

Committee V
East-West Perspectives on Science
and Spirit: Time and Consciousness

DRAFT--5/15/91
For Conference Distribution Only



Handwritten marks, including a checkmark and some scribbles, located to the right of the logo.

**ATTENTION AND TEMPORALITY: BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVES
ON THE TRANSFORMATION OF TIME**

by

Philip Novak
Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies
Dominican College
San Rafael, California, USA

The Eighteenth International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences
Seoul, Korea August 23-26, 1991

cf. Novak
Com 5

International Conference on the
Unity of Sciences XVII
Committee V: East-West Perspectives
on Science and Spirit

Time, the devouring tyrant.
--Traditional expression

Time, the refreshing river.
--W.H. Auden (cited by J.
Needham¹)

**Attention and Temporality:
Buddhist Perspectives on the Transformation of Time**

Philip Novak

"I come as Time, the waster of the peoples," says Krishna in the Bhagavad-Gita.² And human beings, scanning the ruin, understandably recoil from time's ravenous jaws. Anxiety about time contributes heavily to the unsatisfactoriness of human life, the very unsatisfactoriness from which the Buddha, long ago, claimed to offer deliverance. It is no surprise, therefore, that his teaching is fundamentally concerned with the transformation of our sense of time. This paper will explore the transformation of time-consciousness adumbrated in Buddhist theory and effected in Buddhist practice.

Part One sets its parameters by locating the Buddha's teaching within the perennial dialectic between eternalist and process philosophies. Part Two sketches a Buddhist theory of time by way of the notions of impermanance (anicca), instantaneous being (khanavada) and being-time (uji)--a task for which I am heavily indebted to others. Part Three breaks new ground by describing a specific form of Buddhist attentional

practice and by describing how that practice is meant to weave a merely theoretical understanding of time into the fiber of one's being, moving it from psyche's surface to its depths.

PART ONE: Early Buddhism and the Reality of Time

"The history of natural philosophy," writes G.J. Whitrow, "is characterized by the interplay of two rival philosophies of time--one aiming at its "elimination" and the other based on the belief that it is fundamental and irreducible."³ As D.R. Griffin's instructive Physics and the Ultimate Significance of Time⁴ suggests, the key players in the contemporary incarnation of this rivalry are, on the one hand, theoretical physics and certain mystical traditions which, for different reasons, agree that time derives from the limitations of the human mind and is ultimately unreal;⁵ and, on the other hand, the process philosophy and theology stemming from the work of A.N. Whitehead standing for time's ultimacy and irreducibility.⁶

Were the Buddha alive today he would join this debate reluctantly, noting that ontological questions such as the ultimate nature of time tend to remain forever moot and to become for those enamored of them "a jungle, a wilderness, a puppet-show, a writhing and a fetter."⁷ Affirming the pragmatic primacy of the psychological over the ontological, he might add that it profits one less to theorize about the irreversibility of time's arrow than to pull that arrow from one's heart.⁸ Nevertheless, no outlook so penetrating as the Buddha's could

function without at least an implicit ontology of time.

What then is the Buddha's view of time? Unfortunately, as David Kalupahana points out, there are at least three answers to this question depending on which historical sector of Buddhism one addresses them to--early Buddhism, Abhidhamma, or Madhyamika.⁹ This paper will address only the early Buddhist conception of time, partly because it seems to the author to be the most astute conception, and partly because the meditation practices discussed in Part Three are congruent with the early Buddhist outlook and form with it a tight theory-practice symmetry. "Early Buddhism," Kalupahana tells us,

"seems to have followed the middle path, so famous...in Buddhist thought. It...considered absolute time as an extreme and an unnecessary hypothesis. The other extreme is the consideration of time as a mysterious illusion of the intellect. Avoiding both these extremes, the Buddha seems to have considered time as an essential feature of the universe and the experience of it."¹⁰

If early Buddhism were therefore compelled to take sides in the eternalist/process debate about time, it would, I believe, side against the view of time as illusion and side with process philosophy in which temporality is fundamental.

And this is so despite the fact that the reality disclosed by the experience of Nibbana is described as timeless. Whatever the Buddha found in the experience of Nibbana he found nothing to cause him to deny or in any way suggest that he would subrate, on the plane in which philosophical discussion occurs, the reality of the following commonly experienced characteristics of time:

(1) a one-way direction that is in principle irreversible;

(2) categorical differences between past, present and future;¹¹ and 3) constant becoming (as, for example, in the doctrine impermanence (anicca) discussed below.

Anyone denying (2), for example, would be saddled with the burden of explaining why, if the Buddha understood that the future was really as determined as the past, he preached and exhorted and encouraged right effort so unceasingly? One could say that the Buddha's earthly life was just a mirage compassionately conjured up by the timeless Dharmakaya for the benefit of beings suffering the illusion of time, but when we see such suggestions against the background of similar others in the history of religion, like the faintly ridiculous Docetist notion that Jesus of Nazareth's earthly career was a mirage because it would not be suitable for the the Supernatural Son of God to suffer and die, it is revealed for what it is, an unfortunate lapse into metaphysical hocus-pocus. In fact, the Buddha's teaching insists that even though any given moment is totally determined by its antecedents, there nevertheless exists in that same moment, by virtue of the mind's capacity to remain attentive, the seed of genuine freedom and the possibility of real novelty. And freedom and novelty imply nothing less than a truly open, indeterminate future.

Moreover, though Nibbana is a state in which "nothing arises and nothing passes away" it is nevertheless a temporal and temporary state. It arises in time, and the experience does not last.¹² One eventually gets up. This is what the Buddha did. At

thirty-five he realized Nibbana. Then he got up. He taught and preached growing steadily older until at eighty years of age his time-worn body breathed its last. Therefore, while it is cogent to say that the experience of Nibbana marks a moment after which psychological time is permanently altered, that is, rendered incapable of producing emotional dukkha, it is not cogent to say that Nibbana ends psychological time.

Furthermore, it should be noted how extremely rare is the attainment of Nibbana in its purity and completeness, for of the tens of thousands of serious Buddhist practitioners in the world today there are few, if any, arhats.¹³ For most practitioners Nibbana remains a polestar, and this is perfectly alright, since the fruits of the Buddhist transformative opus are already deeply enjoyed and widely shared on this side of Nibbana. And even if time were not strictly ultimate, the band of human experience in which this becomes known, in which time is sublated by a timeless reality, is in Buddhism so narrow as to disqualify it as a starting point for an adequate lebensphilosophie. Knowing this the Buddha, in sharp contrast to almost all other religious geniuses, anchored his entire teaching not in Ultimate Timeless Perfection but in the fact of human suffering. It is as if he said: You can experience a plane of Timeless Perfection, and it is good if you do, but it is best not to talk about it for conceptual appropriations of it prior to its full experiential fruition are but another form of greed-for-views and are bound to mislead.

at Nova

In sum, early Buddhist teaching simply accepts as "relatively absolute" the commonsense notion that our lives are woven by time, and that our salvation depends not upon transcending time, but on relating rightly to our ineluctable temporality. The aim of Buddhism is not to escape time in a mystical state but to transform it from a binding to a liberating force, to render time's perpetual perishing less productive of human desperation, and to do so not by denying its reality but by entering its reality intimately in meditative practice. But we are already ahead of ourselves and we had better move on the next section.

PART TWO: A Buddhist Sense of Time: Anicca, Khanavada and Uji

The Buddha's dying words, "All created things are impermanent" vividly underscore the centrality of the doctrine of impermanence (anicca) within the Buddha's teaching. As frequently as one finds water wet, one finds upon entering Buddhist thought an emphasis on the law of incessant change. Impermanence is one of the three marks of existence¹⁴ and is as fundamental to Buddhism as the four truths and the doctrine of dependent arising. The Buddha's doctrine of impermanence is as radical as any in the history of philosophy, easily rivalling that of Heraclitus. You cannot step in the same river twice not only because it is in the next instant no longer the same river, but also because it is neither the same foot nor the same you. Every cell, every atom, every neuron, every nexus and every part

of every nexus: changing, changing, changing.

At least two doctrines grow out of the Buddha's teaching of anicca adding nuance to it. They are: khanavada (Pali: instantaneous being or momentariness), probably an early Buddhist attempt to formalize the doctrine of impermanence but which was speculatively elaborated and over-absolutized by the scholastic Abhidharmists; and, on the other side of the Buddhist world some sixteen centuries later, uji (Jap: being-time) attributed to the Zen master, Dogen.

Despite their geographical distance from one another the notions of khanavada and uji are close in their attempt to correct the mind's mistaken tendency to overlook the present moment. Perturbed in the midst of its habitual and ceaseless intentional flow toward the future, the mind tends to devalue the present moment and overlook it as but one more moment in the sequence of causal relations, an effect of past causes and a cause of future effects. Our usual sense of the present is of a single moment within a time stream understood to exist "out there", a container in which events occur. It is precisely this apprehension which is at the root of the problem for, as David Loy explains,

...in order for time to be a container, something must be contained within it: objects. And for objects to be "in" time, they must themselves be nontemporal--i.e., self-existing [emphasis his]. In this way a delusive bifurcation occurs between time and "things" generally as a result of which each gains a spurious reality. The first reified 'object' and the most important thing to be hypostatized as nontemporal is the "I", the sense of [some aspect of the] self as... permanent and unchanging. So the objectification of time is also the

subjectification of the self which thus appears only to discover itself in the anxious position of being a nontemporal entity inextricably "trapped" in time.¹⁵

If we accept Loy's reading, then the notions khanavada and uji can each be seen as conceptual correctives to the "delusive bifurcation between things and time" that comes about as a result of ontologizing time as a container. For both the early Buddhist doctrine of khanavada and the later Japanese Mahayana notion of uji suggest that there are no things, but only 'thingings.' Reality is pure process, pure temporal becoming, and khanavada can be seen as anticipations of Whitehead's "actual occasions," those perpetually perishing throbs of experience which are nevertheless the ultimate facts composing the universe in its creative advance. Events, says Kenneth Inada speaking from the perspective of khanavada, do not flow in time, but as time.¹⁶

This is Dogen's point as well in his poetic rendition of uji (being-time): "The time we call Spring blossoms directly as flowers. The flowers in turn express the time called Spring. This is not existence within time; existence itself is time."¹⁷ Loy's more prosaic instruction well summarizes the transformed notion of time encouraged alike by khanavada and uji:

We normally understand objects such as cups to be "in" space, which implies that they must have a self-existence distinct from space. However, ...the cup is irremediably spatial. All its parts must have some thickness and without the various spatial relations among the bottom, sides, and handle, the cup would not be a cup....[T]he cup is space:..[it]is what space is doing in that place...The same is true for the temporality of the cup. The cup is not a nontemporal, self-existing object that happens to be "in" time, for its being is irremediably temporal. The point of this is to destroy the thought-constructed dualisms between

things and time...The being-times we usually reify into objects cannot be said to occur in time, for they are time.¹⁸

This may sound at first as if Loy has used the interdependence of time and objects only to deny the reality of objects, while leaving "time" reified. But the dialectic cuts both ways. To say that there is only temporal process with no nontemporal 'thing' anywhere to 'suffer' it, is actually equivalent to saying there is no time, no container, no reference for temporal predicates. Just as "Spring" is not a "time" when flowers bloom, but flowers-blooming is Spring, and just as winter is not a time when flowers die but flowers-dying is winter, so too "birth" and "death" are not times when I appear or I disappear, but I-appearing-disappearing (i.e., changing) every moment is birth and death. Says Loy:

Because life and death, like Spring and Summer, are not in time, they are in themselves timeless. If there is no one nontemporal who is born and dies, there is only birth and death [his emphasis]...with no one "in" them. Alternatively, we may say that there is birth-and-death in every moment with the arising and passing away of every thought and act.¹⁹

This is why Dogen, Loy's mentor on these matters, can say: "Just understand birth and death is itself nirvana...Only then can you be free from birth and death."²⁰ What khanavada and uji convey, then, is that I am not "in" time, but rather, I am time. But this also means that I am free from time (in its ordinary sense) because to the degree that I viscerally discover that there is no "I", I also discover that there is no (separate) "time." "Only when time is understood as a determining container

of change," writes Asian philosophy scholar John Koller, "is there dukkha."

However, when time is understood to be simply a conceptual ordering of temporality without real power to originate and terminate becoming, one is free from time and bondage to inevitable death. When one transcends the entrapment of concepts and no longer ontologizes conceptual existence, then the conceptual space of time loses its binding power...²¹

To the degree that one could spread this intellectual understanding from the psyche's skin to its marrow (for I assume that the reader agrees that even perfect intellectual comprehension can fail to actually transform the way life feels, as it were, from the insides of one's organism) one would discover a new organismic relation to time. Time, the devouring tyrant, would become time, the refreshing river. But this is as easy to say as it is difficult to do. For this spreading cannot be accomplished by an act of will or by the entertainment of ideas. The latter are all too easily swallowed in the stream of consciousness whose deeper currents are vectored by the predispositional tendencies (in Buddhism: sankhara) or aptic structures²² constituting the unconscious. Therefore, Dogen's admonition--"Just understand that birth and death is itself nirvana" (i.e., that Arising-Passing is all there is)--is deceptive. For the understanding spoken of here, in order to be effective, must penetrate to the precognitive roots of cognition, to that level of organismic feeling that is the vague but primary ground of all our human knowing.²³ Time is to be not only apprehended differently, but prehended differently, and the

latter requires nothing less than the deconstruction and reconstitution of the hidden roots of conscious awareness-- precisely the aim of Buddhist attentional disciplines.

PART THREE: The Buddhist Training of Attention

1. Introduction: Samatha and Vipassana (Concentration and Insight)

In his Buddhist Meditation, Edward Conze puts it plainly: "Meditational practices constitute the very core of the Buddhist approach to life."²⁴ The presumption that the insight gained from such practices is equally disclosed to intellectual analysis, even of the highly refined and subtle sort, seems to be rejected again and again in Buddhist literature. Buddhism's deepest insights are available to the intellect, and powerfully so, but it is only when those insights are discovered and absorbed by a psyche made especially keen and receptive in meditative discipline, that they begin to find their fullest realization and effectiveness.

The various forms of of Buddhist bhavana (mental culture), begin with an effort toward sustaining nondiscursive attention so as to establish some stability within the mental flux. This practice is called samatha (Pali: concentrative tranquility), and it consists of the attempt to train attention to remain steadfastly aware of a given object for longer and longer intervals. This attempt, like any involved in learning a new art, encounters innumerable frustrations, but depending on

factors such as duration and intensity of practice, personal ripeness, and a conducive context for practice, the mind becomes palpably calmer and clearer. Basic concentration (samatha), then, is the sine qua non of Buddhist attentional practices. Without it, further steps are impossible. With it, one of two basic deployments are possible.

On the one hand, concentration practice can lead to increasingly profound states of absorption called "jhana." Buddhist tradition is ambivalent about this route, however, for though it seems to encourage the cultivation of the jhanas and to insist on their profundity, it also dismisses them as non-productive of liberation. For example, scriptural accounts tell us that the Buddha mastered the highest jhanas under his first two meditation teachers, but he found that his virtuoso mastery of these rarified states (wherein time is transcended, though only temporarily) could not produce liberating enlightenment; that is, they could only temporarily mask but could not eliminate the poisons of craving, aversion, and ignorance. Therefore, he abandons them, the scriptures say, "in disgust."²⁵ Robert Gimello makes the point emphatically:

"...the ecstatic and unitive experiences [i.e., samatha leading to jhana]...which are just the experiences usually cited by those who aver the essential identity of Buddhist mysticism with the mysticism of other traditions, are shown to have no liberative value or cognitive force in themselves."²⁶

And the learned Buddhist commentator Sangharakshita adds: "...To get 'stuck' in a superconscious state [jhana]--the fate that befalls so many mystics--without understanding the necessity of

developing insight, is for Buddhism not a blessing but an unmitigated disaster."²⁷

On the other hand, concentration can be deployed precisely toward what Sangharakshita has just called "developing insight." This cultivation of insight [Pali: vipassana-bhavana] is something rather different from what is usually meant by mystical experience or the cultivation of same, and seems to have little to do with the standard categories of mystical literature like "transcendence," "union with the ultimate," "pure consciousness" and so on. Rather, insight (vipassana) is a technique of observation in which one learns to observe, within the framework of one's own body and at a level of subtlety that defies description, the nature of mental and physical phenomena. The aim, simply put, is to see viscerally and directly through a highly refined lens that all phenomena share the 3 "marks" of existence. Phenomena are without exception impermanent (anicca), and therefore contingent (anatta), and therefore intrinsically unsatisfactory (dukkha). Testifying to the difference between the cognitive and the contemplative perception of these marks the Buddha's chief disciple, Sariputra, is reputed to have said: "Those truths of which before I had only heard, now I dwell having experienced them directly within the body, and I observe them with penetrating insight."²⁸ It is the testimony of the Buddhist psychological tradition that such insight into the real nature of mind-body phenomena can become so penetrating as to lead to the lasting transformation of character and quality of

awareness that Buddhism identifies as liberation and beatitude.

2. Field Notes: An Intensive Vipassana Practice Period

In the realm of Buddhist practice the author is neither an expert nor a beginner. He has logged over 2000 hours on that bed of agony/seat of repose known as the meditation cushion, over half of it during intensive practice periods. Of the latter, his most recent stint was a silent 20-day period in the summer of 1990.

The first seven days of the practice period are devoted to developing one-pointed concentration (samatha) so as to sharpen the probe with which one will investigate in succeeding days the fluxing field of events called "mind" and "body." The concentration-object in this particular tradition is the natural flow of respiration as it makes itself felt on the small area below the nostrils and above the upper lip.

One might well imagine how initially difficult it is to feel, even for a moment, the soft, subtle touch of the the incoming and outgoing respiration on this tiny area, let alone sustain one's attention upon this phenomenon for an entire hour, hour after hour, throughout the long meditation day. Nevertheless, the combination of silence and serious effort make this difficult task a possible one. For the meditation day consists of 10-12 hours of absolutely still sitting, complemented by continuing efforts to remain acutely aware of of the process of respiration while eating, walking, washing and all other non-

sitting activity. This makes for a total of 14-16 hours of intensive practice per day. After four or five days, one finds that one's attention is able to remain fixed on this one area of sensation with little or no distraction for large portions of the one to one-and-a-half hour meditation sessions.

To someone who has never deployed his/her mind and body in this way, the whole process may appear slightly insane. Why would anyone with a healthy body and an active mind want to spend seven insufferably long days doing absolutely nothing but trying to remain steadfastly attentive to the upper-lip sensations occurring from moment to moment as a result of incoming and outgoing respiration? Perhaps the best answer to this question is the sports principle: no pain, no gain. One does not enter new domains of human experience by persisting in one's routines, however salutary. In this case, only in this way can the probe of attention be adequately honed for the deep and delicate work it will do in the remaining thirteen days.

This delicate work is insight (vipassana). In line with the ancient Satipatthana Sutta, the key scripture for the entire Theravada Buddhist meditation tradition, the practitioner now turns his sharpened attention to one of four fields. They are: mental states; mental objects (i.e., thoughts), [general] bodily states; and [particular, discrete] body sensations. For all intents and purposes, these four fields cover the full, fluxing sensorium of the mind-body phenomenon.

The meditator is not asked to directly observe all four of

these fields simultaneously, but usually only one. In any case, any one field deeply investigated will automatically involve at least peripheral awareness of the other three, any one of which can be directly focussed upon as prudence sees fit. In the author's case, the particular field chosen for investigation was the field of body-sensations.

The instruction to the meditator, constant for thirteen days, is as follows: to move one's (now rather refined) attention circumspectly from the top of the head to the tips of toes, and in reverse, minute body part by minute body part, in ceaseless repetition, and to observe the sensations occurring at these sites. (The bio-psychic assumption here is that where there are cells there are sensations and therefore that sensations are occurring everywhere on the body whether or not one's conscious awareness at any given moment is sharp enough to feel them). But, --and this is crucial-- this observing must be done objectively, choicelessly, dispassionately, nonreactively. This is the meaning of the dictum that attention must be "bare." Objects are to be attended to without evaluation, judgement, or any kind of cognitive or emotive elaboration or selection. Bare attention is the noninterpretive, nonreactive awareness of one's predominant experience mind-body moment by mind-body moment. So for thirteen more days, amid total silence, one 'sweeps' the body with one's bare attention surveying it for sensations (Pali: vedana).

And what sensations does one experience? One experiences innumerable neutral sensations, innumerable unpleasant sensations

(i.e., physical pain), and many pleasant sensations ranging from great bodily ease to intense rapture. One also cannot help but notice the other fields as well and how their phenomena too are impermanent. One sees, for example, that one's general mental state, its overall tone, has been in constant flux. The same holds true of mental sensations, i.e., thoughts, ideas and images. In moments of relative distraction they arise countless in the mind, run the gamut of emotional colors and intensities...and pass away. But what is the purpose of all this infinitely boring and banal observation? One might think that the purpose is to experience those occasional floods of rapture, or those luminous, egoless states in which Nibbanic peace is tasted. But no. Though such states do occur, they are in the context of insight training of no more intrinsic value than are the unpleasant and painful ones, for all sensations, including the mental sensations we call thoughts and indeed all the phenomena of the mind-body sensorium, teach but one thing: impermanence (and the other two marks co-implicated by it).²⁹ Is that all? Yes, but it is enough. Should the reader find this hard to believe, s/he should pause to carefully weigh the following words attributed to the Buddha himself: "The enlightened one has become liberated...by seeing as they really are the arising and passing away of sensations, the relishing of them, the danger of them, the release from them."³⁰ [emphasis mine]

Insight, then, consists of (1) direct apprehensions at ever subtler levels of awareness that all phenomena within the fluxing

sensorium we call "mind" and "body" are without exception impermanent--this cannot be stressed too strongly or too often; and (2) in the corresponding transformation of the aptic structures of the unconscious in proportion to the depth and continuity of that apprehension, a transformation that issues in new forms of behavior and awareness.

What now remains for us to do is to explain how (2) above may be thought to occur. In other words, how is it that the contemplative perception of impermanence yields, in general, a transformation of the unconscious determinants of consciousness, and specifically, a transformation of the human time-sense?

3. Attention and the Transformation of Consciousness

To understand how attentional practices transform the unconscious roots of awareness, we must first picture to our ourselves how those roots come to be. I have written of this elsewhere³¹ at the length it requires but must now be content to present only a brief sketch.

Let us recall that we are creatures of desire who enter the world possessed of what Thomas Aquinas called the desiderium naturale or Spinoza the conatus: a persistent need to preserve and expand our being. The life activities that spring from this fundamental drive we may call the self-project. Every human being longs to be special, to sense itself as a center of importance and value. This self-project is more or less easily managed during infancy when one lives in a magical, self-enclosed

world in which all one's surroundings are extensions of one's own center. But quite soon the party is over. The individual begins to collide with real existential limits in a world where s/he is decidedly not the center, and the agonizing struggle for secure, inviolable self-esteem is set in motion.

In order to fulfil the demands of the self-project the growing child learns that it must defend itself against those thoughts and physical sensations which emphasize its contingency and impotence while playing up those thoughts and experiences (i.e., sensations) that enhance the feeling of secure self-possession. By the time one is old enough even to begin to take an objective view of the project, one is already hopelessly enmeshed in it, with little chance to escape its incessant demands. The self-project unfolds into an egocentric system in which one's beliefs, feelings, experiences, perceptions and behaviors are automatically viewed and assessed around one's sense of worth as an individual.

The assessment process, automatic and barely conscious, is basically simple. Experiences (i.e., mental and physical sensations) are reacted to according to whether they expand or diminish one, affirm or negate one's will to be. The psyche becomes a webwork of likes and dislikes, desires and aversions both gross and subtle, which manifest the personality in the same way that black and white dots can create the illusion of a face. Time and repetition harden parts of the webwork into iron necessity. The psyche has become a set of predispositions and

automatic response patterns which largely determine the quality of one's interactions with reality. One is involved in a "personal construction of reality" in which one automatically (and mostly unconsciously) limits, selects, organizes and interprets experience according to the demands of the self-project.

We are suggesting, then, that in the course of human development, a network of psychological structures is built up by many and complex variations on the themes of affirmation and negation of one's will to be. Our long-term desires, aversions, sore spots, fixations--in other words, our deeply habituated predispositions (Buddhism's sankhara) --are crucial components of this network. They function as pathways along which our psychic energy travels and the result in consciousness is the endless associational chatter and spasmodic imaginative-emotive elaborations of experience with which we are familiar. Note that there is nothing wrong with emotions as such. They are natural manifestations of real joy and real pain. But our imaginary elaborations prolong the emotive experience into a spasm or cramp that afflicts our entire reception of and response to the world. At our worst, we move from cramp to cramp. In other words, energy that would otherwise be manifested as the delight of open, receptive and present-centered awareness is inexorably drawn to these structures and there is gobbled up--dis-integrated--into the imaginative-emotive cinema and commentaries that suffuse ordinary consciousness. The problem

here, contemplative traditions say as if with one voice, is habitual inattention, a form of unawareness that permits the automatized structures of the psyche to function unchecked. The longer this process continues the more deeply chiseled the grooves of psychological habit become. The machinery built up by our psychological past runs by itself, disperses our attention down the lanes of our past or catapults it into the streets of our future, and largely determines our states of mind, indeed the very feeling of what it is to be alive.

We can now understand the psychotransformative import of the attentional practices described earlier. The effort to sustain attention while sitting in a still posture and in a stimulus-poor environment opens the practitioner's awareness to the flood of thoughts and sensations that arise impersonally and autonomously from within. The unconscious ex-presses itself as the stream of thoughts and images that interrupt the continuity of attention and as the constant play of sensations on the body. But now, in training, as if for the first time, one does not scratch the itch, or move the pained knee, or think the thoughts, or follow the fantasy. One simply establishes and re-establishes attention and with that attention observes, impartially and equanimously, the arising and passing of all these phenomena. In other words, thoughts and sensations continue to arise due to the automatism of deeply embedded psychological structures [what we have been calling predispositional tendencies (sankhara) or aptic structures] but their lure is not taken. In the posture of bare

attention, associational chains responsible for all the chatter in consciousness and our constant abduction into the dead past or the unreal future are now deprived of a chance to chain-react. Similarly, body-sensations to which we had formerly blindly reacted with craving or aversion, are now seen in their ephemerality, and with each such 'seeing' the habit-reaction grows weaker. The more acute and sustained bare attention becomes, the more this trend continues.

The systematic deployment of attention, as for example in the insight practice described in this paper, would thus appear to be able to short-circuit the automated process of imaginative-emotive over-elaboration of experience and to reduce the habit-driven reactions to bodily sensations that are the long-term residue of our self-project. And it is precisely here that we must glimpse the attention's potential to effect deep psychological transformation. Just as Freud compared his investigation of the unconscious to the draining of the Zuider Zee or a vast land reclamation project, we may compare insight-practice (vipassana-bhavana) to a similar strategy of 'starvation.' The automatized structures of the unconscious need constant diet of energy. But every moment that available psychic energy is consolidated in bare attention is a moment when these automatized structures cannot reinforce themselves. In the dynamic world of the psyche, there is no stasis: if automatized predispositions do not grow more strongly solidified, they begin to weaken and dissolve. When deprived of the nutriment and

cf now

stimulation formerly afforded them by our distracted states of mind, these automatized tendencies begin to lose their integrity, begin to disintegrate. Energy formerly bound in emotive spasms, ego defense, fantasy and fear now can appear as the delight of present-centeredness. The deconstruction or de-automatization of old unconscious habit-pathways leads to a new reticulation of those pathways and consequently to the general mode of consciousness constellated by them. By eroding the predispositional tendencies built up over time by the self-project one discovers new modes of receptivity, internal freedom and clarity. The mind acquires the new habit of spending less energy on the imaginative elaboration of desire and anxiety that haunt our being-in-the-world. Ideas, images and emotions still arise in the mind, but one is now less easily caught up in spasmodic reactions to them, less easily yanked into the past or flung into the future by their reverberations or associations. They begin to be experienced in their purity and thus "leave no tracks" as Zen Buddhists are fond of saying. "Right Mindfulness," says the Theravadin scholar Nyanaponika Thera, "recovers for man the lost pearl of his freedom, snatching it from the jaws of dragon Time."³² Time still passes and one grows old, experiencing decay. But the fear-and-desire bound organism begins to wake up and to taste his/her primordial freedom, begins to find release into the Present, into the inexhaustible aesthetic richness of the fleeting now, that intersection of Time and Eternity where the sacred dwells. "The

crush of time" says N. P. Jacobson who has written perceptively on these matters, "...make[s] a shambles of life's rich qualitative flow.³³...Buddhist meditation is a discipline that unravels the ego-dominated life by shifting the center of gravity over to the flow of relatively unstructured quality in the passing now...³⁴

The whole thrust of the Buddhist orientation is to open our experience more fully to what Northrop has called "the undifferentiated aesthetic continuum...³⁵ For those who are able through meditation and analysis to maintain their center of gravity in the passing now nature confers upon them one sign that they have succeeded. That sign is joy...--celebrating the wonder of being every day alive.³⁶ ...This is what it means to be free, free to celebrate the aesthetic richness which comes as a gift from beyond the claims of the self..."³⁷

Conclusion

Buddhism tames time, then, not by denying its reality but by radically accepting it. Staring into the jaws of devouring time, Buddhist practice counsels not a retreat, but a plunge of the body-mind sensorium into the fundamental reality of temporality, the utter impermanence and momentariness of every mental and physical phenomenon. The experiential penetration of the reality of impermanence, by eroding craving, erodes time as well, changing it ripple by ripple from devouring tide into refreshing river, from a binding to a liberating force. When one knows

directly that one is nothing but time, one becomes (to varying degrees--(in spiritual life everything is a matter of degrees) psycho-emotionally free from time. One plunges into time's terrible surf only to emerge riding its wake awakened. As the famous quatrain in the Jataka tales has it:

Time consumes all beings
including oneself;
[But] the being who consumes time
Cooks the cooker of beings.³⁸

Epilogue: The Bigger Picture

I have endeavored in this paper to trace one strand of Buddhist theory and practice as it bears on the problem of psychological time. In so doing, I have paid particular attention to the transformative possibilities of Buddhist attentional practices. To some readers it may at first seem that the subject of attentional practices falls solely into the domain of private, individual experience and that it therefore offers to our contemporary civilizations little by way of social and political import. But this would be to misconstrue the teachings of Gautama and the context through which they came into the world.

Trevor Ling devotes a part of his fine book, The Buddha, to arguing that the Buddha's teaching was in part a direct response to human suffering stemming from contemporary social upheaval. A burgeoning new urban social structure had left in its wake an unprecedently virulent brew of anonymity, fear, greed and narcissism. In reponse the Buddha laid out a blueprint for a new social ecology. The Sangha, i.e., the Community, is after all

one of the three "jewels" (fundamentals) of Buddhism. Part of Gautama's psychological genius was to understand that a social ecology can only be as healthy as the individual minds that compose it are free from gross and destructive emotions. Attentional practices in the Buddhist social ecology were therefore not meant for individual flights from the alone to the alone, but for the maintenance of balance and the reduction of pollution within a social organism.

Unfortunately, the only way the Buddha could see of effecting his social ecology was to establish a separate monastic community in a symbiotic relationship with the society on which it depended. The question for us and for future generations is whether such a social ecology, firmly based in a transformative psychology, can ever escape monastic confines and spread widely into the world-at-large. The fact that growing numbers of white, middle-class Europeans and Americans have in our day seriously taken up disciplines that for two millenia in Asian countries were the province solely of monks and nuns is a positive sign, though of course the numbers are still small and the economic situations that have made this possible are hardly the global norm. For this trend to continue would require at the very least large-scale changes in global civilization toward social and economic justice, ecological sanity, and a far more intelligent use of leisure time. These are utopian thoughts, I know, but without them it seems hard to hope at all. In any case, the hope must be that attentional practices can be extended far beyond

their monastic niches and begin to contribute more widely to the the general education of human beings.

If man is, as Korzybski claimed, a "time-binding" animal, all of whose perceptions of self and world are mediated by the way we imagine, explain and use time, then the shaping of our dispositions toward time, far from being a mere mystical matter, carries great political consequences. In his Time Wars, J. Rifkin argues that the shape of the human future does in fact largely turn on the outcome of a struggle in time-politics. On the one side stand proponents of hyperefficiency, those who would link human time ever more closely to the nanosecond temporality of the computer-world; on the other side stand proponents of a temporal naturalism who would fight this trend toward hyperefficiency (in which we seem paradoxically to be ever more time-impoverished) and attempt to re-link human time to it roots in the natural world.

If anything resembling such a battle is indeed occuring in the world, the outcome is not likely to be decided by the weaker argument giving way to the stronger in polite debate. Perhaps the only thing that can really derail the bigger-and-faster-is-better trend is a catastrophe so profound that the human remainder will be forced to re-imagine human life anew. Let us hope that it will not come to that, and that instead increasing numbers of individuals, increasingly free from a false, habit-ridden bondage to custom, convention and to our own fluxing sensoria, a bondage that keeps us running toward the day

that will never arrive, rediscover through atttentional practices the aesthetic richness of the fleeting now and, with that, what Whitehead calls Peace: "...a broadening of feeling due to some deep metaphysical insight, unverbalized and yet momentous in its coordination of values. Its first effect is the removal of acquisitive feeling arising from the soul's preoccupation with itself...Peace is self-control at its widest,--at the width when the 'self' has been lost , and interest has been transferred to coordinations wider than the personality." ³⁹ In ever larger communities such minds, in cooperation with enlightened leadership, may yet help to shape a world in which the tears of living beings no longer outweigh the oceans.

NOTES

1. Needham, Joseph. Time: The Refreshing River (New York: Macmillan, 1943).

2. Chapter 11.

3. Whitrow, G.J. The Natural Philosophy of Time, 2nd ed., (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980), p. 370. My source for this quote is Griffin, D. R. Physics and the Ultimate Significance of Time (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), p. ix.

4. D.R. Griffin, ed., Physics and the Ultimate Significance of Time: Bohm Prigogine and Process Philosophy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986).

5. Though the view that time's arrow does not exist at reality's most fundamental levels is being challenged by physicists like D. Bohm and I. Prigogine, the majority of contemporary physicists, it seems, espouse a notion of time that is well summarized in the the words of Einstein: "For us believing physicists, the distinction between past, present and future is only an illusion, even if a stubborn one." (Cited in Hoffman, B. Albert Einstein: Creator and Rebel. New York: Viking, 1972, p.258). Similarly, Huston Smith, speaking for the "primordial" mystical traditions repeatedly endorses Einstein's statement and says that "nothing turns on time, for the limitless landscape is there from the start," (Beyond the Post-Modern Mind, p.157), that "time derives from nontime" (Forgotten Truth, p. 28) and that when we awaken to our true nature, identical with the Absolute, which is itself "concrete, timeless perfection" (BPMM, p.120) we will "pass beyond all space and time" (BPMM, p. 51).

6. D.R. Griffin's tenacious arguments for the ultimacy of time and against opponents in theoretical physics and mysticism can be found, respectively, in "Time and the Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness," Griffin, D.R. ed., Physics and the Ultimate Significance of Time, op. cit., pp.1-48, in which Griffin suggests that in regard to time physics has committed the fallacy of misplaced concreteness having mistaken abstractions for concrete realities; and in D.R. Griffin and H. Smith, Primordial Truth and Postmodern Theology, (Albany: SUNY, 1989), especially pp. 38-39, 75-76, in which Griffin argues that this stance leads to untenable internal incoherence.

7. Majjhima-Nikaya, 72.

8. The famous arrow parable in which the Buddha conveys that practical concerns take precedence over speculative ones occurs in majjhima-nikaya, 63.

9. Briefly summarizing a careful survey, Kalupahana writes: "(1) early Buddhism presented an empiricist and relativistic conception of time; (2) the Abhidharma scholasticism produced an absolutistic conception mainly because of its speculative approach, and (3) the Madhyamikas, as a result of their transcendentalism, denied the reality of time. D. Kalupahana, "The Buddhist Conception of Time and Temporality" Philosophy East and West, 1974, Vol. 2, p. 188.

10. Kalupahana, David, op. cit., p.185.

11. "On the basis of this theory of causality [namely, dependent origination, the heart of the Buddha's dhamma]," writes D. Kalupahana, "it is possible to define three periods of time, past, present and future, in the following manner: the past is the determined (=bhuta); the present is the moment of becoming (=bhava); and the future is the as yet undetermined (=bhavya)." D. Kalupahana, "The Buddhist Conception of Time and Temporality," Philosophy East and West, 1974: No. 2, p.183.

12. What does last, the tradition teaches, is the elimination of the sankhara, the deep-rooted predispositions toward craving and aversion which keep one on the wheel of rebirth.

13. Cf. King, Winston. Theravada Meditation (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1980), p. 118.

14. The three marks of existence are: impermanence (anicca), lack of self-subsistence (anatta) and unsatisfactoriness (dukkha). Because no phenomenon is self-subsistent but rather depends for its existence on a host of causal factors, no phenomenon can last. And because no phenomenon can last, no phenomenon can provide enduring satisfaction. The three marks are mutually implicatory.

15. David Loy, "The Deconstruction of Dualism," Nonduality (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p.220.

16. Kenneth Inada, "Time and Temporality: A Buddhist Approach," Philosophy East and West (1974, Vol. 2, p. 173,

17. Masunaga Reiho, The Soto Approach to Zen (Tokyo: Layman Buddhist Society Press, 1958), 68. My source for this quote and reference was D. Loy, Nonduality, op. cit., p. 221.

18. David Loy, Nonduality, op. cit., pp. 220-221.

19. David Loy, Nonduality, op. cit., p. 222. Loy's nondual deconstruction of time is one of a number of ways that he cuts through the traditional irreconcilability of the great philosophies

of flux and the great philosophies of permanence. A brief sampling of his conclusion: "The immutability of the Now is not incompatible with change... So Heraclitus/Buddhism and Parmenides/Vedanta are both right. There is nothing outside the incessant flux, yet there is also something that does not change at all: the standing now. What transcends time (as usually understood) turns out to be time itself. This breathes new life into Plato's definition...: time is indeed the moving image of eternity, provided that we do not read into this any dualism between the moving image and the immovable eternity. In Buddhist terms, life-and-death are the "moving image" of nirvana. This paradox is possible because, as with all other instances of subject-object duality, to forget oneself and become one with something is at the same time to realize its emptiness and "transcend" it." (Loy, op. cit., pp. 223, 224).

20. In the Shoji fascicle of Dogen's Shobogenzo. My source for the quote is D. Loy, Nonduality, op. cit., p. 222.

21. John Koller, "On Buddhist Views of Devouring Time," philosophy East and West (1974, Vol.2, pp. 207-08.

22. "Aptic structures" is a term used by (coined by?) Julian Jaynes in his Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind, and it accords well with the notion of sankhara or predispositional tendencies spoken of in Buddhism.

23. What is referred to here is, of course, Whitehead's "perception in the mode of causal efficacy", a pre-conscious and absolutely primary, albeit vague, mode of perception from which is abstracted the clear and distinct sensory data and thought, (i.e., perception in the mode of presentational immediacy) of conscious awareness.

24. E. Conze, Buddhist Meditation (New York: Harper and Row), 1975. p.11.

25. Majjhima Nikaya, I.240 ff. Quoted in Edward J. Thomas, The Life of Buddha (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), 1927, p. 63.

26. R. Gimello, op.cit., p.63.

27. Sangharakshita, op. cit., p.172. Sangharakshita's full statement on this issue is worth noting: "In fact, with the sole exception of neighborhood-concentration, though the various stages of samadhi are a means to the development of liberating insight...they are even as a means not indispensable. Hence two kinds of disciples are distinguished. There are those who attain the transcendental paths (ariya-magga) with "tranquility" as their vehicle (samatha-yanika) and those who, on the other hand, attain them by means of bare insight alone (suddha-vipassana-yanika), without having passed through any of the jhanas." (loc.cit.).

28. Samyutta Nikaya, XLVIII (IV). v. 10 (50), Apana Sutta. My source for the quote is William Hart, The Art of Living, o. cit., p. 157. Italics mine.
29. Impermanence always co-implies the other two "marks of existence", namely, absence of self-subsistence (anatta) and lack of lasting satisfaction (dukkha).
30. Digha Nikaya, 1. Brahmajala Sutta. My source for the quote is: William Hart, The Art of Living: Vipassana Meditation as Taught by S.N. Goenka (Dhammagiri-Igatpuri, India: Vipassana Research Institute, 1982), p. 148.
31. Philip Novak, "Attention," The Encyclopedia of Religion, edited by Mircea Eliade et al. (New York: Macmillan, 1987), pp. 501-509.
32. Nyanaponika Thera, The Heart of Buddhist Meditation (New York: Weiser, 1973), p.41.
33. N. P. Jacobson, op.cit., p.42.
34. Jacobson, op. cit., p. 63.
35. Nolan Pliny Jacobson, Understanding Buddhism (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), p. 40.
36. N.P. Jacobson, op. cit., p. 86
37. Jacobson, op. cit., p. 38.
38. Jataka, ed. V. Fausboll (London, 1895-1907), ii.260. My source for this reference was Kalupahana, D., op, cit., p. 183.
39. A.N. Whitehead, Adventures of Ideas (New York: The Free Press, 1933), p.285.