — such as addressing the rational ego only – but instead by inducing the student to experience them directly (Britzman & Pitt, 1996, p. 119). Often this is a situation in which transference fantasies are deeply frustrated and eventually unraveled. In Lacanian terms, this is the process of “traversing the (transference) fantasy” (Lacan, 1977, p. 273). This does not mean attaining object *a* once and for all and thus ceasing to desire. Instead it means coming to understand the unattainable nature of the object of desire and, subsequently, the unanswerable nature of existential questions.

I propose that successfully passing the kōan Mu may be conceptualized as a similar traversal of fantasy. In Zen master Mumon's commentary of the kōan, Mu is “the barrier of Zen” used to

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“cast away one’s discriminating mind” (Shibayama, 1974, p. 19). However, it is essentially a “gateless barrier”. This is an apophatic expression, at once asserting and denying the obstacle between the student and the object of desire (Osaka, 2002b). The student must succeed in finding the answer to the question “What is Mu?”, an achievement that implies attainment. Yet success here means realizing that there is nothing to attain. Conveniently enough, the Lacanian philosophical tradition also employs the parable of a paradoxical gate to express a transference illusion and its unraveling. Slavoj Žižek (1989) refers to Franz Kafka’s famous story of the gate of law and its gatekeeper. A man approaches the gate of law, asking for entry. The gatekeeper tells him that now is not the right moment to enter. The man decides to wait by the gate for his turn. However, despite repeated pleas, the gatekeeper refuses to let the man enter. Time passes and the man grows old. Even when he is close to death, he is not granted entry. Then, just before he dies, he asks the gatekeeper whether anyone has ever entered the gate. The gatekeeper answers: “Here no one else can gain entry, since this entrance was assigned only to you. I’m going now to close it” (Kafka, 1915/2017). The psychoanalytic interpretation of this story is that what is hidden behind the gate exists only in the subject’s own transference fantasy; something lost — love, the meaning of life — is merely projected there. What is beyond the gate is thus the phantasmatic object *a*, eliciting desire and existing only for the subject. Thus, the hidden truth learned from the transference fantasy is the nature of desire itself (Žižek, 1989). As Žižek puts it: “Transference is, then, an illusion, but the point is that we cannot bypass it and reach directly for the Truth: the Truth itself is constituted *through* the illusion proper to the transference” (pp. 59–60).

While Kafka’s story has a tragicomic tone, the outcome of kōan training in Kapleau’s transcripts is more positive. The sudden transformative realization, a kenshō, following stringent, at times frustrating contemplation on Mu, unfolds not as disappointment but as joy and liberation in finding out that one’s head had been there all along; that there is nothing hidden and nothing to discern intellectually. This realization does not occur as the logical conclusion of philosophical

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questioning but as an intuitive and affective revelation that resonates through the subject's whole being. A student writes in his journal of a sudden experience following an intense period of kōan training:

One night during the summer of that year while single-mindedly devoting myself to my kōan, Mu, I experienced a state in which I felt as though I was looking at the vast, utterly transparent sky, and the next moment was able to penetrate the world of Mu with an awareness that was clear and sharp. (Kapleau, 2001, p. 256)

From other student accounts kenshō assumes different expressions, but has the same air of deep liberation, relief and a sense of oneness and presence (Kapleau, 2001). These transcripts express not disappointment but joy in the discovery that there is nothing to understand. It is something the student intellectually knew all along, but which she had only now come to know with her whole being.

In contemplative approaches to transformative education, there are many ways in which to interpret deep insights gained through meditation. Byrnes describes practicing “mindful awareness,” as “a constant process of returning again and again to the present moment guided by a sense of the whole” aimed at increasing “wholeness” which “involves welcoming and connecting all aspects of being human” (Byrnes, 2012, pp. 25–26). In her phenomenologically oriented analysis, Morgan describes “ground-of-being experiences” as typical of students of contemplative education. This term refers to an “understanding of a benign, foundational ground that is conceived of here as a transconceptual, elemental substrate that founds reality” (Morgan, 2012, p. 43). These sorts of experiences may nurture a transformed consciousness that is less ego-centered and more compassionate toward itself and others (Irwin & Miller, 2016). Hart (2008) adds research of the neurological correlates of such experiences to the phenomenological view.

Here, I wish to take a more relational stand and suggest treating transformative experiences in contemplative practice as a function of an interpersonal process triggered by an illusion of

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something missing from one's own existence. This illusion of loss initially fuels a subject's desire for an answer. Mu is then inserted into contemplative training as a "gateless barrier", behind which the lost something, object *a*, is seemingly hidden. Here the student is initially engaged in a "transmissive" (De Angelis, 2018, p. 181) understanding of contemplative knowledge: she thinks that knowledge of Mu is something that can be acquired and owned and that the teacher possesses it. The exchanges between the student and teacher are wound around this transferential desire, intensifying rather than simply avoiding it. The teacher is the "subject supposed to know" whose knowledge the student seeks to acquire.

Contemplative training can assume a critical, reflective level when the student understands that practice requires deep self-questioning (De Angelis, 2018). Yet it is also true that mere cognitive reflection can never suffice. Such thinking only amounts to further illusion. The teacher cannot directly explain the nature of this illusion to the student but rather, must work with transferential desire (Bracher, 2006). With the intensification of desire, transferential fantasy is guided towards its eventual unraveling, whereby the student no longer tries to determine what the teacher expects of her. Transferential strivings become "liquidated" (Lacan, 1977, p. 267), meaning that they are no longer strongly geared toward the lost *thing*. Kenshō refers to this liquidation as a novel attunement to desire. This is visible in the spontaneous, effortless way in which the student talks, eats and walks (Kapleau, 2001). This attunement does not refer to any "unity" beyond language that one can identify with in the form of an "oceanic feeling" that overcomes the alienation of the ego. As Moncayo (2012) puts it in his Lacanian reading of Zen Buddhist philosophy, this would only reiterate the idea of returning to a supposedly lost symbiotic state, and it does not mean an ultimate cessation of desire. Instead, it is now possible for the student reflexively "to follow one's desire in order to understand its coordinates, how it is staged within fantasy, and from a position that is bereft of secure identities or comfort" (Taubman, 2010, p. 208).

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Conclusion: Contemplative training and the ethics of transference

Psychoanalytic and contemplative approaches to transformative education often highlight the extrarational and embodied aspects of transformative experiences (Mezirow & Dirkx, 2006; Byrnes, 2012). This stands in stark contrast with what Mezirow (1997) calls the instrumentalist view of adult education — teaching reduced to a method of proceeding efficiently from A to B so that certain instruction causes certain knowledge to be steadily accumulated and amenable to standardized external evaluation. One easily misses many important aspects of teacher-student relationships in contemplative approaches to transformative education if they are viewed only for their informative and rational content. As Hyland (2017) notes, even many contemplative trends are currently commodified into neat training packages, resulting in the “McDonaldization” of spirituality. This is why the “mystery and messiness” (Dirkx, 1997, p. 81) of transformative processes must be constantly highlighted in contemplative approaches as well.

Accentuating the extrarational in transformative education does not amount to a pessimistic view of subjectivity enslaved by unconscious forces, nor does it mean that students are merely indoctrinated through the manipulation of unconscious desires. Rather, it points toward a willingness to be an open-minded and reflective learner, whether one is a teacher or a student. This means, as Taubman (2010, p. 207) puts it, “living in the complexity of one’s life and adhering to the truth of that complexity, a truth which involves assuming responsibility for the way one’s desires and psychic investments conjure and inform that irreducible complexity.”

Awareness of such complexity opens novel vistas for the ethics of, and the power relations inherent in, transformative education and contemplative approaches. First of all, as adult educators, we must be ethically attentive to forms of position power and personal power that may encourage transference and counter-transference attachments (Markham, 1999). To address these issues, Cranton (2016, p. 96) introduces practical ways of “exercising power responsibly” in transformative education. These include avoiding titles, standing at the front of the group and pretensions of

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complete knowledge. Yet it is also true that even dialogical, seemingly egalitarian pedagogical structures in adult education may nurture relationships of hierarchical power and authority (Brookfield, 2005). They may sometimes merely intensify transference, leading the student to idealize the teacher as a person so wise that she knows that she knows nothing and relinquishes all external symbols of superiority (Bracher, 2006). Moreover, none of these methods protects the adult educator herself from falling into the trap of counter-transference – the fantasy of being adored or appreciated by the students (Knights, 1993; Robertson, 1996; Cranton, 2016). This is also true of contemplative education: Whereas Zen teachers may position themselves as non-knowing figures, there are no guarantees that a teacher will not succumb to counter-transference and use her authority in questionable ways. Numerous examples of this in Western Buddhism have caused concern within and outside Buddhist circles (Oppenheimer, 2013).

The ethics of transformative education often follow the principles of truthfulness and dialogical interaction. Yet, the case of kōan training analyzed here highlights that transference dynamics between a teacher and a student make the realization of such principles highly complex. Although dialogical communication may be used, it is sometimes not enough to usher students to a deep transformation. Instead, the pedagogical force of communication in contemplative training is mediated by the perlocutionary aspect of strategic speech acts in certain situations aimed at self-realization. Here, the rational ego, which upholds the ideals of identity, self-mastery and transparency, is intentionally bypassed. The student's desires and fantasies are first humored, then eventually frustrated as a pre-requisite for transformation. This serves to testify that an adult educator need not always try to avoid transference. Instead, the key to emancipation may sometimes be to make students learn about their own transference fantasies firsthand and, thereby, undo transference (Cho, 2009).

We may thus interpret the ethical attunement of contemplative training as aiding the student to loosen the hold of the deep-seated fantasies of something missing and that this something can be

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acquired and possessed once and for all (Moncayo, 2012, p. 54). Instead of reducing ethics of teaching to the following of a moral code or principle, ethical attunement here means a willingness to adopt a critical attunement to oneself and one's desires. This speaks to Olli-Pekka Moisio's (2009, p. 490) view of the "gentle shattering of identities" as both a problem and a general aim of transformative adult education. Clinging to the (imaginary) idea of a fixed self, limited symbolic reality and simple ethical rules may give rise to intolerance and unrealistic demands of oneself and others. This is why, as adult educators, we should remain ethically attuned towards questioning the truth of ourselves. It also means acknowledging that deeply transformative processes are always risky endeavors rife with desires, fantasies and moral conundrums within and between teachers and students.

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