

A monk earnestly asked Jōshū, “I have just entered this monastery. I beg you, master, please instruct me.” Jōshū asked: “Have you eaten your rice porridge yet?” “Yes, I have.” “Then wash your bowls.”

Mumonkan, case 7, in Yamada, *Gateless Gate*.





SAGANUR, 2001, 9 1/4

Nonduality and Contemporary Art Practices – A Literature Review

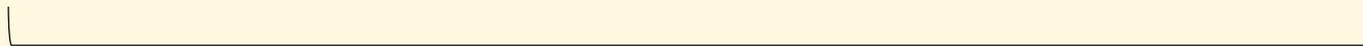
Samir Mahmood
BA CAP, 2019
GMIT



Subject
Or
I



Object



S e e i n g

Nondualism (or non-duality) means "not two" or "one undivided without a second".

Nonduality is the human experience of oneness with all things; a sense of connection to and identity with the entire universe.

Some examples of nondual experiences are:

being in nature

enjoying music or art

being deeply involved in a hobby or work,

during sex,

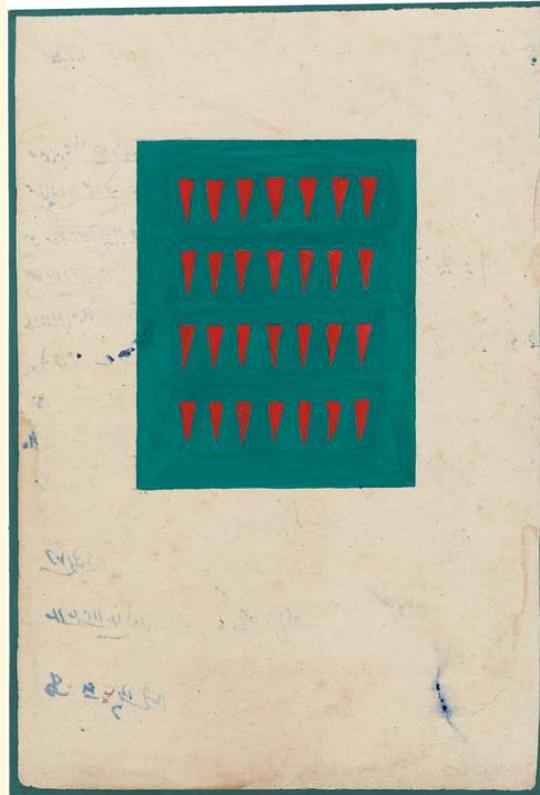
or walking in the park,

while dancing,

or having a few beers with friends



JAIPUR, 1995, 12 5/8

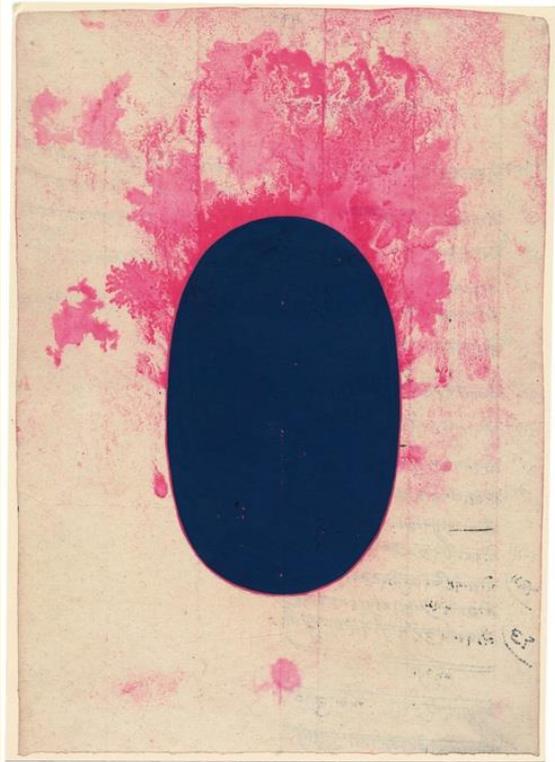


NEAR UDAIPUR, 1999, 13

The term "nondualism" is derived from Advaita Vedanta.

The descriptions of nondual experience can be found within Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and western Christian and neo-Platonic traditions.

Non-dual experiences provide an approach to understanding the nature of reality.



BIKANER, 2002, 14

Nondualism primarily refers to a mature state of consciousness, in which the dichotomy of ‘I’ and the ‘other’ is "transcended”.

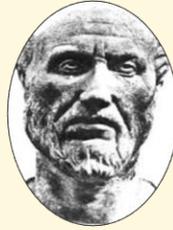
“ Who am I?” - to find the answer look in the direction of, “To whom do these thoughts arise?” (Ramana Maharashi, 1879-1950)

Who is the real me?

- **Am I to be identified with my physical body?**
- **Am I my mind?**
- **Could I exist outside my body?**
- **If so, could I continue to exist after the death of my body?**
- **Is my mind the same thing as my brain?**
- **If not, then where is my mind?**
- **Can I ever really know other people's minds, or do I just look, listen and guess what they are thinking?**
- **What about computer-created artificial intelligence?**

Philosophy of Mind

Plato's notion of the One, or the Good



(Plotinus c. 204/5 – 270: The Six Enneads)

*“There were not two;
beholder was one with
beheld; it was not a
vision compassed but a
unity apprehended”*

*Western mystical figures addressing
the nonduality of subject and object*



Meister Eckhart c. 1260 – c. 1328, German theologian, philosopher, mystic



William Blake 1757 –1827, English poet, painter, and printmaker



Jakob Böhme 1575 –1624, German philosopher, Christian mystic

Philosophers addressing the nonduality of subject and object

Religious figures can be satisfied to rest the assertion of nonduality on faith or on their own experience, but philosophers must support their assertions with arguments!



Baruch Spinoza 1632 –1677, Dutch philosopher of Portuguese origin



Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling 1775 –1854, German philosopher.



Arthur Schopenhauer 1788—1860, German philosopher



Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel 1770-1831, German philosopher



Henri-Louis Bergson 1859 – 1941, French-Jewish philosopher

Emanuel Kant (1929): Objects in themselves - referred to as “noumena” are unknowable.

Georg Hegel challenged Kant’s notion. He believed it was possible for humans to experience and know the divine through the phenomenology of spirit or mind (Hegel, 1998).

Example:

The self comes to know itself by distinguishing from the not self.

Self is meaningless without the Not Self - the opposite is also true, so they are recognized as mutually arising and meaningless without each other.

The synthesis is therefore, the realization that “the Self which knows and the Not Self which is known are distinguishable but not separate aspects” (Joad, 1936).

This synthesis is also applicable to the experience of nonduality, where the subject and object are undivided, and not two (Dumetz, 2018).

Kant, I., 1929. *Critique of pure reason* (NK Smith, Trans.). New York, NY: St. Marin’s Press.(Original work published in 1781 and 1787).

Hegel, G. W. F. (1998). *The Hegel reader* (S. Houlgate, Ed.). Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Joad, G. E. M. (1936). *Guide to philosophy*. New York, NY: Dover.

Dumetz, R., 2018. *In a Dark Light: A Heuristic Investigation of Nondual (Unitive) Experiences*. Pacifica Graduate Institute.

Today the Great Divide in Western philosophy is between:

- those who see science as a model to be justified and followed
- and those who see the scientific mode of knowledge — whose concern for objectivity makes it unavoidably dualistic — as only one mode of cognitive experience.

Some of the most influential thinkers of the last century — Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger are the ones who criticized these dualistic categories in various ways





Friedrich Nietzsche 1844–1900, German philosopher

In *Human, All Too Human* (1878) he wrote: “Through words and concepts we are continually misled into imagining things as being simpler than they are, separate from one another, indivisible, each existing in and for itself.....The ‘subject’ is not something given, it is something added and invented and projected behind what there is.”



Ludwig Josef Johann Wittgenstein 1889–1951, Austrian philosopher

Wittgenstein demonstrated that language does not simply represent an objective world. When we think that language merely expresses facts, and that every meaningful expression must be referring to some thing in the world, we become trapped in and by the concepts we use. It is necessary, he tells us, to “battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language.”



Martin Heidegger 1889 – 1976, German philosopher

The phenomenologists Kant, Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty have included one or more ideas that have echoes of Buddhist notions.

Heidegger meditated primarily on the nature of thinking - not as a means to gain knowledge but both as the path and the destination.

His general concern was to overcome subject–object duality.

In *Being and Time* Heidegger began by analysing:

the Being of a particular being, of that being whose nature it is to raise the question of the meaning of Being — man (*Dasein*)

Having grasped Being in this way, he then intended to turn around and redo the whole analysis from the perspective of Being Itself.

Instead of this, Heidegger's thinking underwent a crucial shift in the 1930s (transformation, 'reversal' 'turning' - *Kehre*) in his attitude toward the process of thinking.

He realised he was dualistically using thoughts in an attempt to "re-present" Being. This was replaced by a kind of thinking which has been "claimed by Being" and therefore serves Being: "Before he speaks man must first let himself be claimed again by Being."

Only thinking that is "an event of Being" can be both means and goal, for only such thinking is sufficient unto itself and needs to accomplish nothing else.

"Such thinking has no result. It has no effect. . . . for it lets Being — be."



According to Loy (1988), Jacques Derrida has remarkable similarities to Nagarjuna – the founder of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Derrida is concerned with showing the limits of language and the difficulties we fall into when we overstep them.

Derrida's work builds on structuralism, which argues that words do not have meaning in and of themselves. The meaning of any linguistic expression always depends upon some other expression, and that "other expression" is also dependent on something else. Meaning is therefore relative and always in flux, part of a chain of reference that never comes to an end. Whatever we think we understand right here and now always presupposes something else that is not present. A simple example is thinking that gets caught in antithetical concepts: success and failure, good and evil, and so forth. We distinguish between such opposing terms because we want one rather than the other, yet the meaning of each depends on the other. If it is important for me to live a pure life (however I understand purity), then I will also be preoccupied with impurity—that is, with avoiding it. We cannot feel that we are good unless we are fighting against some evil—ironically, often creating more evil in the process. In his close reading of texts, Derrida shows how philosophical claims usually involve excluding some meaning that returns in such ways to unsettle the intended meaning.



Derrida's term to describe the relativity and "indeterminability" of meaning is *différance*, and the way *différance* functions in his philosophy can be compared to how Nagarjuna uses *shunyata*, or emptiness.

Derrida emphasizes that *différance* does not refer to some specific thing. It is merely a conceptual tool useful for describing how conceptual meaning is never quite settled, but always "deferred."

For Nagarjuna, *shunyata* is simply a shorthand way to express the interdependence of all things. Nothing has any "self-existence" or "self-presence" because everything—including all concepts – is dependent upon everything else.

Shunyata is "the exhaustion of all theories and views." Nagarjuna emphasizes that the meaning of *shunyata* itself is relative: having used it to let go of other concepts, we should let go of *shunyata* too.



Nāgārjuna (c. 150 – c. 250 CE)
founder of the Madhyamaka
school of Mahāyāna Buddhism



David Loy

- Several Asian philosophical systems, which have many similarities and many differences, make the same claim that the true nature of reality is nondual.
- Mahāyāna Buddhism, Advaita Vedānta, and Taoism (nondualistic systems)
- The nondualistic systems also agree that our usual sense of duality — the sense of separation (hence alienation) between myself and the world “I” am “in” — is the root delusion that needs to be overcome.

Loy (1988) stated that our modes of perceiving, thinking and acting are essentially without cognitive or emotional imposition.

These are interfered with by our attempts to grasp or understand them.

This superimposition of thoughts and concepts obscures the purity of these modes, thus creating the external world of objects through reification and objectification

In order to remove these obscurations, erroneous conceptualizations, emotions and cognitions one must be reintroduced to nondual awareness through direct experiencing.

This direct experience could be pointed to through the following means:

1. Nondual teachings (right view, dharma, Vedas, sutras).
2. Meditation into the nature of being (insight meditation, vipassana, inquiry, mahamudra, Dzogchen).
3. Empowerment or transmission from one who dwells in nondual experience.
4. Spontaneous instantaneous nondual realization.

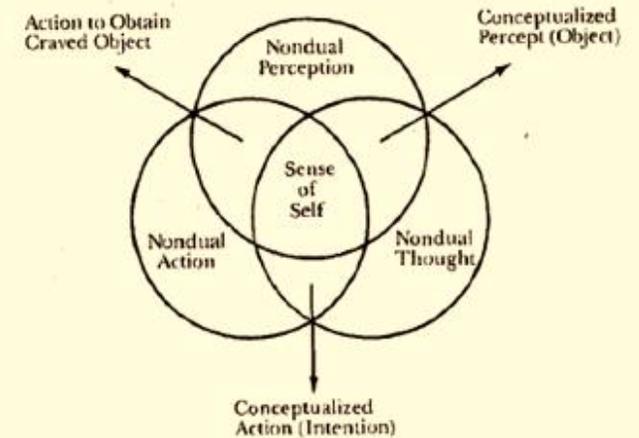


Figure 1. Interaction of thoughts, perceptions, and actions. Reprinted from *Nonduality: A study in comparative philosophy* (p. 183), by D. Loy, 1988. Amherst, NY: Humanity Books. Copyright 1988 by David Loy.

Nondual experience cannot be attained or even understood conceptually.

This is because our usual conceptual/theoretical/abstract knowledge is dualistic in at least two senses:

- it is knowledge *about* something, which a subject *has*;
- and such knowledge must discriminate one thing from another in order to assert some *attribute* about some *thing*.

The dualistic nature of conceptual knowledge means the nondual experience, if genuine, must transcend philosophy itself and all its ontological claims.

Philosophizing obstructs the experience of nonduality.



‘Indeed, the very impetus to philosophy may be seen as a reaction to the split between subject and object: philosophy originated in the need of the alienated subject to understand itself and its relation to the objective world it finds itself in.

But, according to the “nondualist systems” to be considered — Buddhism (especially Mahāyāna), Vedānta (especially Advaita), and Taoism — philosophy cannot grasp the source from which it springs and so must yield to praxis: the intellectual attempt to grasp nonduality conceptually must give way to various meditative techniques which, it is claimed, promote the immediate experience of nonduality’ (Loy, 1988)





- There is a lot of literature on nonduality and/or eastern/western philosophies.
- Which philosophers' work would be relevant to link this topic with the contemporary art practices.
- What possible methods could be employed if one were to develop an art practice based on the theme of nonduality – or generally an experience?

Resources

- SAND: Science and Nonduality, a community (<https://www.scienceandnonduality.com/>)
- Rupert Spira (<http://www.rupertspira.com/>)
- Nonduality: The Varieties of Expression (<https://www.nonduality.com/>)
- The Tantric paintings used in these slides:
 - <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2012/04/03/an-egoless-practice-tantric-art/>
 - <http://sigliopress.com/book/tantra-song/>
 - <https://hyperallergic.com/50046/tantric-paintings-of-rajasthan/>

