Reading *The Dihedrons Gazelle-Dihedrals Zoom* as Buddhist Soteriological Literature

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Leslie Scalapino's *The Dihedrons Gazelle-Dihedrons Zoom*[1] has been alternately described as a mystic vision and a sci-fi fantasy.[2] Assembling clusters of unusual words chosen from the dictionary by a process of alexia,[3] it throws up strange and fleshy images which become agents of action. These "sensual exquisite corpses"[4] appear as three-dimensional composite creatures: the butterfly blood-reef, pink-flesh-rind, intestine-jewel-coil liver-heart, sides-dihedral-planes of gelantinoid organs hanging vertical, gruiforms whole cranes rails coots, gemsbok Oryx gazelle gemma… Each monstrous image-creature intersects and traverses horizontal space, appearing as a vertical shape in a ceaselessly transforming landscape. Changing direction instantaneously, the vertical creatures roam the emerald dark horizon, the heart's lake, conchoids planes, ice floods, a baseball diamond, sky and ocean.

The book's[5] emphasis on the visual creates a kaleidoscope of landscapes and actors coming into contact with one another. Most of the time these events[6] happen between the fantastical image-characters and their horizontal surrounds: "the contester chordate coming to the crowd lining the street as horses go by…,"[7] but occasionally the events mirror those recognizable from the "real world." Events occurring at the time of writing are woven into the book, such as the 2008 attacks on Mumbai and the public appearances of the then US Vice President, Dick Cheney. Sarah Palin, Governor of Alaska at the time, gets swallowed into the action as if she were executing her state policy on the ground:

> …a Gatling gun mounted in a helicopter gastropodous hurtling copter sagging through the
> air of the tundra plain flying firing from it Sarah Palin former candidate running-mate of the
> then-presidential candidate mows down the floating moose herds that come up beneath
> her…[8]

Scalapino's poetic work has often been aligned with the 1970s and 80s avant-garde movement known as Language Poetry, with which her work shares a number of values and characteristics. The use of parataxis, a commitment to demonstrating the constructive nature of meaning-making, and the

employment of aleatory means for composition and interpretation regularly present themselves in her published works. The philosophical and poetic project which spans her books can be characterized as "negating conventional thought processes and modes of perception," disrupting the commonplace structuring of language which influences the interpretation of one's experience.[9] Fixed ways of interpreting the world, Scalapino suggests, impoverish experience by herding it into pre-existing conceptual structures which then come to dominate one's notion of the initial occurrence.[10] Experiences become reified as ideas, and hermeneutical certainty is taken as a sign that one's understanding of the world corresponds to an extra-subjective reality. Scalapino thus undertakes a "continual conceptual rebellion" as a means of "outrunning" the forces that would seek to conventionalize one.[11]

For those familiar with Buddhist philosophy, Scalapino's philosophical-poetic project bears some familiarities. Indeed, her ideas about perception and the particular kind of phenomenology she develops is informed in a large part by Zen Buddhism.[12] Some critical essays have already pointed to the connection between Scalapino's philosophical-poetic project and Zen Buddhist thought: Jason Lagapa, in his article "Something from Nothing: The Disontological Poetics of Leslie Scalapino," has drawn direct comparisons between Nāgārjuna's[13] "Buddhist apophasis" and Scalapino's deconstructive poetics. Focusing on Scalapino's negative constructions ("they see that…or don't – and it isn't there"; "only that and also *not* that"), Lagapa demonstrates how Scalapino uses words to undermine themselves. Camille Martin's "Reading the Mind of Events: Leslie Scalapino's Plural Time" introduces Nāgārjuna's concept of Two Truths to contextualize Scalapino's critique of essentialized thinking. Martin's essay looks at Scalapino's concern with narrativity, especially her rejection of the hierarchies created by a linear conception of time and causal relations between events.

Scalapino's poetic work has also been anthologized within collections of Western Buddhist writing, including *Beneath a Single Moon: Buddhism in Contemporary American Poetry* (1991), and *The Wisdom Anthology of North American Buddhist Poetry* (2005). The editors of *Beneath a Single Moon* see Scalapino as belonging to category of poets who draw readers towards the "emptiness" of language – its lack of an ultimate ground. In a Nāgārjunian vein, Johnson and Paulenich argue, avant-garde Buddhist poets such as Scalapino seek to dissolve the conventional dualities of noumena/phenomena, reading/writing, and language/world, breaking through "the temporal and spatial hegemonies of narrative."[14]

My aim is to extend on these discussions by reading *The Dihedrons Gazelle-Dihedrons Zoom* as a Buddhist text. More specifically, I will be considering how Scalapino's last book can be seen to operate within a wider framework of Buddhist soteriology.[15] How does the reading of a book of Buddhist poetry like *The Dihedrons* inform and develop one's commitment to following the Buddhist path?[16]

Prior to the event which inspired this essay, I had read parts of *The Dihedrons* and I was aware of its author's religious leanings and some of the scholarship that had been done on Scalapino's association with Buddhism. *The Dihedrons*, I knew, sets up a parallel universe which embodies a number of core Buddhist teachings: *anitya* (impermanence), *anātman* (no-self), *pratītya-samutpāda* (dependent origination), and *śūnyatā* (emptiness). Coming to read *The Dihedrons* in full, I unconsciously began with a soteriological intention: I hoped to take on Scalapino's ways of perceiving the world, to come closer to understanding the Buddhist teachings as they manifest in one's very perception. As a student of poetry and a student of Zen Buddhism, I read *The Dihedrons* as a religious text, one that would lead me towards insight into "the true nature of things." My ultimate goal, it could be said, was to reach a point wherein Scalapino's poetry became my own thought processes. I wanted her writing to rewire my habitual ways of using language in order for me to see the world according to Buddhist truth: fleeting, insubstantial, empty.[17]

My identification of *The Dihedrons* as *upāya*[18] (skillful means) was not unfounded in a wider view of Buddhist literature. There is a rich history of poetry that has developed out of Mahāyāna Buddhist practices, from *haiku* to *waka*, to *shi*, to *kōan*, to *gāthā, mantra,* and *dhāraṇī*. In Chan and Zen circles,[19] poetry was often used alongside religious training, being seen as the ideal vehicle for transmission of an enlightenment experience.[20] Students would often be called upon to write poems as a demonstration of their level of enlightenment,[21] and priests often used poetry in their pedagogy as a means of indirectly pointing the way.[22] There is a particular Zen rhetoric, too, that has developed as a kind of oral poetry and which might best be encountered in the kōan collections. Kōans, which suppose themselves to be a record of spoken conversation between Zen masters and interlocutors, operate by absurdities, paradoxical assertions, indirection, drastic abbreviation, tautology, oxymoron, and various shades of silence.[23]

Indeed, the Zen scholar Dale S. Wright considers this Zen rhetoric to be a highly developed and unique tradition.[24] Characterized by "a persistent refusal to talk about ordinary matters in ordinary ways," "the discursive practice of 'talking about,' that is, propositional, representational discourse, was resolutely avoided."[25] Accompanying the strange and disorientating effects of Zen rhetoric is the idea that it is designed to lead a listener or reader to a sudden experience of enlightenment.[26] That is to say, the particular ways of using language developed and supported within Zen institutions had a soteriological function: to lead adherents towards *satori*.

Given this history of Zen poetry and Zen rhetoric, Scalapino's "avant-garde" literary practices designed to disorientate the reader can be seen as part of a wider Buddhist tradition. However, in order to further this discussion of the soteriological possibilities of Scalapino's *The Dihedrons*, I must outline the ways in which the book manifests Buddhist truths.

Anātman

Among the multitude of events and images that arise within *The Dihedrons,* the phrases that first capture a reader's attention are those which repeat. They usually appear as long strings of adjectives and nouns, with the occasional verb – liver jewel of intestine-curl, Silvertip grizzly-Silver-Wattle tree, gruiforms whole cranes rails coots, whitewolfdog, butterfly blood-reef red Chrysanthemum, blowing giant frozen waste lake. These become the core phrases of the book, acting as both images and characters. But each time the image-characters surface, they do so with slightly different wordings. In just one paragraph, the dihedrons gazelle-dihedrals appear as "the dihedrons halved sides," "halved-sides-halved-persons," "dihedrons (people?)," "the sides (the dihedrons)," "dihedron-planes," "frontal-dihedral gazelles frontals people," "dihedral-gazelles-frontals," "sides-dihedrons (people-like)," and "galloping dihedral horses."[27]

Far from the characters of a novel, these image-creatures have no essential identity. They are perpetually under construction, and their operation as both images and characters blurs the line between environment and agent. They are not the autonomous or independent characters of a conventional narrative, inhabiting a clearly defined social or geographical landscape. These image-characters are non-self-identical, transitory beings, which do not exist outside of the contexts in which they arise.

The image-characters manifest the doctrine of *anātman*: no-self. That is to say, the image-characters have no fixed identity or essence, no underlying reality. Since we only know these strange image-characters through name (that is, they have no "real world" referent), we must conclude that the morphing names cancels any possibility for the creatures themselves to be self-existing or ontologically grounded entities.

Further to the image-characters' transient identities, *The Dihedrons* itself posits that it has no fixed essence. Rather than the book being seen as a self-existent object, a historical artefact or a record of thought, Scalapino suggests in the author's note that "the writing is not the idea of the whole framework of occurrences after without its existence ever being."[28] That is to say, *The Dihedrons* resists the possibility for one to summarize or essentialize it into a narrative framework (such as a description of a plot or a synopsis). It is very difficult to say what "happens" in a given poem; there are so many occurrences and how they happen in relation to each other is indeterminate. The meandering syntax and the compound characters create an overload of possibilities for interpretation, positioning the reader as co-maker of the parallel universe: one whose perception creates the events that happen. In this way, *The Dihedrons* positions itself as a time-based unfolding in which one must be in the action to have any experience of it at all. It is an ongoing process in which the reader "is to find out what's there, *as* occurrence."[29] The implied reader is not an observer of the action, detached from the immediacy of events that the book generates.

In fact, *The Dihedrons* proposes that it does not even exist as such until a mind comes into contact with it. Both arise simultaneously, and neither can exist without the other. As the Chan master Huángbò Xīyùn (unknown-850) expresses this idea, "no 'mind' exists outside awareness of 'objects;' and no objects exist other than those in mind."[30] There is no perception apart from "objects," and there are no objects apart from those that exist through perception. *The Dihedrons* is not book until one identifies it *as* a book: other than its nominal form, the book has no identity and no inherent essence.

Anitya, Pratītya-samutpāda

Reading *The Dihedrons* gives the impression that there is nothing certain to grasp onto. Extremely long sentences without punctuation throw up a number of images and events, creating the effect of ceaseless transformation. There is a degree of disorder to this, and the overwhelming feeling for the reader is an information overload. One could say the high rate of images-per-second that *The Dihedrons* operates at creates a complex simulation.

> …aquanaut swimming in the ocean the seasons visible there to the aquanaut dicrotic hears
> the plomb inserted dark liquid flooding night air plugging dawn asterism glows there
> beneath these stars limbs a huge oak tree on land appear still while it is moving the tree
> plomb of sky aquanaut swims…[31]

The excess of things moving and things happening embodies *anitya*. One of the three marks of existence identified by the Buddha, *antiya* suggests that all things of the world are constantly under construction, continually transforming as they arise and recede. Every thing is characterized by *anitya* – impermanence. The notion that all things are ceaselessly arising, changing and passing away from one moment to the next means that there is nothing permanent in the phenomenal world that a person can hold onto.[32]

Closely related to the concept of *anitya* is that of *pratītya-samutpāda*: dependent origination. *Pratītya-samutpāda* suggests that all phenomena arise in relation to all other phenomena, as a result of the causes and conditions provided by them. In simple terms, "when one thing arises, another thing comes to be,"[33] so every singular phenomenon is both interconnected to all other phenomena, and dependent on all other phenomena for its continued existence. *The Dihedrons* demonstrates *pratītya-samutpāda* by making its events syntactically interdependent. Anacoluthon, the characteristic sentence structure of the book, combines into a single statement "large numbers of agrammatical or potentially incoherent units of discourse."[34] Not only does this make it difficult to determine where event-phrases begin or end, but it means that events rely on each other because of their presentation as a sentence. In the following excerpt

from "No Collective Baudelaire later, the ochlocracy," what could be eight different events exist in seamless interdependency:

> *When* the Asteroidean star encountered by the base runner – a star as Cheshire's head floating starfish in the city *when* the base runner comes to the lake to drink, his/the base runner's heart's lake has a tie to this outer lake – assembling the Asteroidean infusing sky and internet green meadow of dissociative disorder *at once* center red star blushing indigo *substitutes* for Cheshire cat sign grinning in the city air space *though* through the streets the horizon has buildings on it…[35]

The words I have highlighted in italics above would presume to provide a temporal or spatial orientation within conventional novelistic prose, but here they only serve to show the dependency of events. "Though" and the repeated "when" function as subordinate conjunctions, suggesting that the text that follows is conditional. The dependent clauses created by "when" and "though" wait to be resolved by independent clauses, but the independent clauses never arrive. Even reading from the first "when" and ignoring the text between the dashes does not lead to a resolution of the subordinate clause: "When the Asteriodian star encountered by the base runner…assembling the Asteriodian infusing sky." The excerpt's other temporal-locational words, "at once" and "substitutes" suggest simultaneous and sideways movements. Like the subordinate conjunctions, "at once" and "substitutes" suggest that the events that follow cannot be seen as separate (or chronologically later) to the events that precede the word.

In the world of *The Dihedrons,* events are pulled into existence conditionally and simultaneously, rather than being discrete happenings within an already-established temporal or locational framework. One could say that the sites of action in *The Dihedrons* are groundless, there being no point of reference to which all events correspond. In her book of essays *The Public World/Syntactically Impermanence,* Scalapino explains this kind of *pratītya-samutpāda* poetics as

> no phenomena or events/constructs [that] can be single, in that they spring from other contingencies and are these, they do not exist in that perceived form (single) only appear to exist 'at present,' which also only appears to exist…'Logic' is the maintenance of that appearance and set of appearances.[36]

Without "logic" maintaining a set of predictable appearances, *The Dihedrons* creates a free-floating, strange world of phenomena and events through which a reader must navigate her way. It produces a parallel universe in which everything is constantly in flux, where none of the characters appear as self-identical, and where the syntax creates interdependency among events. Like other avant-garde art and

literature, *The Dihedrons* baffles our usual interpretative strategies and asks us to reevaluate the frameworks with which we try to make sense of it. What is a phrase if the words themselves keep changing? What is a sentence if it cycles through endless swerves of phrases, seeming more like a synthesis of disparate elements than the articulation of a meaningful statement? What is meaning if it can be determined by chance? *The Dihedrons* encourages the reader to make sense of a new environment which is not governed by authorial intentionality, self-existent entities, causal relations, and a linear sense of time.

Śūnyatā

Scalapino's philosophical-poetic project suggests that language has significant power in determining one's interpretation of experience.[37] By disrupting conventional structures of language, Scalapino proposes, conventional ways of viewing reality are also dislodged. As the critic Nicky Marsh has commented, Scalapino's writing

> inverts the insight that social constructions are always necessarily mediated through language…, suggesting instead that the vehicles of mediation are themselves the central constituents of experience – hence the *text becomes the act*. Scalapino asks that the reader acknowledge that the text doesn't simply *represent* reality for us (albeit in an ideologically governed way) but *produces* a reality on its own terms.[38]

The idea that language produces reality is an important thread in the teachings of Mahāyāna Buddhism. According to Buddhist thought, our instinct is to take words and concepts to be reflective of a preexisting reality, as if the concepts and categories with which we make sense of the world were disclosed to us by the world itself. This happens because we assume that our linguistic categories, our most basic means of apprehending the world, also bear implicit philosophical truths. According to a contemporary philosopher of Buddhism, David Loy, "there is a metaphysics, although an inconsistent one, inherent in our everyday view" which is a product of conventional language patterns.[39] The "commonsense metaphysics" identified by Loy includes the ideas that nouns represent discrete, self-existent entities, that objects are passive and inanimate, remaining unchanged unless acted upon by a subject, and that each autonomous and independent entity interacts with others by way of causation.[40]

The Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna, writing in the second century CE, was responding to this "commonsense metaphysics" when he composed the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*.[41] Throughout his masterwork, Nāgārjuna relentlessly deconstructs assertions on the nature of reality, teasing out subject from predicate, motion from spatial-temporal location, trying to understand the exact event that commonplace linguistic constructions claim to refer to.

If motion is in the mover,

There would have to be a twofold motion:

One in virtue of which it is a mover,

And one in virtue of which it moves.[42]

Do substantive objects precede motion? Is the person going really different from the motion of going which is also different from the place of going to? His conclusion is that many of our conventional linguistic constructions are philosophically unintelligible.[43]

Nāgārjuna proceeds to propose that there are two truths: a conventional reality and an ultimate reality.[44] Conventional reality is that which is created by a culture's linguistic categories and conceptual understandings, and is the agreed-upon consensus of "the way things are" that makes daily life intelligible. Conventional reality can be seen as equivalent to "commonsense metaphysics," a nominal reality produced by and dependent on the functions of language. Ultimate reality, on the other hand, is free from all concepts and categories. It is not the characteristics we impute to things of the world, but "the nature they have from their own side."[45] However, conventional and ultimate reality are not two different ontological realms but mutually reinforcing:

Without a foundation in the conventional truth,

The significance of the ultimate cannot be taught.

Without understanding the significance of the ultimate,

Liberation is not achieved.[46]

Conventional reality is thus not to be disparaged as it is a necessary part of human life, even if it is a "lower" truth. Moreover, conventional reality is not insignificant, "as it determines the character of the phenomenal world"[47] – that is to say, it determines what counts as real for us.[48] In this way, language is a direct and powerful force in shaping what we consider reality. Nāgārjuna argues, however, that conventional reality is ultimately characterized by *śūnyatā*: emptiness. That is to say, conventional reality does not correspond to ultimate reality; language does not truly refer to an external reality which it assumes to describe. It is ultimately groundless. In its dualizing of substance and attribute, subject and predicate, permanence and change, it deludes us as to the true nature of things.[49]

However, Buddhist soteriology does affirm the possibility of experiencing ultimate reality. Part of the path to liberation is coming to apprehend "things-in-themselves" without the overlay of distorting dualistic fictions. Buddhist soteriology promises that one can deconstruct or "de-automatize" the perceptual process which operates via conventional reality, leading one toward an altered perception of

self and environment. *Nirvāṇa* itself, it has been suggested, is "the cessation and non-functioning of perceptions as signs of named things."[50] That is to say, the highest point on the Buddhist path is one in which "perceptions do no refer to any hypostatized object 'behind' the percept." [51] It is our commonsense understanding that "makes the world *saṃsāra*[52] for us, and it is this *saṃsāra* that Nāgārjuna is concerned to deconstruct."[53]

While the goal of Buddhist soteriology is liberation from suffering, such liberation can only be attained when one achieves insight into the true nature of things.[54] And such insight must be gained, in part, through reasoning and thus, language.[55] So although language inherently produces dualisms, separating subject from predicate, motion from locale, and hypostatizing processes into discrete self-existing objects, particular uses of language can overcome this tendency. Dōgen (1200-1253), the founder of the Sōtō school of Zen, famously used words in a poetic way to embody Buddhist truths. In his master work, the *Shōbōgenzō,* he refers to followers of the Buddha as "a few bags of skin" and monks as "those in cloud robes and mist sleeves," capturing the teachings of no-self and impermanence, respectively. For Dōgen, "the manner of expression is as important as the substance of thought; in fact, the experimentation with language is equivalent to the making of reality."[56]

While other critics have noted that Scalapino is interested in deconstructing narrativity, from a Buddhist perspective her project can be seen as interested in our deconstructing the delusional everyday metaphysics which keeps us in *saṃsāra*. The semantic indeterminacy which permeates *The Dihedrons* operates as a way of unsettling a reader's "commonsense metaphysics." Disrupting a reader's certainties of how phenomena exist in time and space and how they relate to one another, it specifically disallows a reader to identify self-existing objects interacting causally in an objective spatial and temporal framework, and disallows the reader to identify the text itself as existing outside of the reader's mind. That all events in *The Dihedrons* are dependent on one another suggests that the occurrences are referential only to themselves, or at least, only to the totality of the events that happen within *The Dihedrons* parallel universe. The words form a web which is not annexed to a "real world" of true sense and accurate logic, just as the monstrous image-creatures distort the dictionary definitions from which they arose. One could say that *The Dihedrons* parallel world collapses the difference between interpretants and their referents, "making the text its own action."[57]

But while Scalapino breaks down the conceptual categories that make up conventional reality, she simultaneously suggests that those linguistic categories are all there is – there is no external reality behind language. Things are at once not our interpretation of them (*The Dihedrons'* universe is fantastical, not "real") and only our interpretation of them (what is a dihedron gazelle-dihedral outside of the book?). What this amounts to in terms of Nagarjuna's two truths is that there is no duality between appearances and reality, between conventional and ultimate truth.

Scalapino uses words in a way that extends what a reader thinks possible. Like Dōgen, she operates under the principle that words themselves "are the truth that we need to realize,"[58] and makes language a living force. Her words do not just circumscribe reality but open up, re-express, renew, and cast off, "unfold[ing] new horizons of their own life."[59] Language, for Scalapino, does not need to be relegated to the instrumental position of a "finger pointing at the moon"[60] if it is not trying to grasp and convey truth; it can already operate *as* truth.

Through *The Dihedrons,* Scalapino initiates the reader into one aspect of Zen Buddhist training: a fundamental reorientation in language.[61] In an important article on the role of language in Zen, Dale S. Wright draws attention to the particular uses given to language within Zen training. Wright claims that the linguistic practices of Zen institutions enculturate novices into "distinctive, nonobjectifying, rhetorical practices,"[62] with the unique rhetoric used by Zen masters being as powerful as the teachings themselves.[63] The central feature of Zen rhetoric, Wright suggests, is emancipatory in that it seeks to free listeners and readers from conventional modes of comportment.

My awareness of the existence of a "Zen rhetoric" into which students are socialized perhaps informed my unconscious choice to read *The Dihedrons* as a religious text. As if a novice entering a training situation, I wanted to take on nondualizing and non-objectifying ways of seeing the world put forward by *The Dihedrons*, to fundamentally reorientate my way of ordering the world, to perceive *through* and *as* the poetry. Interestingly, Scalapino herself has acknowledged that poetry may make possible something akin to this: reading is "creating reality as imposition on a formation of one's thoughts and actions."[64] Other critics have also noted that her work lends itself towards a reading so immersive that "it as if the description predicated on the event[s] were the voice of the writer as the experience of the reader."[65]

Needless to say, my experiment reading *The Dihedrons* as soteriological literature is still ongoing. While specific uses of language in a book like *The Dihedrons* can support and develop one's spiritual progress on the Buddhist path, as I have argued, this is not enough in itself. Training in Zen has always encompassed a number of activities which may be seen as contributing to a person's spiritual progress, which is in line with the Buddha's identification of suffering as an affliction which pervades the whole of a person's being. Somatic practices such as meditation, which also seek to bring a practitioner to a state of nondual perception,[66] are equally important in the Zen school of Buddhism. As the Zen scholar Hsueh-Li Cheng observes, "being, knowing and acting are synonymous in Zen philosophy."[67] Words may be the truth we need to realize, as suggested by Dōgen, but that realization does not come by cognition alone. Or, as the most celebrated Western Zen poet Gary Snyder has written, Zen poetry is valuable "not for the literary metaphor but for the challenge presented by the exercise of physically actualizing the metaphor in the present."[68]

Notes

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[1] Sausalito, California: The Post-Apollo Press, 2010. Published shortly after Scalapino's death in 2010, *The Dihedrons Gazelle-Dihedrals Zoom* is the finale in a stream of writings which extend from 1976. Hereafter, *The Dihedrons.*

[2] Fanny Howe and Charles Bernstein, *The Dihedrons,* back cover.

[3] "not as a mental disorder but word-blindness: trace-like stream overriding meaning, choice, and inhibition." Scalapino, *The Dihedrons,* vii.

[4] Scalapino, *The Dihedrons,* vii.

[5] I choose the term "book" as a generic descriptor in order to acknowledge the blending of genres (poetry, prose, visual art) which *The Dihedrons* exhibits. I prefer "book" over "text" in this instance, to convey the materiality of the printed title. The materiality of the printed book, as we shall see, is in part what causes a person to think of *The Dihedrons* as a self-existent entity. Other types of text, such as hypertext, exist within a digital network and are not so easily conceptualized as discrete or bounded objects.

[6] Throughout this essay, I will use the term "event" to denote an occurrence, not in the specific manner of a Heideggerian event or a Deleuzian event, but in the manner employed by Scalapino in her discussions of her own poetics.

[7] Scalapino, *The Dihedrons,* 1.

[8] Ibid., 27.

[9] Jason Lagapa, "Something from Nothing: The Disontological Poetics of Leslie Scalapino," *Contemporary Literature* 47, no. 1 (2006) pp.30-61: 37; Camille Martin, "Reading the Mind of Events: Leslie Scalapino's Plural Time," *How2* 2, no. 2 (2004): unpaginated.

[10] Leslie Scalapino, "Introduction," in *Overtime: Selected Poems,* Philip Whalen ed. Michael Rothenberg (New York: Penguin Books, 1999)*,* xix.

[11] Lyn Hejinian, "Leslie Scalapino Remembered," *Poets.org*, 2010, https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/leslie-scalapino-remembered

[12] Scalapino's interest in Buddhist thought systems can be traced to her childhood, when her family travelled extensively throughout Asia as a result of her father's job. Robert Scalapino worked as a political scientist specializing in Asian Studies and founded the University of California at Berkeley's Institute for Asian Studies. The experience of living in different cultures had a significant impact on the young Scalapino, and she recounts being given a book on Buddhism at the age of 13 for a school assignment. Scalapino continued to study Buddhist philosophy in depth throughout her life. Biographical sources on Scalapino include Hejinian, "Leslie Scalapino Remembered," unpaginated; Leslie Scalapino, "An Interview with Leslie Scalapino conducted by Elizabeth A. Frost," *Contemporary Literature* 37 no. 1 (Spring 1996) pp.1-23: 22; "Scalapino, Leslie." *Literature Online biography,* ProQuest, 2007, http://gateway.proquest.com.ezproxy.auckland.ac.nz/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&xri:pqil:res_ver=0.2&res_id=xri:lion&rft_id=xri:lion:ft:ref:BIO006452:0&rft.accountid=8424

[13] Nāgārjuna (circa 150-250 C.E.) was the founder of the Madhyamaka (Middle Way) school of Mahāyāna Buddhism. One of the most influential Buddhist philosophers of all time, his writings have had a lasting effect on all modern schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism, including Zen.

[14] Kent Johnson and Craig Paulenich, "Preface," in *Beneath a Single Moon: Buddhism in Contemporary American Poetry* (Boston; London: Shambhala, 1991) pp.xv-xxi: xix.

[15] Soteriology, as the study of salvation, is often used in contemporary scholarship to denote study of the Buddhist path. The use of this Christian theological term is not unproblematic, though, since many Buddhists do not see their salvation as the result of an external agent. Dan Cozort, "Soteriology," in *Encyclopedia of Buddhism,* ed. Robert Buswell (New York: Macmillan, 2004), 782.

[16] The Buddhist path to enlightenment, as described by the Four Noble Truths and set out in the Noble Eightfold Path.

[17] I acknowledge that this aim may have been naïve: even the Chan master Huángbò Xīyùn's transmission record advises that to cast off the conceptual strategies with which one usually make sense of the world is truly frightening. As Dale S. Wright paraphrases Huángbò, "the experience is somewhat like being suspended over an infinite void, groundless, with nothing to hold on to." (Dale S. Wright, "The Discourse of Awakening: Rhetorical Practice in Classical Ch'an Buddhism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 61, no. 1 (1993) pp.23-40: 32.) Or to consider it another way, on the path to

enlightenment one cannot go directly from Great Faith to Great Death: one must also encounter Great Doubt.

[18] *Upāya* denotes the possibility for something to act as an intelligent means through which to lead a person closer to insight. In pedagogical situations, it is thought of as the ability to tailor teachings to the needs of others. *Upāya,* Carl Olson notes in his dictionary *The A to Z of Buddhism* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2009) suggests that while there is a single truth, there are many ways to approach it. This last point is important in this context as it supports the idea that there can be many forms of "Buddhist literature."

[19] Chan is the Chinese name for the school of Buddhism known more commonly in the West as Zen. I use Chan to refer to Zen in China, which chronologically precedes the Zen school in Japan. Both Zen and Chan are transliterations of the Sanskrit *dhyāna,* a "deep absorption in meditation characterized by pure awareness." (Olson, *The A to Z of Buddhism,* 99.)

[20] Sandra Wawrytko, "The Poetics of Ch'an: Upayic poetry and its Taoist enrichment," *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal* 5 (1992) pp.341-378: 343.

[21] Iriya Yoshitaka, "Chinese Poetry and Zen," *The Eastern Buddhist* 6, no. 1 (1973) pp.54-67: 60.

[22] Wawrytko, "The Poetics of Ch'an," 343.

[23] Steven Heine, *Zen Koans* (Honolulu, Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press: 2014), 20.

[24] Dale S. Wright, "The Discourse of Awakening: Rhetorical Practice in Classical Chan Buddhism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 61, no. 1 (1993) pp.23-40: 23.

[25] Dale S. Wright, *"*Rethinking Transcendence: The Role of Language in Zen Experience," *Philosophy East and West* 42, no. 1 (1992) pp.113-13: 126.

[26] Ibid., 126-7.

[27] Scalapino, *The Dihedrons,* 61-62.

[28] Ibid., 129.

[29] Leslie Scalapino, *The Public World/Syntactically Impermanence* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press; Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), 54.

[30] Dale S. Wright, *Philosophical Meditations on Zen Buddhism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 160-161.

[31] Scalapino, *The Dihedrons,* 28.

[32] Olson, *The A to Z of Buddhism,* 54.

[33] Ibid., 191.

[34] Huntington Brown and Albert W. Halsall, "Anacoluthon," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Roland Green, Stephen Cushman, and Clare Cavanagh (Princeton University Press, 2012). http://ezproxy.auckland.ac.nz/login?url=http://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/prpoetry/anacoluthon/0

[35] Scalapino, *The Dihedrons,* 7-8.

[36] Scalapino, *Public World,* 54.

[37] Camille Martin, "Reading the Mind of Events," unpaginated.

[38] Nicky Marsh, "'Note on My Writing': Poetry as Exegesis," *Postmodern Culture* 8, no. 3 (1998): unpaginated, emphasis mine.

[39] David Loy, *Awareness Bound and Unbound: Buddhist Essays* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2009), 36.

[40] Loy, *Awareness Bound and Unbound,* 48; David Loy, *Nonduality: A Study in Comparative Philosophy* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1998), 74.

[41] Loy, *Awareness Bound and Unbound,* 37.

[42] Nāgārjuna quoted in Jay Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 7.

[43] Loy, *Awareness Bound and Unbound,* 35.

[44] For a full definition and discussion of Nāgārjuna's Two Truths, an important doctrine in Mahāyāna Buddhism, see Jay Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). The explanation I give here is specific to the argument I am making in this essay and is thus somewhat truncated.

[45] Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom,* 298.

[46] Nāgārjuna quoted in Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom,* 298.

[47] Ibid., 307.

[48] Ibid., 89.

[49] Loy, *Awareness Bound and Unbound*, 37.

[50] Loy, *Nonduality,* 54.

[51] Ibid.

[52] *Saṃsāra* denotes the experience of unliberated existence which is characterized by unsatisfactoriness and suffering. Meaning "rebirth," *saṃsāra* refers to the cycle of death and rebirth which all unenlightened beings are subject to. Olson, *The A to Z of Buddhism*, 202.

[53] Loy, *Awareness Bound and Unbound,* 36. Nāgārjuna's translator and commentator Jay Garfield supports this idea when he writes that "the difference – such as it is – between the conventional and the ultimate is a difference in the way that phenomena are conceived/perceived." Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom,* 320.

[54] Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom*, 298.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Hee-Jin Kim, "The Reason of Words and Letters: Dōgen and Kōan Language" in *Dōgen Studies,* ed. William LaFleur (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1985) pp.54-82: 60.

[57] Marsh, "'Note on My Writing'," unpaginated.

[58] Loy, *Awareness Bound and Unbound,* 44.

[59] Kim, "The Reason of Words and Letters," 60.

[60] An idea introduced in the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* which suggests that language can never be the ultimate truth but can only gesture towards it.

[61] Wright, *"*Rethinking Transcendence," 125.

[62] Ibid., 133.

[63] Ibid., 125.

[64] Leslie Scalapino, *How Phenomena Appear to Unfold* (Elmwood, CT: Potes & Poets Press, 1989), 30.

[65] Watten quoted in Lagapa, "Something from Nothing," 39.

[66] Lagapa, "Something from Nothing," 33.

[67] Hsueh-Li Cheng, "Psychology, Ontology and Zen Soteriology," *Religious Studies* 22, no. 3/4 (1986) pp.459-472: 459.

[68] Gary Snyder, "Introduction," in *Beneath a Single Moon: Buddhism in Contemporary American Poetry,* ed. Kent Johnson and Craig Paulenich (Boston; London: Shambhala, 1991) pp.1-9: 3.