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LANGUAGE AND EMPTINESS IN CHAN BUDDHISM AND THE EARLY HEIDEGGER[1]

I. INTRODUCTION

Despite the cultural and intellectual distances between Martin Heidegger's thinking of being (*Sein*) and Zen Buddhism's meditation on the empty mind and no-self (*kongxin* 空心; *wuwo* 無我), both have been portrayed as disclosing "primordial experience" through the dismantling of the sedimentations involved in language and conceptual thinking. Whereas Heidegger's destructuring (*Destruktion*) of the history of metaphysics and fallen inauthentic everydayness discloses the possibility of a more originary encounter with being and reorientation of individual existence (*Dasein*), Zen Buddhism's aporetic and puzzling strategies seemingly throw even standard Buddhist teachings into question in revealing original mind (*benxin* 本心) and self-nature (*zixing* 自性).[2] Heidegger and Zen apparently converge in overcoming objectifying, representational, and calculative thought as derivative in light of a more originary abiding presencing.[3] Such comparative portrayals have been increasingly questioned as critics of Heidegger and Zen, and of their potential convergence, warn that this totalizing and constant presence is a reification that problematically repeats rather than overcomes metaphysics.[4]

Heidegger himself emphasized the holding sway and presencing of being. But these concepts are understood primarily temporally and ecstatically, and evoke absence and interruption as much as—if not more than—abiding presence, singularity and alterity as much as universality and identity, and transience and transformation as much as constancy. The fundamental temporality, historicity, and hermeneutical character of Heidegger's thinking of being are particularly evident in his lecture courses of the early and mid-1920s, which help contextualize the strategies and claims of *Being and Time* and his later thought. Heidegger's early strategy of formal indication (*formale Anzeige*) is a process of destructuring and emptying

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pre-established contents and models through formalization in order to allow concrete phenomena in their variety, texture, and particularity to show themselves from themselves. This strategy is reflected in his methodological atheism requiring the suspension of faith in philosophy, the emptying of the sacred, and the formalization of religious categories that he redeploys in his analysis of human existence.[5] Rather than positing an abstract or mystical "presence" underlying beings, a totalizing being subsuming individual life, Heidegger's hermeneutics of factical life stresses the lived enactment, performativity, and practice of being.

Heidegger's early hermeneutics is illuminative in contrast with the paradoxical performative strategies of Hongzhou 洪州 and Linji 臨濟 Chan Buddhism. In these strategies, emptiness is an enactment and practice of emptying and clearing, proceeding through interruptions of ordinary conventional dispositions. Destructuring aprorias and paradoxes—including the reification of sacredness and central Buddhist teachings—are skillfully employed to encounter the phenomena themselves "just as they are" (*faruru* 法如如). Rather than sublimating phenomenality into a monistic or totalizing presence, including the presence of "absolute nothingness," Heidegger and Chan Buddhism indicate strategies for allowing things to be encountered immanently from out of themselves in their singularity and contextual interdependence. These strategies of dereification proceed through transformative encounters with what resists being thought, perceived, or categorized in customary terms by ordinary understanding. Nothingness and emptiness are indispensable yet traceless moments in attending to, responding to, or being mindful of the phenomena themselves in their upsurge and self-occurrence (*phusis*) or the one interdependent suchness (*yiru* 一如) of the myriad dharmas (*wanfa* 萬法).[6]

Chan Buddhism faces the reification of its own means of communication, which would undermine rather than encourage insight into the self, responsiveness to things, and compassion toward others. Buddhism's history reveals the language of anti-essentialist destratification itself becoming essentialist, conventional, and ideological. This includes the most radical examples, such as the incessantly restylized figure of Linji Yixuan 臨濟義玄 (d. 866/7). Linji was increasingly depicted as both more radically unconventional and more paradigmatically orthodox during the Song Dynasty. During this period, Chan masters became less likely to behave in unconventional or shocking ways while idealizing such behavior. Transmission and tradition established a past that was never present, even as the promised spontaneity of the event of awakening kept such codifications in suspense.

Chan spontaneity and "living words" (*shengyu* 聖語) occurred within and presupposed the context of traditional Buddhist practices and doctrines, Chinese social-political conditions, and Chan monastic discipline and ritual.[7] As spontaneity only transpires in and through these relational and thus interpretive contexts, the view that Chan dismantles fixed words and concepts for a pure intuitive or mystical experience has been justly criticized as naive.[8] Historiographical accounts illustrate the multiple ways that Chan used and became entangled in its own rhetoric, propaganda, and ideology.[9] The content and form of Chan encounter dialogues and *gongan* 公案 ("public case") practices do not simply reveal a free, spontaneous, and natural play, as Chan spontaneity, naturalness, and iconoclasm occurred in determinate contexts of ritual and monastic discipline where they received their meaning and impact.[10]

Chan works explaining monastic discipline and ritual, for example, the *Baizhang Qinggui*《敕修百丈清規》(Baizhang Chan Monastic Regulations) that include rituals for the well-being of the emperor and traditional Buddhist practices, make the traditional Buddhist and Chinese social-political contexts of Chan evident.[11] The rhetoric of a pure noncausal and nonkarmic spontaneity is criticized in Tang Chan itself by Guifeng Zongmi 圭峰宗密 (780–841), who condemned this rhetoric for its immoral antinomian consequences. In the *gongan* concerning Baizhang 百丈 and the fox-spirit, a monk who denied karmic conditioning was all the more relentlessly conditioned by it in being reborn as a wild fox.[12]

Because language is self-destructuring without a primordial entity or original experience standing outside of the self-reproduction and deconstruction of language, there is nothing outside of the event of communication. Critics thus reject the claim that Chan Buddhism concerns intuition, "mysticism," and "pure experience."[13] While recognizing the legitimacy of deconstructive and historiographical analyses of Chan/Zen's self-presentation, these also become one-sided insofar as communication can be transformative in its repetition. Just as Chan interactions presuppose larger social contexts and the conservative reproductive character of language, as living communication they enact something surprising that reveals a different perspective and alternative comportment. Because of its aporetic character, the Chan rhetoric of immediacy and spontaneity can be more than rhetorical as the master uses yet cannot transmit any representational content. Through perplexing communications and world-opening encounters, awakening is transmitted without the "transmission" of an objective content.[14]

Chan is not one unified ahistorical entity in its practices or doctrines, as diversity, contestation, and *agon* are at work in its

official history. Chan should be carefully distinguished then from the metaphysical and mystical approaches attributed to it in the interpretations of Zen that emerged from D. T. Suzuki and the Kyōto school. These tend to interpret Zen as a unique culmination and discontinuous transcendence beyond previous Buddhism.[15] Approaching Zen through Heidegger has contributed to these interpretive tendencies as Lin Ma has shown. Her work demonstrates the questionable nature of linking Heidegger and Zen too closely, noting their distinctiveness.[16] The difference between Heidegger's thinking of nothing (*das Nichts*) and Chan emptiness (*kong* 空), however, reveals that both prioritize communicative and lived strategies (the "way" or "how" one proceeds) such that they cannot have the same end or object. Neither Chan Buddhism nor Heidegger posits something beyond communication that could be identical or the same. Neither discourse establishes an object that transcends its own occurrence and performative enactment. It is accordingly questionable whether there is silence without communication, holiness independent of mundaneness, and *the Way* independent of *a way* and being underway.

Given this inescapable interpretive dimension, there is neither "Being" (*Sein*) nor "Mind" (*xin* 心). That is, there is no access in language and experience to static nonexperiential and nonlinguistic entities, or some self-sufficient representational content or idea, subsisting beyond the event and enactment of interpretation, individuation, and appropriation. Pure intuition and mystical experience are all the more entangled in words and interpretations by ignoring them. What is at issue in Chan talk of nature, mind, and emptiness, and in Heidegger's basic concepts such as being, existence, and nothingness, is the living word in the context of explicitly and implicitly codified traditions and the communicative event of saying that which cannot be directly—in a purely determinate and representational language—said.

Heidegger's nothing and Chan emptiness challenge conventional experience and language through what already informs and potentially reorients and transforms experience, language, and practice. Chan relies on and is enmeshed in experience, language, and practice, while stressing that these too are conditional, interdependent, and empty, whereas Heidegger's being is disclosed within language, history, and experience, while remaining concealed in, different than, and irreducible to such disclosure. The history of being is equally being's disclosure (presence) and its concealment (absence) in its occurrence. Being's epochality and concealedness are historical-ontological insights that Kōichi Tsujimura finds lacking in Zen. Heidegger's historicity is the possibility of appropriation and

individuation, whereas the singular in Zen occurs not as history but as the lived communication of self and other.[17]

II. Posing the Fundamental Question

According to Dahui Zonggao 大慧宗杲 (1089–1163), there are two kinds of awareness: direct awareness of the "beginningless present" that "flows out point by point from within your own heart to cover heaven and earth," and comparative awareness, which is "gained from external refinements," discerning, fixing, and fixating names and categories.[18] The intrinsic inappropriateness of comparative thought is not an ideal starting point for addressing the nothing in Heidegger's works in relation to emptiness (both the "not" [*wu* 無] and the Chinese term for *śūnyatā* [*kong* 空]). Comparison is inevitably external and reifying, and the "not" of the incomparable does not appear to allow much to be said.

In *Introduction to Philosophy*, Heidegger engages the question of how one can ever begin to enter into philosophy, concluding that this is a false issue as we are already within philosophy as soon as we pose the question.[19] This "we" is already within philosophy in myriad ways with varying degrees of wakefulness. Philosophy cannot begin then from historical or systematic analysis or comparisons, as these lead away from rather than awaken philosophizing.[20] Philosophy does not occur as long as one talks about it. It happens in its enactment through "bringing philosophizing underway" and letting its matter and question become "free in us in this situation."[21] Questioning is philosophical in striking back at the one posing it. In asking, the questioner is questioned, and exposed to the question of its existence.[22]

The need for self-knowledge, to know oneself, finds no response in our everyday ontic concepts and categories. This absence is intensified in the happening of philosophy in which "the complete nothingness of human essence" is revealed.[23] This nothingness, signifying here "non-essence," is neither merely negative in the sense of negation nor external to human existence. It is identified with a radical absence of ground and the abyss confronting human existence in its lack of bearing and orientation (*Haltlosigkeit*).[24] Even the silence advocated by some masters and Wittgenstein cannot evade this situation insofar as keeping silent already presupposes and relates to being and nothing in one way or another.[25] Because one cannot be secure from the nothing in remaining silent, language can only take this risky and uncertain lack of bearing and orientation as its point of departure. Language and its formalization in logic

cannot avoid addressing—if only indirectly—the intractableness of nothingness.

According to Heidegger, the lingering and risky question of nothing is not accidental or derivative to Western traditions, as the exclusion of the nothing still relies on it and takes recourse to it.[26] The question of nothing haunts the positing of what is and the supposedly unquestionable givenness—whether the positivity of God as the highest entity among others or the positivity of the factually given—through which philosophy has construed and mastered beings.[27]

Leibniz posed the question, in order to demonstrate God's existence, "why is there something rather than nothing?" and answered that both terms, beings and nothing, could only be justified and explained through a third term, namely God, which is external to and provides the ground for both. If there is no God, there is no sufficient reason for existence over nonexistence, and the world would disappear into nothingness. Because the world does exist, its sufficient reason—the third transcendent term—necessarily exists.[28]

For Heidegger, the question of why there is something rather than nothing is most perplexing. It is already baffling in its own terms of something (being) and nothing even prior to Leibniz's further addition of God as a transcendent third term. Rather than being or God, it is the nothing appearing in Leibniz's argument that provokes the greatest perplexity and concern. Heidegger commented that he asks Leibniz's question in a different sense. Whereas for Leibniz "nothing is simpler and easier than anything," for Heidegger: "If [the question] does not concern itself with beings and inquire about their first cause among all beings, then [it] must begin from that which is not being."[29]

Heidegger is incorrect insofar as Leibniz, for instance discussing the Christian association of nothingness and evil in his *Dialogue on Human Freedom* (1695), noted how nothing "can enter into the composition of things" much like the zero in arithmetic. Leibniz commented: "[things] are bounded or imperfect by virtue of the principle of negation or nothingness they contain, by virtue of the lack of infinity of perfections in them, and which are only a nothingness with respect to them."[30] [Yet t]he analysis of finitude as imperfection, as privation and sin, [remains] at work in Leibniz, [and] contrasts with the perfection of things "as they are" in Hongzhou Chan.

Reflecting on nonbeing, Heidegger remarked: "One of the essential sites of speechlessness is anxiety in the sense of the horror to which the abyss of the nothing attunes human beings."[31] Why does Heidegger venture to speak of the nothing in the face of such speechlessness? Is this not the logical confusion, religious error, or nihilistic void of which both metaphysical and anti-metaphysical positivistic Western philosophy persistently warn?

III. EMPTINESS, NOT SACREDNESS

Chan texts mention that the profane and the holy, the secular and the sacred, cannot be separated from each other. One can only be found through and in the other. Chan discourses recurrently deny that we can distinguish the ordinary and the sacred, dismantling the categories of the sacred, the religious, and the divine in the name of emptiness, which threatens to make significance tremble if not disappear. The radical self-questioning of the premises of Buddhism occurs in numerous Chan question and answer dialogues (*wenda* 問答) that form the basis of the *gongan*. In the first case of the *Biyan Lu*《碧巖錄》(*Blue Cliff Record*), Emperor Wu welcomes Bodhidharma telling him of his many meritorious works:

> [W]hen the Emperor asked how much merit he had acquired, Bodhidharma answered "none." He asked "What is the first principle of sacred truth?" Bodhidharma replied "Vast emptiness, nothing sacred (*kuoran wusheng* 廓然無聖)." He asked "Who then is facing me?" He replied "Don't know."[32]

Such encounters are distinctive of the iconoclastic style of the—retrospectively designated—Hongzhou lineage established as orthodox in the Song Dynasty.[33] Such examples of anti-authority and anti-orthodoxy themselves become authoritative and orthodox.[34] Their radicality consisted in conventional practices of the acquisition of merit through good works and banal ideas of the sacred being problematized by the emptiness of the agent, works, and the sacred itself. In the same way, Hongren reportedly dismissed offerings and the pursuit of blessings (*futian* 福田) in the *Platform Sutra* in favor of looking into oneself through which the emptiness of the self is disclosed.[35] However conventionalized and stratified emptiness might become, the encounter is the possibility of renewing its significance for oneself. In each case the question can be posed and enacted anew for oneself in one's own hermeneutical situation by abiding or lingering in its questionability. Heidegger's approach to the disorienting and reorienting horror of the abyss of the nothing evokes Huangbo and Dahui's void that is in turn itself void and not to be feared. Across the incommensurable interval of their differences, there is an exposure to that which is not a something, not even a noumenal or transcendent something, but nothing.

In an exchange from the *Zhaozhou Yulu*《趙州語錄》(Recorded Sayings of Zhaozhou), a monk asked; "Does a dog have Buddha-nature or not (*gouzi foxing* 狗子佛性)?" Despite the inherent Buddha-nature in every sentient being, the master replied "Not" or "No."[36] The Chinese *wu* 無 not simply means "not" but from its early Daoist context implies emptiness; it is the absolute nothing or void in

the phrase *xuwu* 虛無. Reinhard May argues that the Chinese graph *wu* 無 is related to clearing, a place where there were once trees, which he compares with Heidegger's clearing (*Lichtung*).[37] Yet this etymologically problematic interpretation gives *wu* as nothingness a derivative meaning to what was present and its givenness or positivity, which is questionable given the priority of the nothing and emptiness.

Immanence is usually interpreted as the givenness and positivity of worldly phenomena or things, which are to be accepted as such or derived from a higher ideal or transcendent source. Here—between vast emptiness and self-empty dogs—the question arises not of the positivity of things and facts about them but of the self-given or immanent emptiness of the phenomena themselves. How are emptiness and the nothing, on the one hand, and, on the other, the immanent givenness, suchness, or thusness of things—empty and "just as they are"—interconnected?[38]

Is the "not" an operational negation or can it have another function in its surprising performance or enactment? Whereas "nothing" presupposes the logical negation (the not) that is its source and measure according to Carnap, the opposite holds for Heidegger. Logical negation—and the very positivity of things—presuppose the openness that allows humans to encounter things at all.[39] Heidegger's formalizing through the formless and emptying through the nothing discloses the openness that is the fullness of things. It is presupposed by language and experience yet rarely disclosed in the experience of the nothing, which is not a thing but an object-less and nonintentional condition and way of being attuned.[40] This condition is particularly visible in exceptional situations of uncanniness (*Unheimlichkeit*), where existence is experienced as slipping away and left hanging in extreme anxiety or boredom in which sense is shaken and shattered.[41]

The young Heidegger depicts an elemental disquiet (*Unruhe*)—a precursor to the elemental uncanniness—as constitutive of history and life (*Leben*).[42] Heidegger employs while destabilizing the language of *Lebensphilosophie*, depicting life as its own immanent ruination and questionability.[43] Life is not only encountered as stability, security, and certainty but as dispersal, distance, and ruination.[44] Rather than being a continuum of vital energy or evolutionary progress, disquiet characterizes life and indicates its fundamental motility.[45] This constitutive questionability indicates the need to confront life in both its everydayness and uncanniness, as the being of life is both most familiar and strange.[46] Each is furthest from himself; what is most familiar in its everydayness remains unquestioned, and the uncanniness of everydayness left unspoken.

In uncanniness, the radical absence of ground (*Ab-grund*) and the nothing—like death anticipated *as* unanticipatable and

inappropriable death—are not another something to be integrated
and ordered in everyday existence or a conceptual system. Dasein
is relational with itself, others, and its world, and yet the "nothing" is
dis-relational; it ex-propriates rather than being something that can
be appropriated or mastered. It resists being ordered and assimilated,
disrupting the relationally constitutive of human existence. In inter-
ruptive and aporetic limit situations, the "I" is depersonalized and
existence reduced to its being-there (*da-sein*).[47] Without experiences
of the "not" and otherwise, the absolutely and fully other, the con-
ceptualization of negation would never begin. As negation is only
one way nihilation occurs, it cannot be the absolute measure of the
nothing, which it becomes in onto-theological metaphysics and posi-
tivist anti-metaphysics.[48] Thus exposure to the nothing is not neces-
sarily negative. Finite freedom and worldly transcendence, which
signify being thrown (*geworfen*) into encountering (*begegnen*) world
and things, allows humans to encounter and engage others, things, and
ourselves. This signifies that we can and do "release ourselves into
the nothing."[49] Extreme anxiety and boredom—and the nothingness
they indirectly disclose—indicate this releasement in heightened form
while being presupposed in each human comportment.

IV. PLAYING WITH WORDS

Hongzhou radicalism is a product of the Chan imagination during the
Song Dynasty, and yet it is not solely a Song creation as it is already
criticized for its radicalism and antinomianism by Zongmi during the
Tang Dynasty.[50] Hongzhou and Linji Chan—the orthodox identity
of which were stabilized in the Song period as a "golden age"[51]—are
recognized for their simultaneous ruthless critique and creative exer-
cise of communication. Its use of indirect, paradoxical, and shocking
ways of speaking indicates a strategy that is simultaneously suspicious
of language while richly employing it in manifold ways.

   Chan's "wordless words" are extraneous to the extent that they
should not be taken as establishing an absolute standard or substan-
tializing concepts of the Buddha and awakening.[52] This way of speak-
ing is incoherent only if the expressive exercise of language is
secondary to its cognitive propositional use, or if it is impossible to
performatively enact language against language's referential charac-
ter. McRae has noted the significant difference between performative
and referential utterances in Chan.[53] Chan ways of speaking reveal
the inadequacy of both claims. The tension between performance and
predication, experience and language, cannot be ignored nor unques-
tioningly reproduced, as it clarifies the extensive variety of linguistic

tactics involved in ways of speaking that challenge conventional speech and understanding.

Heidegger asserts that predicative or propositional thinking can only conceive "nothing" as either another something, an object of predication, or absurd.[54] Heidegger argued against the semantic paradigm of conventional and formal logic, which Chenyang Li argues is inadequate to Chinese thought, as it makes the derivative primary insofar as truth as correctness presupposes truth as the openness of disclosure and propositional language presupposes language as the interpolation of address and being addressed.[55] The issue of truth is one of wakefulness to the question:

> Only if it belonged to the essence of philosophy to make the obvious incomprehensible and the unquestioned something questioned. Only if philosophy had the task of shocking common sense out of its presumptive self-glorification. Only if philosophy had the function of arousing us so that we become awake . . . [56]

Heidegger does not deny but stresses that, however inappropriately, the transition from representational to recollective thinking proceeds through representational thinking.[57] The transition from metaphysics to another kind of nonmetaphysical thinking proceeds through metaphysical questions.[58] Although it is not primary, representational and predicative thinking, and the tension between predication and performance, are part of the movement of thought interpreted as a practice rather than as a collection of referential and representational content.

Chan performatively places in question representational predication in utterances that themselves use predication, thus allowing each exercise of authority to be an occasion for criticism and further transformation.[59] Such self-challenging speaking is enacted in the Chan iconoclasm best exemplified in the reshaped figure of Linji, when he advises Buddhists to kill the Buddha and the patriarchs or to become the genuine person without rank or position—who is described as "here in this lump of red flesh" and as "a shitty ass-wiper."[60] Chan's linguistic practices involve an emptying and desacralization of what is popularly understood as sacred in order to point back to the "one great matter": "There is only you, followers of the way, this person in front of my eyes now listening to the dharma. . . ."[61] In another case, Linji is described as forbidding travel to Mount Wutai 五臺山, where devotional Buddhists believed the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī appeared.[62] Linji's Mañjuśrī cannot be found on a sacred mountain, as the Bodhisattva is performatively manifested in the event of one's own activity and practice.

The secularization and demystification implicated in Heidegger's "methodological atheism" likewise separates philosophy from faith

(*Glaube*), as faith as faith in transcendence beyond being remains irreducible to the immanence of philosophy. Destructuring struggles to renew itself in its enactment and confrontation with what has been handed down and solidified, and accordingly demands "a genuine confrontation with the history that we ourselves 'are.' "[63] Heidegger and Chan suggest two different strategies of transformation through responding to immanent existence. The destructuring discloses what is "already" at play as the destructuring transcendence and modification of everydayness remains immanent within everyday existence or the ordinary mind. Despite the divergence between awakening and authenticity, they suggest two strategies of addressing transformational immanence and overlap in their existential orientation if not in the contents of existence. This existence itself in its immanent significance is the great issue of concern and transformation. Heidegger's authenticity and inauthenticity are both modifications of the same everydayness, while Buddhism stresses that the awakening of "ultimate truth" occurs in this life in relation to the conventional mundane world.[64] Existence in its temporal and worldly being-there is ecstatic for Heidegger in standing out in the world, irrupting amidst beings. It surpasses the world as formative of world yet does not transcend the world in the sense of departure to another realm. This worldly transcendence is not derivative of intentionality, selfhood, or subjectivity but grounds them.[65] Dasein cannot be restricted to the immanence of consciousness or perception, the subject or the "I," even as it exists within worldly immanence as precisely this "each time one's own" "being-in-the-world."[66]

In contrast to faith, which Heidegger described as a believing, revealing, and way of existing that does not arise spontaneously or immanently from and through Dasein itself, it is you yourself that is in each case in question; your own mind is the great issue.[67] What Chan practices transform is not the mind as an entity but how the mind enacts and experiences itself and things, whether it mirrors things as a free responding to phenomena or is reactively attached to and enthralled by things. The point is to avoid being entangled in or turned around by things and not be lost in their emptiness. One ought not be attached to and hindered by the Buddha himself in awakening to one's own condition.[68] Authenticity is an immanent modification of inauthenticity and absorption in beings—including the self—rather than their elimination: "We are overwhelmed and spellbound by beings. Yet not only do we relate in this way to beings, but we are likewise ourselves beings—this we each *are*."[69]

Authenticity and inauthenticity are both modes of the same everydayness. Instead of being opposites or different worlds, authenticity is the modification and realization of one's inauthenticity. As

self-relating finitude confronted by infinity, Dasein can only be at best authentically inauthentic or inauthentically authentic:

> The authentic being of Dasein is what it is only insofar as it is inauthentically authentic, that is, 'preserved' in itself. [Authenticity] is not anything that should or could exist for itself next to the inauthentic.[70]

A Hongzhou formulation is that nirvana is samsara and samsara nirvana, just as suffering is awakening. The discovery of what is in each case already happening, to use a phenomenological expression, is repeatedly emphasized by Linji.[71] As in the Bodhisattva's nonappearance on Mt. Wutai, what we seek is not external at all.[72] Seeking is not finding since it implies already being lost.[73]

Chan's deconstructive and postmodern critics stress its instrumental view of language,[74] and its "rhetoric of immediacy."[75] Wright and Faure reject the idea that one can use words to get beyond words and forget them in doing so.[76] The practice of Buddhism is a vehicle that destructures itself in its being enacted for oneself, as "self-practice is the practice of the Buddha" and being the Buddha is only the practice of the Buddha.[77] Practices, including linguistic ones, are not extrinsic or secondary but constitute the path and being-underway that is itself awakening. This performative rather than instrumental use of language entails that language is not a means to a nonlinguistic mystical exteriority transcending the world. As each time self-enacting and possibly transformative, Chan is neither mysticism nor faith insofar as it does not dissolve the subject within an intransitive absolute.

The encounter with and transformation through emptiness is crucial to Chan; yet it is not itself the end or an absolute. Emptiness does not signify the classical western conception of nothing as the negation or privation of being, or its modern onto-theological successors. In the Chan context, Zongmi interprets emptiness as a provisional negation to be relativized as a negative means inadequate to the ultimate positive soteriological goal of becoming a Buddha.[78]

Huangbo presents a different approach to emptiness as an abyss without limit or obstruction. It is not instrumentalized as purely negative and not rejected as nothing. The dharma does not mean that there are "no things"; it is a freedom and ease in relation to things. It is not being dependent on causes and things in the midst of their interdependent conditionality.[79] Emptiness is spoken of as the source of being and nothing, mind and no-mind, and compared with the empty sky, empty hand, or the clarity of infinite empty space.[80] Nonetheless, emptiness is not an entity or something to be construed as an absolute reality.[81] It is itself empty and thus in need of dereification and unsaying. Heidegger's abyssal groundlessness of the ground, the nonessence that informs essence, approaches this conditionless condition.[82] As

itself empty, emptiness both attracts and repels language, as can be traced in the long and multicultural history of the apophatic saying and unsaying words.

Chan sayings are performative rather than referential, as it speaks a language of indication rather than explanation.[83] Chan makes language useful to that which seems beyond language, as its long literary history indicates. The poetic and paradoxical use of language to indicate what is other than language and what is ultimately the same (if there is no beyond) entails that these warnings are directed against the fixation of words and being fixated by language, as "genuine mind is not fixed, and genuine wisdom is not bounded."[84]

The call to "go beyond" is reversed in the Chan assertion that there is no beyond to be reached. Each being is already sufficient without needing augmentation or diminishment.[85] Just now, one is already there, and "this very inescapability itself is meditation: if you go further and apply effort to examine yourself, you're even further away."[86] Dahui describes a double movement of transcending any absorption in ordinary daily life and responding to it in its immanence—empty and clear, spontaneously aware and responsive with untroubled mind in encountering and responding to situations, people, and circumstances.[87] It means "not to forget the matter of birth and death while in the midst of the passions of the world."[88]

The way is without difficulty and nothing mysterious. It is "perfect and complete right under everyone's feet" and "pure and naked in the midst of everyday activities."[89] There is nothing to cling to and calculate, as language is self-deconstructing in Chan without a primordial independent thing standing outside the self-reproduction and deconstruction of language. Using without being absorbed in words and interpretations, as there is no ultimate definition or account that can be provided in words, Chan challenges and brings into question clinging to the language that one uses, including self-reflexively the language of nonclinging.[90] The question concerns the language of experience and the experience itself rather than the negation of language. The issue is one's own being or mind; not "Being" or "Mind." The self-destructuring of language and experience occurs through multiple performative means—from the shout and the stick to the aporia and double-edged bind of the *gongan*. These work to disturb experience and language by showing their disquiet and uncanniness in Heidegger and their interdependent, impermanent, and empty character in Chan.

V. SPEAKING PARADOXICALLY

In typical Hongzhou formulations, "ordinary mind is the way" and "this mind is the Buddha."[91] Awakening is inseparable from and

found in the ordinary activities of life: "seeing, listening, sensing, and knowing are fundamentally your original nature."[92] Mazu Daoyi 馬祖道一 (709–788) described this ordinary mind as meaning "no intentional creation or action, no right or wrong, no grasping or rejecting, no terminable or permanent, no profane or holy. . . . Now all these are just the way: walking, abiding, sitting, lying, responding to conditions, and handling matters."[93] "Though the dharma is not attached to anything, every phenomenon one has contact with is thusness."[94]

Heidegger examines human existence in *Being and Time* from the perspective of everydayness, what it does habitually and for the most part, and authenticity is primarily a clarifying transformation of one's disposition. Both Heidegger and Chan concern everyday practices and the breakthroughs that transform them. In the former, it is uncanniness—the anxious dread in the face of one's inescapable death that cannot be mastered or appropriated. In Chan, it is a series of physical, linguistic, and mental shocks aimed at a transformation of the everyday itself, as one is in each case already awakened. This return to the self through the lack of self, the "no-self" or the destructuring of ordinary self-conceptions, is provoked through speaking otherwise through the "living words" of the abusive, paradoxical, poetic, shocking, and tautological strategies unfolded in Chan. These strategies are not attempts to block or forbid doubt through belief but—akin to Heidegger's emphasis on immanently lingering in the question and the uncanniness of the nothing—to intensify it into the "great doubt" that through focus and commitment is the occasion of self-awakening.[95] So Sahn compares this with a mosquito biting an impenetrable iron statue, and Dahui—who is associated with the development of *kanhua* 看話 or *gongan* introspection meditation on the crucial phase or punch line (*huatou* 話頭) that creates doubt—describes the one suchness of mind and things as requiring "an abrupt, complete break."[96]

Without fearing or fixating emptiness, or creating new entities via nothingness as early analytic philosophy feared of Heidegger's language, "this very lack of anywhere to get a grip is the time for you to let go of your body and life."[97] Dahui advocates intensifying and radicalizing one's doubt: "Take your own constant point of doubt and stick it on your forehead."[98] In the worst moment, when your mind "seems bewildering and stifling and flavorless, as if you are gnawing on an iron spike, this is just the time to apply effort. . . ."[99] This is "a sudden leap within the fires of birth and death," in which one leaps out "without moving a hairsbreadth."[100] "[N]ot knowing where we come from at birth and not knowing where we go at death," there is no escape and nothing to be found.[101]

The interruption of uncanniness, the abyssal, and the remaining within and inability to escape from the question and questionability, is a basic trope for Heidegger. He employs the language of horror, the sublime, or the uncanny as an experience that discloses something different about human existence. Wright maintains that the strangeness and disruption of the conventional and ordinary are two forms of Chan rhetoric.[102] One glimpses the uncanny and shocking when Linji speaks of murdering Buddha and parents, Huangbo describes the terrors of "being suspended over an infinite void, groundless, with nothing to hold on to," or in depictions of the "great death" that destructures ordinary understandings of life and death.[103]

Chan employs its own dramatic and paradoxical language and use of physical surprises like shouting and hitting. In both, we find that the disruption of the ordinary flow of experience is key, "cutting off" the habitual and customary succession of thought and practice in order to make, according to Huineng 惠能, "non-abiding the basis or fundamental."[104] In a passage attributed to Mazu, it is claimed: "Responding to things, [the dharma-body] manifests itself in [many] shapes like the reflection of the moon in water. It functions constantly without establishing a root."[105] Rootlessness is itself responsiveness, when one can "function responsively without losing balance."[106] It is by cutting off the flow of habits that ordinary persons perceive their own sagehood: "just now non-abiding, just now root mind."[107] The root mind (*benxin* 本心) is not an isolated essence, substance, or foundation, as the Chinese word *ben* 本 implies the rooted or interconnected ground from which things sprout, that is, a plural ground that is dynamically interrelated.[108]

The denial of habitually lingering in dwelling and abiding, including dwelling in nondwelling, is challenged by the spontaneous and receptive yet nonhabitual practice of undermining one's habitual practices. It is "sudden" in breaking through one's attachments in order to achieve what is not an achievement: namely, what Huineng calls no-thought, no-form, no-abiding. It is seeing without being disturbed and a letting occur.[109] Dahui's Chan enacts an immanent looking that is transformative in attending to the phenomena rather than hankering after the transcendent: "Just look right here, don't seek transcendent enlightenment. Just observe and observe."[110]

Letting is a responsiveness that is only possible based on the recognition of the emptiness and immanent self-manifestation and suchness of things: "From the outset the dharma has been in the world; being in the world, it transcends the world. Hence do not seek the transcendent world outside, by discarding the present world itself."[111] Chan reorients human "dwelling." Beyond the nostalgic language of being at home and homelessness, dwelling is found to be

nonabiding or a free and easy dwelling without support. In nonabiding, empty illumination manifests itself.[112] We are reminded not to abide and cling here either. Nonabiding is letting the way circulate freely, without reifying the dharma itself through attachment and calculation, and what indeed should impede it?[113] Heidegger approximates this point in recognizing the fundamental lack of ground of human existence and the possibility of a being-underway and dwelling appropriate to the groundlessness and conditionality of each ground and condition.

VI. Self-Questioning Emptiness

Chan emptiness and Heidegger's nothingness approach each other without convergence in emphasizing the originary groundlessness and temporal impermanence of human existence. Heidegger's nothingness is not negative. The verbal *nothing* (*Nichts nichtet*) is not a negative thing nor is it a meaningless null. Nihilation, negativity, and negation presuppose a prior nothing that is indicated in extreme limit-situations but fundamentally abyssal and indescribable. Nothing is the performative condition for the negativity that makes thought and practice possible, including all positivity. Likewise, emptiness is not pure negativity or undifferentiated voidness. It is no mere abstract or nihilistic void, as it is comparable to the infinite openness of space and sky, and is the intersecting interdependent happening of things; that is, the fecund multiplicity of things and their encounters. Emptiness is not "nothing," understood as either the threat or realization of annihilation, but the openness of liberation itself.[114] Emptiness exceeds the doctrinal affirmation and reification of difference and the other in embracing the multiplicity of the myriad or ten thousand things, each of which is a great teacher and expresses truth. Against the affirmation of the presence of the trace, Linji leaves us without a trace, the trace is never found and none is left behind. What Dale Wright has described as a "spontaneous responsiveness without end" occurs through the emptying of fixed characteristics and the rejection of a self-subsistent pure mind or unchanging self-nature.[115]

In the record of Linji, the great universal wisdom of the Buddha "refers to you yourselves who, wherever you are, understand that the ten thousand things have no innate nature and no characteristics."[116] Apophatic language concerning nothingness and emptiness should not be reified any more than being or mind. If such language aims at opening and releasing rather than eliminating phenomena, the great issue and originary questionability of existence is not about nothing understood as annihilation or a hidden reality.

Emptiness is compared with space cleared of objects or the sky of clouds and solar phenomena, allowing things to be seen clearly.[117] Emptiness as the enactment of clearing and opening is partly analogous to Heidegger's formal indication and clearing (*lichten*). No particular content or doctrine is analogous, only the formalization and emptying of content that allows phenomena to present themselves. In the self-destructuring path-opening wayfaring of formal indication, the more empty the concept, the more open it can be to the concreteness and richness of the phenomena insofar as formalization remains tied to encountering—while not being captivated by—facticity and its variations. The early Heidegger identifies the process of formalization and emptying articulating the particularity and texture of the singular through formal indication.[118] This emptying is not a retreat from phenomena for Heidegger, as it is deformalized into individual and concrete ways of understanding.[119] Dasein's realization of its nonabsorbed distance from things allows it to listen and respond to them.[120]

Emptiness is formally indicative rather than explanatory of, or referential to, the concrete in Heidegger. The destructuring movement—from the "false concreteness" of the indifferent absorption in the phenomenon to letting beings occur—is a free engaging and encountering of beings.[121] Heidegger contrasted calculation, compulsion, and mastery with a responsive letting that heeds the incalculable.[122] This letting-be-encountered is the primordial activity of being-there, already described in 1928/1929 as the openness of letting beings be and the letting or releasement into beings of *Gelassenheit*.[123] Formal indication, as emptying and distancing in order to open up and let beings be, allows the distancing from absorption in things that is the open expansiveness of phenomena.

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Endnotes

1. Chinese terms are transliterated in pinyin except in bibliographical information of works using Wade-Giles. Some translations have been silently modified. For Chinese references, I have used the CBETA Chinese Electronic Tripitaka at http://www.cbeta.org. Taishō references are added when the Chinese text is used, and are cited by T volume number, page number(s), column(s) (a, b, or c), and line numbers.

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 3. Joan Stambaugh, *Impermanence Is Buddha-Nature: Dōgen's Understanding of Temporality* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), 120–28.
 4. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: The Seabury Press, 1973), 68; Carl Olson, *Zen and the Art of Postmodern Philosophy: Two Paths of Liberation from the Representational Mode of Thinking* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 220; Louis E. Wolcher, *Beyond Transcendence in Law and Philosophy* (London: Birkbeck Law Press, 2005), 84, 216.
 5. Particularly "*Phenomenology and Theology*," Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 39–62.
 6. Huangbo, *Chuan Xin Fa* Yao, T 48 N2012A: 381c07; T 48 N2012A: 381c01.
 7. This is evident in Albrecht Welter, *The Linji Lu and the Creation of Chan Orthodoxy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) and John R. McRae*, Seeing through Zen: Encounter, Transformation, and Genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
 8. Welter, *Monks, Rulers, and Literati: The Political Ascendency of Chan Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4; Welter, *Linji Lu and the Creation*, 82.
 9. Ibid.
10. McRae, *Seeing through Zen*, 90–91.
11. Translated as *The Baizhang Zen Monastic Regulations*, trans. Shohei Ichimura (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2006).
12. On Zongmi's critique, see Peter N. Gregory, *Inquiry into the Origin of Humanity* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995), 32–33, 90–94, 203–4; Jeff Broughton, "Tsung-mi's *Zen Prolegomenon*: Introduction to an Exemplary Zen Canon," in *The Zen Canon: Understanding the Classic Texts*, eds. S. Heine and D. S. Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 25–27. On the fox *gongan*, see Steven Heine, *Opening a Mountain: Kōans of the Zen Masters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 130. For further consideration of the issue of karma in Buddhism and phenomenology, see my "Questioning Karma: Buddhism and the Phenomenology of the Ethical." *Revisioning Karma*, eds. Charles Prebish, Damien Keown, Dale S. Wright (Journal of Buddhist Ethics, 2007), 353–73.
13. Bernard Faure, *Chan Insights and Oversights: An Epistemological Critique of the Chan Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 3, 78–80.
14. Chung-ying Cheng, "On Zen (Ch'an) Language and Zen Paradoxes," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 1, no. 1 (1973): 77–99.
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16. Lin Ma, *Heidegger on East-West Dialogue: Anticipating the Event* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 183.
17. Kōichi Tsujimura, "Martin Heideggers Denken und die Japanische Philosophie," in *Japan und Heidegger*, ed. Hartmut Buchner (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke Verlag, 1989), 165.
18. Ta Hui (Dahui), *Swampland Flowers*, trans. J. C. Cleary (Boston: Shambhala, 2006), 57.
19. Heidegger, GA 27: *Einleitung in die Philosophie* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 2001), 3. Heidegger citations are to the volumes and page numbers of the German *Gesamtausgabe* except when noted.
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21. Ibid., 4 and 6.
22. Ibid., 11.
23. Ibid., 12
24. Ibid., 331–38.
25. Ibid., 191.
26. Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, 84.

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28. For example, "On the Ultimate Origination of Things" (1697) in Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, trans. and ed. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989), 149.

29. Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, 290.

30. Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, 114.

31. Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, 238.

32. Adopted from Stephen Addiss, Stanley Lombardo, and Judith Roitman, eds., *Zen Sourcebook: Traditional Documents from China, Korea, and Japan* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2008), 9; Thomas Cleary and J. C. Cleary, trans., *The Blue Cliff Record* (Boston: Shambhala, 1992), 1.

33. Welter, *Linji Lu and the Creation*, 40, 98–99.

34. Ibid., 48.

35. T 48 N2008: 348a29-b02; Huineng, *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*, trans. Phillip B. Yampolsky (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 128.

36. Modified from Addiss, Lombardo, and Roitman, *Zen Sourcebook*, 76.

37. May, 1996, 32–33.

38. So Sahn, *The Mirror of Zen* (Boston: Shambhala, 2006), 99.

39. Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, 91.

40. Ibid., 86–88.

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42. Heidegger, GA 60: *Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1995), 30–54.

43. Heidegger, GA 61: *Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1994), 2, 151–55.

44. Ibid., 103.

45. Ibid., 93.

46. Ibid., 189.

47. Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, 89.

48. Ibid., 92.

49. Ibid., 96.

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51. Welter, *Linji Lu and the Creation*, 2–3.

52. Yuanwu Keqin, *Zen Letters: Teachings of Yuanwu*, trans. J. C. Cleary and Thomas Cleary (Boston: Shambhala, 1994), 106–7.

53. McRae, *Seeing through Zen*, 76.

54. Heidegger, *Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, trans. Michael Heim (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 2–3.

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60. Linji, *Zen Teachings of Master Lin-Chi*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 52, 13; compare Welter, *Linji Lu and the Creation*, 89.

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72. Linji, *Zen Teachings*, 29, 31.

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76. Pine, *Bodhidharma*, 1987, 111.

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79. T 48 N2012A: 383b02–13; "Transmission of Mind", 37.

80. Sahn, *The Mirror of Zen*, 51, 64; Dahui, *Swampland Flowers*, 1.

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87. Dahui, *Swampland Flowers*, 2–3, 6; Yuanwu, *Zen Letters*, 46.

88. Dahui, *Swampland Flowers*, 34.

89. Yuanwu, *Zen Letters*, 99.

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91. Jinhua Jia, *The Hongzhou School of Chan Buddhism in Eighth- through Tenth-Century China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 67–82.

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97. Dahui, *Swampland Flowers*, 38, 10.

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105. Jia, *Hongzhou school*, 124.

106. Cleary and Cleary, *Blue Cliff Record*, 42.

107. *Xinming*《心銘》, T 51 N2076: 457c15.

108. Gregory, *Inquiry into the Origin of Humanity*, 13, 66–67.

109. T 48 N2008: 353a–b, Huineng, *Platform Sutra*, 139.

110. Dahui, *Swampland Flowers*, 72.

111. T 48 N2008: 351c09–10; Huineng, *Platform Sutra*, 161.

112. T 51 N2076: 458a08.

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114. Linji, *Zen Teachings*, 70.
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116. Linji, *Zen Teachings*, 71.
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119. Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, 21.
120. Ibid., 135.
121. GA 61: 30; Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, 144.
122. Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, 236–37.
123. GA 27: 180, 198–99, 214.