

Proposed Presentation/Not Accepted

ASSOCIATION OF BUDDHIST UNIVERSITIES SYMPOSIUM
Bangkok 2/25/2008

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**Buddhist Ethics and Performance Art; The Uneasy dialogue
between Ethics and the Western Modern Art Tradition**

**(Is 'Amorality' the indispensable core of western artistic
process?)**

"Buddhist Ethics" and their varied manor of dissemination in the west are at the core of a persistent conversation in contemporary, critical art, particularly performance related art, occurring among western artists and arts educators. Specific areas of current inquiry acting as departure points for creating art and curriculum, particularly among younger emerging artists and teachers, include:

--The adoption/confusion/appropriation of Buddhist Dharma language in support of a western artistic language of creative process, for example, casting the artist as bodhisattva and the making of art as "bodhisattva activity".

--The thorough reinvestigation and redefinition of "ritual" and "spirituality" in non theistic, non dualistic, post theological, post Christian terms.

--A desire to re-gird art in the west, through association with Buddhist Ethics, as a culturally critical medium whose forms are capable of holding "wisdom" and "ethical instruction" as opposed to simple reflection of neurosis and sensationalist narratives of the classic samsaric responses of passion, aggression and ignorance.

Questions this presentation would purport to raise: can we speak at all about the role of “Ethics”, and “Buddhist Ethics” in particular, in relation to the process and production of cultural expression in the west? Is it possible to have a conversation on this subject at all if it is not based on an accusation and defense of cultural appropriation? What are the cultural forms and processes of collaboration which could further develop the evolution of positive, progressive world culture?

This paper will cover two related contextualizing narratives in support of the main discussion:

1. A brief narrative articulating the extremely different cultural roles, uses, and specific cultural definitions of "art" that underlie the 150 year old conversation between western artists and eastern philosophy, phenomenology and the psychology of meditation.
2. A brief historical overview of the deeply entwined relationship of the Euro/American modern art, “avant garde”, critical art movements of the 20th century and the nature of mind teachings brought to the West by a series of teachers from D.T. Suzuki through Chogyam Trungpa, Renpoche. This is poignantly reflected in the sometimes serendipitous, always dramatic, role artists have played in the development of American Buddhism in general, and, in particular, the founding and ongoing creation of Naropa University, the only “ Buddhist Inspired” University in the West.

Notes:

A performance can be included as part of this presentation or as a separate offering to the Symposium

This paper is partially based on a course developed and taught in collaboration with Cobina Gillett in 2002 at New York University, Tisch School of The Arts in the Undergraduate Drama Department: *Locating Contemporary Theater Practice and Aesthetics: A century of the East-West Connection*

There is the possibility of extending this paper into a collaboration with Butoh artist Katsura Kan, Kyoto, Japan. Mr. Kan would be supported by another institution.

Submitted by Wendell Beavers for consideration of the following panels:

Buddhist Ethics and Literature

Buddhist Ethics and Education

Buddhist Ethics and Social Development

Buddhist Ethics and Mind Culture

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