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Collective identity and sacred space: A study of seven Zen communities in northern California

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University of Delaware, 1989

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COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AND SACRED SPACE:
A STUDY OF SEVEN ZEN COMMUNITIES IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

By
Sheryl N. Hack

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Early American Culture

August 1989

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A STUDY OF SEVEN ZEN COMMUNITIES IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

By
Sheryl N. Hack

Approved:    
Bernard Herman, Ph.D.
Professor in charge of thesis on behalf of the Advisory Committee

Approved:    
James Curtis, Ph.D.
Director of the Winterthur Program in Early American Culture

Approved:    
Carol E. Hoffecker, Ph.D.
Acting Associate Provost for Graduate Studies
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INTRODUCTION

Hand-planed wood and smooth wooden floors; incense and incense burners, bronze bells and fish-shaped wooden drums; chanting in Japanese; robes rustling as bodies, male and female, bend at the waist, hands together, eyes lowered. Hands touch the floor, then knees and the tops of the feet; lower arms, elbows, then foreheads as the hands, palms facing upwards, rise and are lowered in the symbolic act of lifting Buddha's feet. Is this a Japanese temple? No. It is the practice of Zen in an American Zen Center community in San Francisco or Sonoma, Mountain View or Berkeley, Marin County or the Carmel Valley hills.

Since the mid-nineteenth century Americans have been intrigued with Buddhism.¹ During the twentieth century this interest in Buddhism, and particularly in Japanese Zen, has been gaining momentum and strength.

¹For a complete discussion of the history of Buddhism in America see Fields, Rick, How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America (Boston: Shambala, 1986) and Layman, Emma McCloy, Buddhism in America (Chicago, Ill: Nelson-Hall, 1976).
Permanent groups have been organized, and significant numbers of Americans have taken up Buddhism as a daily and life-long practice. In northern California, for example, there are seven associated Zen communities which lie within a 120 mile radius of San Francisco. Referred to in this study as the Suzuki-roshi or Zen Center communities, they are examples of the establishment of year-round, residential centers for the practice of Japanese Soto Zen.

Headquartered at the corner of Page and Laguna streets in San Francisco, the San Francisco Zen Center includes the Page Street community, a practice center in Marin County called Green Gulch Farm and Tassajara, the first American Buddhist monastery, set deep within the coastal range above the Carmel Valley. These three communities were founded by Japanese Zen master Suzuki-roshi who came to San Francisco in 1958. The remaining four communities—located in Berkeley, San Francisco, Mountain View, and Sonoma—were established between 1966 and 1982 and are run by senior students of Suzuki-roshi.

The Zen Center communities vary in size, population, location, number of structures, and architectural arrangement and character. The Tassajara Mountain Monastery, Green Gulch Farm, and the Sonoma Mountain Center are located on previously built rural
sites. The Berkeley, Mountain View, San Francisco/Page
Street and San Francisco/Hartford Street centers are set
on city lots in residential or institutional structures.

For the majority of Americans the word Zen
connotes the soft philosophy expounded in Robert Pirsig's
well-known novel *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle
Maintenance.* However, the members of the Zen Center
communities have dedicated themselves to Zen as a serious
historical and practical study. Zen teachings, and
specifically those of Zen Center founder and teacher
Shunryu Suzuki-roshi, govern the nature and structure of
daily life. Primary activities, which are organized
around an all-powerful schedule, are meditation, work and
study. Communal meals, lectures, and sleep complete the
daily routine.

Zen Center practice is a complete practice which
focuses on maintaining the state of mind achieved through
zazen or sitting meditation, and allowing it to permeate
all aspects of daily life. As stated in a community
information sheet:

> We stress daily-life practice as meditation itself. Through working, eating, talking,

---

¹Robert Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle
Maintenance: An Inquiry into Values*, (New York, NY: Bantam
Books, 1974).
walking, and sitting together, in an informal setting, we try to practice Buddha's way.3

Although the Zen Center communities currently house about two hundred residents, their following extends to the thousands of people who come into contact with their philosophy and practices through publications, guest programs, and commercial establishments including a grocery store, bakery, and Greens, one of San Francisco's finest and most successful vegetarian restaurants.4 Weekly public lectures and sittings draw two to three hundred people at some communities, and the total lay membership numbers four to five hundred.

The Zen Center communities could be analyzed art-historically and aesthetically, in terms of the accuracy

3 Green Gulch Farm information sheet.

4 Listed as the "Top Vegetarian Restaurant" by Michael Bauer, Executive Food Editor in "How Bay Area Restaurants Rate," San Francisco Chronicle, June 1987.

"A recent lunch at Greens underscored once again that this vegetarian restaurant run by the Zen Center is one of the best eating places in the city," restaurant review column, San Francisco Chronicle, March 1988.

of their replication of traditional Japanese design concepts and forms; they could be characterized in terms of American Orientalism and the way in which they conform to or depart from the hundred-forty-year tradition of American borrowing and adaptation of Japanese motifs and design ideas; they could be examined in terms of the American tradition of utopianism and communitarianism; or they could be evaluated within the context of the "new religions." However, I have chosen to write a religious ethnography which utilizes the landscape, architecture and objects created by and found within this American subculture to understand its norms and operation, both in its own terms and in terms of the way in which it differs from and interacts with the larger American society.

The Zen Center communities are the product of a particular time and place: San Francisco in the 1960's. Viewing the communities within the context of this time and place is essential in order to understand their nature, value structure and meaning. The 1960's American counterculture, with its attraction to alternative lifestyles and Eastern thought, and the Japanese cultural

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framework provided by San Francisco's sizeable Japanese-American community, together allowed for the birth and subsequent growth of the Suzuki-roshi communities. Although it is important to understand what the presence of these communities says about the dominant American culture, this thesis is a case study of a distinctive subculture which offers an alternative, based on Eastern tradition, culture and thought, to American philosophical, spiritual and material life.

Many recent books on American Buddhism and American Zen have been written and numerous Zen "how-to" manuals and historical Buddhist texts have been made available to the American public by American publishers.

6 For a thorough treatment of the counter culture, both as the representation of a new paradigm and in terms of its relationship to Orientalism and Oriental mysticism, see Theodore Roszak, The Making of the Counter Culture, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969).

Suzuki-roshi was sent to San Francisco, by the Soto Zen headquarters in Japan, to serve as a priest for the Japanese-American congregation of Sokoji ("Soko" = San Francisco, "ji" = temple).


Zen "how-to" manuals:
All this work is historical, biographical, promotional or denominational; no attempt has been made to analyze American Buddhism, to interpret American Buddhist communities or to understand American Buddhist material culture.

The Zen Center communities embody an amalgamated (Eastern and Western) cultural tradition which stems from


Historical Buddhist texts:

For further references contact Shambala Publications, 314 Dartmouth St., Boston, Massachusetts.
the acceptance of a Japanese Zen philosophical perspective on the nature of life and manifests itself in architecture, foodways, landscape design, ritual, ceremony, costume, behavioral norms, work, study, organization of time, values, goals, carriage, gesture, and the choice and use of objects. These communities are important because of the new sub-culture which they have created, because of what they say about the larger American culture from which they have come, and because of the new perspective and set of ideas which they offer to this culture.8

Following a brief history of Buddhism in the introduction, the Zen Center communities will be discussed in three chapters. Chapter one, The Zen Environment, treats the physical environment (which includes community sites, architectural and functional layouts, landscaping and gardens, natural features and characteristics, and the derivation and meaning of component parts). The second chapter, The Zen Life, presents the religious practices

8While it is beyond the scope of this study to document the degree to which Zen Buddhist philosophy has permeated the larger American culture, I would suggest that current environmental consciousness, interest in health food, and realization of global natural and human interconnection and interdependence owe a considerable debt to the entrance of Buddhist ideas and ideals into American thought.
and philosophical premises of the seven communities and discusses their choice and use of objects. The third chapter features Zen structures, both new and adapted, as the physical embodiment of an amalgamated (American and Japanese Buddhist) cultural tradition.

**Historical Buddhism**

Buddhism began in India, in the sixth century B.C., out of the enlightenment experience of Prince Siddhartha Gautama who was given the title Shakyamuni ("the silent sage of the Shakya clan") and became the historical Buddha (or the "Awakened One"). The central teaching of Buddhism is the doctrine of the Middle Way, the idea that it is neither through extreme asceticism nor through sensual indulgence that one can solve the most basic problems of human life: old age, sickness, sorrow, suffering and death. The idea that the nature of human life is suffering is the cornerstone of Buddhist belief. The goal of Buddhist practice is the cessation of suffering, which is achieved through discovery of the cause of suffering--belief in and attachment to an individual self--and through following the eight-fold path.

---

of right views or understanding, right purpose or intention, right speech, right action or conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right kind of awareness or mindfulness, and right concentration or meditation, that is the Middle Way.¹⁰

In its primary Theravada or Hinayana form, Buddhism spread south from India to Sri Lanka, and east to Burma and Thailand. Mahayana Buddhism, which developed in the first century A.D., traveled north and east to China, Mongolia, Nepal, Tibet, Cambodia, Vietnam, Korea, and Japan. The Mahayana and the Theravada represent the two major divisions within Buddhism. Theravada Buddhism emphasizes individual salvation and upholds the ideal of the arhat as the embodiment of its achievement. The arhat is one who, through strenuous effort, has subdued all desires, greed, hatred and anger, has thus freed himself from bondage to the concept of an individual self and thereby achieved nirvana.¹¹ Having attained enlightenment, which in the Hinayana concept is "merely the extinction of false ideas, in particular the hard-to-


¹¹ See footnote 6, page 43, for an explanation of nirvana.
conquer belief in a separate ego,"12 his task is complete; there is nothing more to do. On the other hand, the ideal figure in the Mahayana tradition is the bodhisattva, an enlightened being who elects to postpone his own nirvana in order to aid other beings on the path to illumination. The bodhisattva goal is the goal of becoming a true Buddha; the emphasis of the Mahayana tradition is on universal salvation.

Zen Buddhism, a branch of Mahayana Buddhism, began in India and, as legend has it, was transmitted to China by an Indian monk named Bodhidharma around 500 A.D. The teachings of Bodhidharma, which were marked by the abandonment of priestly ritual and the endless chanting of the sutras or Buddhist scriptures in an attempt to return to the essence of the Buddha's experience, led to the birth of Chinese Ch' an and subsequently, of Japanese Zen (the word Zen is a Japanese transliteration of the Chinese Ch' an).

Zen traveled from China to Japan in its Rinzai form in the eleventh century by way of Zen master Eisei who founded the Japanese Rinzai sect, and in its Soto form in the twelfth century through the study and teachings of

12 Ross, p. 47.
Dogen, the first Japanese patriarch of the Soto Zen school. The Soto and Rinzai schools are the two main schools of Zen, and have been extremely influential in Japanese spiritual and cultural life since their founding at the end of the eleventh and beginning of the twelfth centuries.¹³

As derived from the teachings of Bodhidharma, Zen stands apart from other forms of Buddhism in its staunch reliance on zazen, or sitting meditation, as the way to achieve enlightenment. The Rinzai sect also utilizes koans, intellectually unsolvable questions or riddles, designed to demonstrate the inadequacy of the intellect as a vehicle for attaining enlightenment or solving the ultimate problem of existence.¹⁴

The teacher or Zen master plays a crucial role in the education of his students and the nature of their practice. Zen teachings are transmitted from teacher to student by word-of-mouth, and each teacher chooses one or more students to be his dharma heirs, those to whom he


will give the honor of passing on his teachings and becoming part of his lineage.\textsuperscript{15} A Zen master or roshi is respected rather than revered; he is followed rather than worshipped. He is an example and a guide, a long-time practitioner of zazen who embodies the actualization of practice.

Practice is an essential term in the Suzuki-roshi communities. In certain contexts it stands for zazen, and in others it refers to the entire daily routine of meditation, work and study which constitutes the monastic life. The ambiguity and centrality of this term highlight two significant characteristics of Zen which help to explain what Zen is and how it functions. First is the focus on zazen as the heart of Zen, and thus as the method for realizing the Buddhist goal of enlightenment or perfect understanding of the true nature of life and of the universe. Second is the notion of zazen as both a constant and a lifelong pursuit. Zazen is not simply sitting in meditation; it is a process of uniting mind and body in a state of mindfulness or conscious awareness.

While the posture assumed is essential to zazen,

\textsuperscript{15}The dharma is the teachings of the Buddha, and in Buddhist tradition represents one of the "three treasures" along with the Buddha and the sangha, or Buddhist community.
the mental state (which is conditioned upon a mind-body awareness resulting from the physical posture) is the crucial element and reason for taking up the meditation posture. Ideally this enlarged, enhanced and stilled state of consciousness does not stop and start with the physical assumption of the posture but is to be striven for in all aspects of daily life. The ideal of life as awareness, or truth, as found in and through the tasks of daily existence gives expanded meaning to the term "practice." Every action taken with conscious awareness thus becomes a form of practice.

The paradoxical notions of zazen, a prescribed seated posture as a means of achieving enlightenment and a perpetual mental practice are resolved by the Zen acceptance of paradox as an element of life which bears no need for explanation. While viewing zazen as the primary method for freeing the self from conceptual bondage to itself, Zen tradition also recognizes that such liberation may, after weeks or years of study, instantaneously occur as a result of a particularly revealing sound, sight, discussion with a learned teacher, or any other intense personal experience. A significant segment of Zen literature is devoted to recounting examples of sudden
Buddhism in America

Buddhism came to America through translated texts, Oriental immigrants, Buddhist missionaries, and American travelers. Buddhism in America has no single racial, cultural or intellectual identity. Represented traditions include both Mahayana (Chinese, Japanese, Tibetan, Korean, and Vietnamese) and Theravada (Sri Lankan, Thai, and Burmese). For the purpose of cultural analysis, the major division in American Buddhism is between Asian American and American Buddhists. Japanese American Buddhist churches, located in areas of Japanese settlement, function more as centers of social and community life than as places of intense spiritual practice. Services and structures are Protestantized, and often include aisles, pews, and modified Christian hymns. Japanese Americans have obviously strongly Westernized their religious traditions and practices.

The opposite may be said of American Buddhist

17 For a complete treatment of the history and nature of Buddhism in America, see Rick Fields' How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America, (Boston, Mass.: Shambala, 1985), and Emma McCloy Layman's Buddhism in America, (Chicago, Ill.: Nelson-Hall, 1976).

18 Fieldwork, summer of 1987.
The opposite may be said of American Buddhist groups, whose primary focus is highly intensive, devoted practice. American Buddhist structures tend to attempt to imitate traditional Oriental building types, and chanting is often done in Oriental languages. While there has been in recent years some entrance of Americans into Japanese American Buddhist groups (the Japanese Jodo Shinshu and Nichiren Shoshu churches are the most notable examples), the Japanese American and American groups generally exist in isolation from each other and represent different Buddhist sects and schools.

Of all the Buddhist traditions and schools, the Japanese Zen school, with its meditative tradition, has had the longest and strongest appeal to Americans. Following the World Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago in 1893, Japanese Zen masters began to come to this country with the idea of teaching Americans. Soyen Shaku, who spoke at the Parliament, arrived in San Francisco in 1905. He traveled across the country on a speaking tour with his student Daisetz T. Suzuki, a young Buddhist scholar and lay Rinzai practitioner, who, through the publication of more than twenty books on Zen and

19 Fieldwork, summer of 1987.
through courses taught at Columbia University, was later to become the great popularizer of Zen and the catalyst of the Zen boom among American intellectuals of the late 1950's. This trip marked the first comprehensive presentation of the Mahayana doctrine to the American public (Theravadin texts and teachings had been more widely disseminated in Europe and America because Theravadin scriptures were first discovered and translated by Western scholars, who believed that there existed only a single Buddhist tradition).

At the same time that Zen teachers were first coming to America, Americans were beginning to go to Japan to study Zen. The precedent of American study and practice of Japanese Buddhism (set by Bostonians William Sturgis Bigelow and Ernest Fennollosa in the late nineteenth century) was continued by a small number of Americans who studied with Soyen Shaku at Engakuji. During the twenties, thirties and forties Zen groups in New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco continued to slowly gain members, and Japanese Zen masters continued to arrive in America.

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20 Rick Fields, *When the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America*, (Boston, Mass.: Shambala, 1986).

21 Fields.
Zen, as taught to and practiced by Americans in these years, focused on the intellectual and scholarly tradition, rather than on the physical and mental practice commonly understood as Zen. As stated by Fields, "1960 marked the point when American Zen turned from the intellectual to the practical." Zen as a way of life and practice was the concern of Soto Zen master Shunryu Suzuki-roshi, who came to San Francisco in 1958 to lead the Japanese American congregation of Sokoji, the Soto Zen Mission.

**Zen as Practiced in the Suzuki-roshi Communities**

Soon after his arrival and installation as head priest of Sokoji, a group of Americans seeking zazen instruction began to gather around Suzuki-roshi. Within a year a daily program of sitting had been established and Suzuki-roshi was lecturing regularly in English. This was the beginning of Zen Center, which was incorporated in 1961 and currently consists of an urban headquarters at Page and Laguna in San Francisco, the Tassajara Mountain Monastery in the hills of the Carmel Valley, and an

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organic farm and meditation center on Marin County's Muir Beach called Green Gulch Farm. There are also three commercial establishments—the Green Gulch Green Grocer, the Tassajara Bread Bakery, and Greens Restaurant—which are owned by Zen Center. All three are located in San Francisco, focus on the sale of vegetarian foods, and were the brainchildren of Baker-roshi, who followed Suzuki-roshi as abbot of Zen Center.\(^2\)

There are four affiliate communities in northern California which are connected with Zen Center through the spiritual leadership of Suzuki-roshi. They are: the Sonoma Mountain Zen Center also known as Genjo-ji, located in Sonoma County and founded in 1974 by Jakusho Kwong-roshi; the Berkeley Zen Center, led by Mel Weitsman who is currently also serving as co-abbot of Zen Center; Kannon Do in Mountain View, established as Haiku Zendo in Los Altos by Suzuki-roshi in 1966, whose teacher is Les Kaye; and the Hartford Street Zen Center in San Francisco, run by resident priest Issan Dorsey and organized in 1982.

The form and character of the Zen practice carried

\(^2\) The Zen Center commercial establishments were begun in order to generate income for the communities, as well as to provide places of employment for Zen Center students.
out at the seven Zen Center communities is based on the individual perspective, approach, and teachings of Shunryu Suzuki-roshi, placed against the background of historical and practical Zen. Buddhism is organized around the concept of the master or teacher and the formal relationship between teachers and students. As stated by Fields:

Buddhist history is the record of lineage—of who gave what to whom—not as dead doctrine, but as living truth... Though lineage is chronological and linear, or seems to be, and the story has gone on for twenty-five hundred years, Buddhism insists on the primacy of the present. Zen masters sometimes talk about linking eyebrows with the ancient patriarchs...  

Zen Buddhists trace their lineage, or spiritual ancestry, back through Japan, China and India to Shakyamuni Buddha, and believe that they are directly related to him in spirit and practice. The "Names of the Buddhas and Ancestors" or Patriarchs chant, which includes sixty names and is intoned daily, asserts both the existence and importance of this relationship. In his essay "Bodhidharma's Pacifying the Mind," Koryu Osakaroshi describes the transmission of the dharma (Buddhist doctrine) from one Patriarch to another: "...it [the dharma] was passed on just like water poured from one

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25 Fields, p. xiii.
container into another." And so it continues to be passed on today. Although the Zen Center communities constitute a distinctive American subculture, they are also vital elements in a continuing Buddhist tradition.

Fieldwork for this study was conducted during the summer of 1987 and included visiting each of the seven communities, participating in meditation practice and chanting services, conducting interviews with residents and teachers, and, as circumstances permitted, following the daily schedule of meals, work and practice. Promotional literature was culled and scholarship on the history of American Buddhism consulted, in order to place the Suzuki-roshi communities within the context of the growing American Buddhist tradition. The work of anthropologists Clifford Geertz, James Deetz and Serena Nanada was used to define and to understand the concept of culture. Dell Upton and Bernie Herman provided the theoretical framework for the study of vernacular architecture. Object typology and analysis was aided by the work of Louis Binford, and models for characterizing

religious behavior have come from the work of Mircea Eliade, Raymond Firth and Geertz. Grant McCracken's book on culture and consumption provided insight into materialism and consumer behavior in twentieth-century American culture, and Theodore Roszak's work *The Making of the Counter Culture* contributed a framework for understanding the intellectual and cultural climate of San Francisco in the sixties. Landscape studies by Erich Isaac, J.B. Jackson and D.W. Meinig informed the chapter on the Zen Environment.
CHAPTER ONE

THE ZEN ENVIRONMENT

We regard all landscapes as symbolic, as expressions of cultural values, social behavior, and individual actions worked upon particular localities over a span of time. Every landscape is an accumulation... every landscape is a code and its study may be undertaken as a deciphering of meaning, of the cultural and social significance of ordinary but diagnostic features...¹

The Zen landscape consists of the layout of each community, including the arrangement of structures and functions, the relationship of natural features to buildings, and the placement of flower, food and rock gardens. As a consciously constructed, value-laden environment, architecture and organic elements work together to enforce and reinforce a particular philosophical, ideological and social agenda.

In the Zen philosophy practiced by members of the Zen Center and Zen Center affiliated communities, the

entire physical world is regarded as sacred space. The cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth which is common to all creatures is respected, and the natural world, as the scene in which this cycle takes place, is likewise reverenced. Reverence for the physical world is manifested both through the choice of community locations and through the treatment of the natural and built environment within community boundaries.2

The rural communities of Tassajara, Sonoma Mountain, and Green Gulch Farm are located in remote areas accessible only by a lengthy drive over narrow, winding roads. Their isolation serves to construct and maintain a very real boundary between the internal world of the community and the external world of the larger society. The drive and the road function as physical and experiential components of the layout of the communities. They provide the physical transition between the internal and external worlds and facilitate the accompanying emotional and psychological transition.

Dramatic landscapes characterize the rural Zen community sites. Tassajara, once a hot springs resort which still retains its popularity as a swimming and bathing spot, sits within the narrow valley of the Tassajara Creek surrounded by tens of thousands of mountainous acres of national forest. Located in a coastal valley on the slopes of Mt. Tamalpais and in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, Green Gulch Farm stretches from rolling grassy hills and stands of eucalyptus, to the waves and seashore of Muir Beach. The Sonoma Mountain Center is perched on the side of a mountain and situated within a redwood grove on an eighty-acre plot eleven miles south of Santa Rosa.

These natural settings are essential to the quality and character of the experience in each community. Work practice, in the form of gardening, farming, raking, building and repairing is carried out within the natural environment and is subject to the general climate.³ The rigors of the tightly constructed daily schedule of work and meditation—early morning rising, sitting for long periods in unheated halls, and outdoor work—expose

³Work practice, or meditation practice through daily work, is an essential element of life in the Zen Center communities.
community members to daily and seasonal extremes of heat and cold. Within a life pattern which is largely shaped by natural cycles, the full range of each day's drama is inescapable.

The beauty of the morning sun as it lights up the mountains and glides down the Tassajara canyon as one is hurrying to the meditation hall for 5:20 a.m. zazen, is an example of the way in which the natural world impacts the daily experience of life in these communities. The power and presence of the individual sites combined with the schedule of meditation, work and study brings one into harmony with the physical world. Alignment with the physical world is at the heart of the practice of Zen.

The natural environment is cultivated for both commercial reasons and to fulfill community needs. Organic spinach, lettuce, and potatoes are grown at Green Gulch Farm and garden vegetables and flowers are raised at Tassajara, as well as at the San Francisco/Hartford Street and Sonoma Mountain centers. In the urban Berkeley, San Francisco/Page Street, and Mountain View centers extensive landscaping and intensive gardening characterize the limited available space.
The Japanese love of gardens and the long established tradition of garden design is clearly evident in the Zen Center communities. The flower, vegetable, ornamental and rock gardens which are present in these communities do not come directly out of Japanese tradition but their ubiquitousness is evidence of Japanese influence. The rock gardens at Tassajara and the raked dirt at Sonoma Mountain Center make reference to the karesansui or dry landscape garden traditionally associated with Zen temples.

Non-garden areas in the Zen Center communities consist of carefully raked dirt, lawns, and other elements of the natural landscape, such as eucalyptus, oak, and redwood groves, and grass-covered rolling hills. Community environments are always clean and well tended. It is part of the community members' individual and collective, practical and philosophical commitment to keep them so.

An integral relationship exists between the natural and human elements of the Zen Center landscape. Structures are built into, rather than onto, the landscape.

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in consonance with Buddhist belief. Site characteristics influence building placement and arrangement and suggest physical form. This relationship between site, garden design, and architecture is also found in Japanese Zen temple planning and in Japanese architectural thought and tradition. As stated by William H. Frederick, Jr., in an article entitled "Lessons for Americans to Learn From Japanese Garden Designers":

(Japanese) architecture and... landscape architecture are designed as a unified whole... The personality of the site and community has a strong influence on the total design including the siting of the architecture, (and) the development of garden experiences...

Chinese Ch' an style temple plans were introduced to Japan in the twelfth century. The fundamental difference between Chinese Ch' an and Japanese Zen temple layouts was the degree to which the Japanese adapted the established plan to the natural characteristics and advantages of the site upon which the temple was built. Japanese architecture is organic and flexible in both construction and conception; and, because of the emphasis placed upon harmony between all natural elements (as derived from the native Shinto tradition and enriched and complemented by the introduction of Buddhism in the sixth century), it is logical that Japanese Zen temple layouts would exhibit a stronger accommodation to the natural topography than their Chinese counterparts.


William H. Frederick, Jr., "Lessons for Americans to Learn From Japanese Garden Designers" in Plants and Gardens: Brooklyn Botanic Garden Record, vol. 41, no. 3,
The integration of interior and exterior space is, according to art historian Siegfried Wichmann, the "decisive factor" in Japanese architecture. With its removable, non-weight supporting walls ("fusama") the Japanese house opens to the garden to such a degree that, "The house is part of the garden and the garden is part of the house."

In the Zen Center communities natural materials and the liberal use of windows cause buildings to relate to and blend into natural landscape features. The generous use of large, sliding windows gives a transparent, Japanese-like character to the structures by minimizing the barriers between interior and exterior space.

Structures and functions in the rural and urban Zen Center communities are arranged according to concepts of profane and sacred, ordinary and ritualized, disorderly and orderly, chaotic and consonant, public and private, individual and collective, outside and inside space.

Autumn 1985, p. 56.

Architecture, the arrangement of structures, and objects enforce, reinforce and facilitate the transition from secular to sacred and ordinary to ritualized space as one enters into and progresses through these communities. The highly particularized layout organizes structures, gardens, and features of the natural landscape to focus on the zendo as the physical and spiritual center of the community. Zendos or meditation halls, which represent the most sacred enclosed space, are raised upon an elevated site or placed deep within the community. They may be placed in monumental structures (in relative scale) or in tucked away spaces, but they are always clearly identified. Zendos must be identifiable to visitors from outside the community so that they will not accidentally intrude on sacred space.

The differences in sites and in physical circumstances (e.g., the presence of previously constructed buildings) found in each of the communities have called for the establishment of a flexible design tradition, the central feature of which is the need for a clear physical, psychological, and spatial definition of the zendo space. As the most sacred of inner community

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8 In the Page and Hartford Street city centers, the zendo has been placed in a basement room of the single community structure.
space, the zendo is never placed next to the public road or entrance, although it may be visible from it. At Tassajara, the fourteen mile dirt road serves as an entrance space to the mountain community. The Tassajara zendo is placed below the library, flower garden, and entrance gate, on an elevated piece of ground overlooking the residential and utilitarian buildings. Its location near the entrance of the community provides a focal point for community intention and activity. As the largest single structure, its visual weight offers a reminder of the community's purpose and meaning.

The character of Zen Center architecture, like that of community layouts and plans, is flexible and utilitarian. Building exteriors exhibit no visual continuity or uniform style. Exteriors are simple and unarticulated.9 Structural interiors, on the other hand, are clearly articulated and are therefore, able to direct action and to define spatial use and the nature of activity.

9 The character of the exterior appearance of Zen Center structures is usually more related to their previous function as barns, houses, or churches, for example, than to a specified set of aesthetic principles. In contrast to many American religious buildings, Zen Center temples do not call attention to themselves through signage or distinctive exterior features. Zen Center structures therefore remain largely undetected by casual observers.
The arrangement of structures and functions, and the differential treatment of architectural interiors and exteriors is significant because such arrangement and treatment aides in the mediation between external (outside world) and internal (community) environments, and sends a message to the outside world concerning the nature of these communities. Their architecture and literature clearly communicate that the Zen Centers are not interested in attracting casual visitors to their communities. They wish to draw sincere and like-minded individuals dedicated to pursuing the practice of Zen.¹⁰

The ordinariness of Zen Center architecture is essential to its role in the transition from that which is familiar and understood within the dominant American culture to that which is particular, sacred, uncommon, ritualized, and unknown. The orchestration of community layouts around concepts of public and private, as well as profane and sacred space, is based on a carefully crafted relationship between the Zen Centers and the outside world. The layouts of the communities not only reflect

¹⁰Zen Center architecture and promotional literature function as mechanisms of control over the nature and number of the people who are aware of, and thus who enter, the Zen Center communities.
that relationship, but help to create, define and regulate it by controlling who enters the communities and providing an orderly progression from profane to sacred space.

While Zen Center leaders and builders have succeeded in creating workable architectural and spatial layouts for their communities, their organizational and visual statement is, in their perception, incomplete. They are currently engaged in a master planning process for each of the three rural sites (Tassajara, Sonoma Mountain and Green Gulch). The plans call for the construction of additional structures, and at Green Gulch, for the separation of resident and guest practice space.¹¹

The master planning process is most advanced at Green Gulch Farm. Two distinct groups have formed within the community, and, with the assistance of an architect, have each drawn up a plan. (fig. 1, p. 109) The difference between the two plans revolves around the issue of siting, with one group advocating strict adherence to traditional Japanese spatial relationships (fig. 2, p. 111), and the other desiring a plan which is more in keeping with the natural features of the site (fig. 3, p.

¹¹By practice space I mean zendo space; space within which to practice zazen or sitting meditation.
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113). With their respective focus on the orientation of structures or on natural topography, each option emphasizes a different aspect of traditional Japanese temple design. 13

As is evident from the plans for the development of Green Gulch Farm, the Zen Center community leaders are interested in constructing individual structures and creating an overall plan which reasonably conforms to traditional Japanese models for temple layout and design. The impetus behind the direction and character of this desired development is a conception of inherent spiritual value present in Japanese temple forms. 14 According to Zen Center vice president Robert Lytle, community members are uncertain about the nature of the benefit to their practice which will brought about by the presence of Japanese style structures. Notwithstanding this uncertainty, they feel it is important to erect Japanese

12 Interviews with San Francisco architects Peter Calthorpe, 1/29/88, and Chuck Davis, 2/2/88.

13 As is stated in footnote 3, page 25, traditional Japanese temple plans are concerned with both the orientation of structures to each other as derived from Chinese temple layouts and with accommodating the architecture to the characteristics of the particular site.

14 Interview with Robert Lytle, 1/29/88.
style buildings in order to experience whatever spiritual benefits they may bring.15

The daily lives of most contemporary Americans are not seriously affected by the rising and setting of the sun, the changes of the seasons and the presence of fog or the absence of rain. Due to advances in technology and to the pursuit of comfort, the control of the exterior environment over the conditions of daily human life has been virtually negated for people in the industrialized world. For people living in the Zen Center communities a different set of goals and assumptions, and sometimes divergent physical conditions (for example there is no heat or electricity at Tassajara) are in operation. In relation to work, climatic control, and physical conditions, their lifestyle is in some ways closer to that of preindustrial society than to that of twentieth-century America. In an article entitled "Religion, Landscape and Space" Erich Isaacs discusses the differences between the contemporary twentieth-century landscape and the landscape of past cultures and societies, in terms of the paradigmatic and perceptual differences of which they are a physical embodiment. Isaacs states:

15 Interview with Robert Lytle 1/29/88.
Why do the forces that operate in a magical-cosmic religion no longer operate, or at best work in a diluted fashion, in the changing landscapes of the 20th Century? The answer... lies in man's changing spatial perception, in itself partly the product of man's changing religious beliefs. The transformation has been from... 'symbolic' space to 'abstract' or geometric space, abstracted from 'all the variety and heterogeneity imposed upon us by the disparate nature of our senses,' and... of our cultures. Geometrical space has replaced divine and cosmic, mythological and magical space... A culture that has attained a logical view of space perceives elements of the landscape, too, in their causal relations. Perception of the landscape in any other way becomes the province of the artist or the mystic - the atypical member of society.  

Isaac classifies religious systems into magical-cosmic religions and religions of revelation. Within this classification, Buddhism, with its concept of the divine presence in humankind and in nature, falls within the category of magical-cosmic religions. The fact that the people who inhabit the Suzuki-roshi communities have chosen a magical-cosmic religion and that they have allowed it to order the physical, spatial, material, and mental aspects of their lives sets them physically and intellectually apart from the larger American society. The communities and structures within which they live, the

17 Within Isaac's system Christianity is the quintessential religion of revelation.
goals they pursue, and the philosophical premises upon which they base their lives, render them separate from the dominant American culture.

Isaac also discusses the relationship between spatial perception and culture, examining religious ordering or transformation of space and assuming that this transformation is a direct function of culture. He says:

The nature of the role which culture assigns to religious experience will determine the extent and the character of the transformation religion makes upon the landscape. If a culture imposes no conditions upon religious experience, space may be perceived according to religious categories.18

Within the Zen Center community culture, the Zen Buddhist philosophical/religious system is the governing principle for thought and life. There are no limitations on the perception of space in philosophical/religious terms, and in the expression of the religious principle in environmental, structural and aesthetic design. The members of the Zen Center communities are culturally free to allow their religious/philosophical system to both define and to shape their landscape.

18 Isaac, p. 15.
CHAPTER TWO

THE ZEN LIFE

The Zen Center communities are a group of Buddhist communities whose ideological framework, as formulated by the communities' founder Suzuki-roshi, by historical Soto Zen, and by the Mahayana Buddhist tradition is the driving force behind individual and collective action. These communities constitute purposeful societies based on a prescribed way of thinking and practicing. They have been deliberately organized through the application of religious beliefs and philosophical premises to the problems and situations of daily life. Due to the ideological nature of these communities it is essential to understand their philosophical system in order to comprehend their landscape, architecture, and object systems.

Scholarship on the nature of religion presents several ways of analyzing religious systems. The two perspectives which have proved to be most relevant to this study are those of the cultural anthropologist and of the
historian of religions. The assumption of the cultural anthropologist, whose viewpoint is summarized by Clifford Geertz in "Religion as a Cultural System," is that religion is a series of culturally derived systems created by humankind to infuse life with meaning.1 Another proponent of the functional position is Raymond Firth, who in an article entitled "Religion in Social Reality," asserts:

The understanding of religion is most fully obtained not by embracing its symbolic system, but by scrutinizing it. It is then seen as a symbolic product of human desires in a social milieu. A religious system represents one way of obtaining a framework for handling fundamental problems of social organization—for reducing uncertainty and anxiety, for increasing coherence in human relationships, for assigning meaning to human endeavor, for providing justification for moral obligation. On this rests its power and its capacity for continued adaptation and re-creation. It is not possible for human society to exist without some forms of symbolic solutions which rest on non-empirical foundations.2

The perspective of the historian of religions is represented in the works of Mircea Eliade. Eliade approaches religion on its own terms.


...a religious phenomenon will only be recognized as such if it is grasped at its own level, that is to say, if it is studied as something religious. To try to grasp the essence of such a phenomenon by means of physiology, psychology, sociology, economics, linguistics, art or any other study is false; it misses the one unique and irreducible element in it - the element of the sacred. Obviously there are no purely religious phenomena; no phenomenon can be solely and exclusively religious. Because religion is human it must for that very reason be something social, something linguistic, something economic - you cannot think of man apart from language and society. But it would be hopeless to try to explain religion in terms of any one of those basic functions which are really no more than another way of saying what man is...3

Eliade does not see religion as a functional element of a cultural system. He endeavors to understand the sacred as it is experienced within given cultures as a way of living in and viewing the world.

The man of the archaic societies tends to live as much as possible in the sacred or in close proximity to consecrated objects. The tendency is perfectly understandable, because, for primitives as for the man of all pre-modern societies, the sacred is equivalent to a power, and in the last analysis, to reality. The sacred is saturated with being. Sacred power means reality and at the same time endurance and efficacy. The polarity sacred-profane is often expressed as an opposition between real and unreal or pseudoreal... Thus it is easy to understand that religious man deeply desires to be, to participate in reality, to be saturated with power.

...desacralization pervades the entire experience of the nonreligious man of modern

societies and... in consequence, he finds it increasingly difficult to rediscover the existential dimensions of religious man in the archaic societies.4

In order to formulate an accurate, comprehensive and informed evaluation of the nature and practices of a religious group or community one must be able to view it both in its own terms and from an outside perspective; one must be both a participant and an observer. One must remain critical yet open, and allow oneself to experience that which is felt by the participants in order to understand their experience and what it means to them. For a comprehensive analysis, then, I have enlisted both the Geertzian analysis of religion as a symbolic cultural system which fulfills specific, identifiable human needs and Eliade’s perspective which accepts the reality of the sacred and endeavors to understand and characterize its manifestation within the given religious tradition.

Belief

The belief system taught and practiced in the Zen Center communities is derived from the individual goals and values espoused by Suzuki-roshi set against the background of the philosophical/religious traditions of Mahayana Buddhism and Japanese Soto Zen. There are five basic philosophical premises which inform life within these communities.

The first element of the Zen perspective was articulated by Zen master Dogen, the founder of Japanese Soto Zen. It is the doctrine of non-dualistic thinking which asserts that contrary to common mortal perception, reality is inherently nondualistic. This means that there is no difference between subject and object, body and soul, good and evil, life and death, truth and delusion, sacred and profane in the absolute sense. As described by Dogen:

By virtue of zazen it is possible to transcend the difference between 'common' and 'sacred'...
Zazen is a practice beyond the subjective and objective worlds, beyond discriminating
thinking... There is no gap between practice and enlightenment or zazen and daily life. The goal of zazen, which is the primary Soto Zen practice and will be discussed in the next section, is the realization of the fundamental unity of all life within the universe. This realization may also be termed enlightenment or nirvana.

The second premise of the Zen life is the assumption of a circular rather than a linear life process. As is clear from the previous quotation, within the Zen paradigm the heart of life or the kernel of truth is to be found within the ordinary and everyday rather than within the elevated and ritualized (although it exists there, too). Thus the achievement of the Buddhist goal of nirvana does not elevate or distinguish one, but rather leaves one exactly where she or he is, experiencing the sacred while continuing to carry out the activities of daily life. Within the Zen paradigm the achievement of

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*Nirvana, as defined by Yuho Yokai in Zen Master Dogen: An Introduction with Selected Writings, p. 209-210, is: "Literally, 'extinction'. Originally, this referred to the state of enlightenment attained by the Buddha Sakyamuni. Accordingly, it means the state that can be reached by extinguishing all illusions and destroying all karma, which is the cause of rebirth. In Mahayana Buddhism it further denotes that state which is
nirvana alters one's understanding of her/his daily experience. The goal is not to be transported to another realm or to be something different than that which one already is. The Zen attitude toward the ordinary is illustrated in the following poem from The Tassajara Recipe Book:

An Ordinary Day
To realize true nature, we
Study the body and mind of Reality...
The body and mind of Reality
are not different than this
body and mind right now,
but to know it fully,
we must examine and investigate,
actualize it through and through.

What we really want
Waits within
the ordinary.8

The third element of the Zen philosophy taught and practiced in the Suzuki-roshi communities is the notion of beyond birth and decay, and is equated with Wisdom and the ultimate Truth.7 And as described by Emma McCloy Layman in Buddhism in America, p. 319: "literally, the 'void'; dissolution of dualities, with realization of the selfless 'I' and accompanying inner peace and freedom when one experiences enlightenment."

7This view may be distinguished from the Christian concepts of going to heaven, becoming perfect like Christ, or of taking off the old and putting on the new through baptism or conversion.

the primacy of the present moment. Life is here; life is now. Thought should be focused on the present moment and concentrated on the current activity. This notion is linked to the idea of nondualism as well as to the concept of circularity. By focusing on or "being present in" the immediate moment and concentrating on the moment's activity one demonstrates the lack of distinction between subject and object or between zazen and daily life of which Dogen speaks. In so doing one is also able to experience and to express the non-attainment which is characteristic of the circular life process.

The fourth facet of practical Zen thought concerns the conception of the individual self. In Zen the realization of the illusion of the individual self is a key component, if not the essence of, enlightenment, and is one of the primary goals of Zen practice. In the thirteenth century Dogen said:

To study the Way is to study the self.
To study the self is to forget the self.
To forget the self is to be enlightened by all things.
To be enlightened by all things is to remove the barriers between one's self and others.9

9Dogen, from "The Manifestation of the Koan" (Genjo Koan), Shobo-genzo, as quoted in Yuho Yokoi in Zen Master Dogen: An Introduction with Selected Writings, (New York, NY: Weatherhill, 1976).
Thus the ego and ego gratification do not occupy the central position within Zen Center culture which they hold within the larger American society.

The fifth premise, which is a corollary of the idea of a non-separate self, is the belief in the essential unity of all sentient beings. This belief leads to a deep respect for all elements of the natural environment. Within this systemic framework there is no hierarchical order of beings. Human beings are perceived to exist within and as a component of this environmental system, rather than being charged to dominate or to subdue nature.

Practice

The Zen practice carried forth in the Zen Center communities is a complete practice which permeates all aspects of daily life. Activities are organized according to a schedule which centers around meditation and work. There are three forty-minute meditation periods each day, two of which occur in the morning, and the third in the late afternoon or evening.

The morning sittings are punctuated by a ten-minute period of walking meditation, called kinhin, which follows the first of the two periods, and by a twenty-
minute service which takes place after the second duration. Following the morning service there is a collective cleaning period called soji. Community members and guests gather in a circle outside the zendo, and are assigned cleaning duties, usually a different job each day. Tasks are executed thoroughly but quickly; soji lasts for only twenty minutes. Residents gather and form a second circle following soji, bow together, and then proceed to the dining room for breakfast. Meals are served buffet style and eaten collectively, and students are expected to bow when they seat themselves and again when they rise from the table. They also practice silence during the morning meal.

Following breakfast a work meeting is held in order to assign work duties for the day. Two morning work periods are broken by a mid-morning break, and a third work period follows lunch. The schedule after work calls for zazen and dinner, dinner followed by zazen, or a lecture or class, until approximately 10:00 pm.\textsuperscript{10} It is

\textsuperscript{10}There are often evening lectures given by senior community members or guest speakers, and there is also often an on-going weekly class for which students receive credit in the priest training program.
The daily schedule is very important to the collective living which occurs within the Zen Center communities and is the essence of monastic or community life. It not only enforces simultaneous action—everyone is involved in the same activity at the same time—but it helps to create a collective consciousness based upon shared experience and mutually pursued goals. The schedule is necessary for the accomplishment of community tasks and for the fulfillment of community needs such as food preparation and production, care of guests, and basic management. The schedule is also a way of regulating and controlling human behavior.

Interviews with community members elicited mixed responses to the rigors of the schedule. Individuals at times reacted with resentment against the internal struggle generated by the rigid structuring of their lives, while recognizing its importance to meditative discipline and practice. By eliminating choices

1Weekend day schedules vary somewhat from weekday timetables; at Green Gulch Farm zazen begins at 6:30 a.m. on Sundays, rather than at 5:00 a.m. as on weekdays. A sitting, a lecture, a discussion and a meal are held, to which the lay community and the public at large are invited. Many of the communities have extended lay membership; one to two hundred people come to Green Gulch Farm each Sunday for the meditation period and lecture.
concerning time and activities, the schedule aids one in concentrating on the present moment and activity in order to achieve the larger goal of letting go of the ego or self. The schedule therefore functions as a "teacher" assisting residents in practicing meditation through daily activity.

A day at Tassajara, Green Gulch Farm, or Sonoma Mountain Center is punctuated by the sounds of the drum, bells, and han (a rectangular block of wood which is hung on the wall and hit in the center with a wooden mallet), calling people to meals and meditation. (fig 4, p. 111). A complex series of signals, which incorporates all three types of instruments and involves striking them at given intervals in particular ways, has been developed to announce the type of activity that will occur and the amount of time until it will begin. Signals commence twenty to thirty minutes prior to the hour appointed for meals, lectures, or meditation, and continue in increasingly smaller interspaces until it is time to begin.

The pervasiveness of this auditory system is important in maintaining community discipline and the power of the schedule. One cannot escape the inexorable language of signals and violate the timetable unknowingly.
Dharma Talks

The final aspect of daily practice in the Zen Center communities is education and study. *Dharma talks* are lectures given by advanced students or teachers relating experiences which integrate religious teachings with individual experience. *Dokusan* are daily or weekly discussions between teachers and students concerning problems and progress of practice. There are also formal courses on Buddhism, in which students learn to see themselves and their practice in relation to historical events and long-standing traditions. These courses deepen their understanding of the religious life and religious practice as it was defined by those who came before them. The significance of these elements of practice is that study constitutes the third component of life in the Zen Center communities after work and practice.\(^1^2\)

\(^{12}\)Literature on traditional Zen monastic life places great emphasis on meditation practice and on work. Although lectures (dharma talks) and dokusan are an integral part of this life, historical Buddhist study is not formalized and emphasized to the degree to which it is in the Zen Center communities.

**Sesshin**

In addition to the daily periods of zazen and to morning services, there are concentrated periods of meditation called *sesshins*. A sesshin is a three to seven day period of intensive meditation during which participants eat and often sleep in the zendo, or meditation hall. The purpose of the intensive period of meditation called sesshin is to bring to mind the essential and eternal harmony of all life and of all being. This harmony, which is both a result and a representation of the Buddha nature, is reaffirmed through the singular, unified activity of all participants. Silence is observed except during chanting, and zendo etiquette is strictly adhered to. The community becomes one in pursuit and motion, thus symbolizing and embodying the essential unity of all living things.

**Oryoki**

...the use of oryoki during sesshin and weekly Saturday breakfast provides an opportunity to deepen our practice. Paying careful attention to the way in which we take our meals, the true relationship between our food and ourselves is made clear. Emphasizing each simple activity, we continually learn our way.\textsuperscript{13}

Meals eaten in the zendo in the time of sesshin are eaten in a set of bowls and according to a prescribed manner known as oryoki. The oryoki bowls, chopsticks, spoon, and scraper are carefully wrapped and tied within a cloth that functions as a placemat when the bowls are laid out to receive the food. (figs. 5 and 6, p. 116, 117). Recipients remain seated in the zendo in zazen posture, while servers bring the three dishes which constitute the repast. Meals are conducted in silence; servers are signaled when the portion they have conferred is sufficient, and if second helpings are desired. Participants are required to consume all of the food which they are given, and to clean their bowls with hot water or tea when they have finished their meal. The complexity and specificity of the way in which bowls and utensils are wrapped and unwrapped, and the appointed etiquette of the meal, combine to make oryoki a continuation of the meditation process and constitute its significance as an element of sesshin.
Bowing was a crucial element of practice to Suzuki-roshi, as is evident from the following quotations from *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*.

By bowing we are giving up ourselves. To give up ourselves means to give up our dualistic ideas. So there is no difference between zazen practice and bowing. Usually to bow means to pay our respects to something more worthy of respect than ourselves. But when you bow to Buddha you should have no idea of Buddha, you just become one with Buddha, you are already Buddha himself. When you become one with Buddha, one with everything that exists, you find the true meaning of being. When you forget all your dualistic ideas, everything becomes your teacher, and everything can be the object of worship.15

Bowing helps to eliminate self-centered ideas. This is not so easy. It is difficult to get rid of these ideas, and bowing is a very valuable practice. The result is not the point; it is the effort to improve ourselves that is

14There are two types of bows: the bow of gasho and prostrations. Prostrations are deep bows in which the body bends fully at the waist, hands at elbow height, palms touching, and is lowered on bent knees to the floor. Knees, forehead and the tops of the feet touch the floor as the hands are raised, palms facing upward, in the symbolic act of raising Buddha’s feet. The body is then raised back to its upright position.

  The bow of gasho is a smaller and more frequently used bow. It functions as a greeting among community members and an acknowledgement of the Buddha’s presence when students momentarily pause at the small altars found throughout the communities. The gasho bow is made by holding the palms together against the chest with fingers pointed upward and bending at the waist.

valuable. There is no end to this practice.\textsuperscript{16}

According to Rick Fields, author of \textit{How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America}, Suzuki wrote his thesis at Komazawa Buddhist University on bowing, and felt that bowing was "particularly important for Americans...because American culture lacked forms to show respect."\textsuperscript{17} In addition to the nine prostrations or full bows that accompany the morning chanting service, students bow to each other as they enter and leave the zendo, as they sit down to and rise from the dining table, and as they move about the communities accomplishing their daily tasks.\textsuperscript{18}

In Zen practice the purpose of bowing is to acknowledge the Buddha in oneself and in others, and in so doing to affirm the perfection and unity of all living things. This is possible because bowing is both a mental

\textsuperscript{16} Suzuki, p. 45.

\textsuperscript{17} Rick Fields, \textit{How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America}. (Boston, Mass.: Shambala, 1986), p. 231.

\textsuperscript{18} Students bow at the many small altars which are hung on interior and exterior walls throughout the communities as they go past them while attending to their daily tasks. Of these altars, Katherine Thanas, head priest in charge of teaching at Tassajara said: "The altars that we have around are a little reminder to bring awareness into the moment and into the place." (Interview with Katherine Thanas, Tassajara Mountain Monastery, 7/26/87.)
and a bodily practice. It is thus able to unify the mind
and body and therefore to reflect the larger unity of
which it is symbolic.

Chanting

**Meal Chant**

Innumerable labors have brought us this food
We should know how it comes to us
Receiving this offering we should consider
whether our virtue and practice deserve it
Desiring the natural order of mind
We should be free from greed, hate and delusion

We eat to support life and to practice the way
of Buddha
This food is for the three treasures\(^{19}\)
For our teachers, family and all people and
for all beings in the six worlds
The first portion is for the precepts\(^{20}\)
The second is for the practice of samadhi\(^{21}\)
The third is to save all beings
Thus we eat this food and awaken with everyone.

Chanting, like bowing, takes place both within and

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\(^{19}\) The "three treasures" are the historical Buddha,
the dharma—his teachings, and the sangha—the community
of followers.

\(^{20}\) The Buddhist precepts taken upon lay or priestly
ordination.

\(^{21}\) Samadhi: "Frequently translated as 'meditation'
or 'concentration,' this word denotes a state in which the
mind, free from distraction, is absorbed in intense
'purposeless' concentration. With the mind thus
completely absorbed in itself, the essential nature of the
Self can be experienced directly. Yuho Yokoi, *Zen Master
Dogen: An Introduction with Selected Writings*, (New York,
outside the morning service. Like oryoki and samu or work practice, chanting is an exercise in mindfulness and thus is an extension of zazen. Zendo chants consist of *sutras* (Buddhist scriptures) and historical texts that express the essence of Zen, communicate important experiences or events, and connect Zen Center participants with traditional, historical Zen. Chants are collectively intoned in a singular monotone voice producing an even, rhythmical pattern. The chanting is partly in English and partly in Japanese, with critical texts such as the Great Heart Sutra always intoned in English.22 Meal chants, such as the one reprinted above, are always said in English.23

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22 The primary Zen text.

23 A great deal of debate concerning the merits of chanting in English as opposed to the advantages of chanting in Japanese has occurred within the Suzuki-roshi communities. Those who believe it is better to chant in English argue that in order for Zen to survive and grow in America, it must adapt itself to American language and evolve American forms. Opponents of translation feel that there is an integral relationship between language and form which is destroyed when the texts are deprived of their traditional sounds.

The second argument is problematic, however, because in its historical development Buddhism has moved from India to China, Japan and Southeast Asia, and in each country new traditions and forms have grown up.
Objects

Within the Zen Center communities ritual and non-ritual objects play a vital role in reinforcing the culture, value system, philosophy, and daily practice of the Zen life.

Zen is a non-materialist tradition which grew up in part as a response to the perceived material excesses of the contemporary Buddhist tradition. Historically Zen has not concerned itself with the development of its own forms, but instead has borrowed from other Buddhist traditions.24 As described by Mel Weitsman, founder of the Berkeley Zen Center and acting co-abbot of San Francisco Zen Center:

In this kind of practice the forms are the teachings... You don't need anything to practice Zen. You borrow from other forms of Buddhism to give form.25

In their non-materialist orientation, the Suzuki-roshi communities are thus in consonance with historical/cultural Zen.

24 Although Zen has not concerned itself with the development of its own forms, its aesthetic of simplicity and utility has greatly influenced Japanese culture and has resulted in the development of cultural rituals such as the tea ceremony which have in turn generated their own systems of architecture, garden design and ceramics.

25 Interview with Mel Weitsman, 8/22/87.
The Zen Center community ethos in regard to objects is radically different from that of contemporary American consumer culture.\textsuperscript{26} The Zen Center communities constitute a non-materialist, ideologically-based society with an economy of objects. These communities are not concerned with the accumulation of material goods. Individually and collectively community members are non-acquisitive, so one finds neither the number nor the multitude of types of objects present in most American

\textsuperscript{26}For an analysis of contemporary consumer culture two major works are Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood's \textit{The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption} (New York, NY: Norton, 1979) and Grant McCracken's \textit{Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities} (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1988).

McCracken discusses the relationship between culture and consumption in the birth of the modern Western world and in the creation of the twentieth-century American materialist, "consumer society." McCracken asserts:

"in Western developed societies culture is profoundly connected to and dependent on consumption... The meaning of consumer goods and the meaning creation accomplished by consumer processes are important parts of the scaffolding of our present realities.
"... the goods that are so often identified as the unhappy, destructive preoccupation of a materialist society are in fact one of the chief instruments of its survival, one of the ways in which its order is created and maintained... " (p. xi).
McCracken's discussion focuses on the relationship between objects and culture and the way in which the objects produced by a culture both create and affirm cultural meaning.

"Goods help...(create) a largely undetectable record of existing cultural categories and cultural principles. Surrounded by these goods, we are encouraged to imagine that these categories and principles are somehow inherent in the very nature of things. ...goods...are instruments of innovation and conservation and in both capacities they serve us in our modern quest for order in a disorderly world." (p. xv)

McCracken's work provides a framework for understanding the differences between the Zen Center communities and mainstream American culture in terms of the objects they choose and the way in which they view them. Based on McCracken's arguments, it is clear that since the Zen Center communities have a different philosophical and ideological system than the larger American society, they should also have a different object system with a different set of meanings and/or a different type of relationship to objects altogether.

An example of these differences in the understanding and use of objects is that while the Zen Center communities, like the larger American culture, utilize objects to maintain order, they use ritual objects which reinforce traditional communal life and practice rather than consumer goods which perpetuate a cycle of increased acquisition as part of the displacement of meaning and the preservation of hope (see McCracken, chapter 7, "The Evocative Power of Things: Consumer Goods and the Preservation of Hopes and Ideals").

McCracken argues that one of the primary functions of consumer goods in contemporary American culture is that of defining ("Without consumer goods, certain acts of self-definition and collective definition in this culture would be impossible...", p. xi). In the Zen Center communities objects enforce collective rather than individual definition.
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In the Suzuki-roshi communities objects are tools; they are understood in terms of the function they fulfill in cooking, gardening, education, or worship. This utilitarian object ideology is nearly devoid of aesthetic, historical/cultural or economic components. Objects are important because they facilitate human action and enforce collective values. They possess little inherent aesthetic or financial value.²⁸

²⁸The information presented in this chapter was gleaned through the author’s observation of and participation in meditation practice and ritual chanting services in the Suzuki-roshi communities. There is very little written material on Buddhist ritual objects which is available in English. Art historians have treated Buddhist architecture, painting, and sculpture but have not concerned themselves with the bells, drums, incense burners and vases which are necessary to Buddhist practice.

The single English study which treats Buddhist ritual objects is a catalogue by Elizabeth Lyons and Heather Peters (Buddhism: History and Diversity of a Great Tradition, Philadelphia: The University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, 1985) which accompanies a permanent exhibition at the University Museum. Although consistent in its effort to examine Buddhist art and ritual objects as outgrowths of the cultures within which they were created, the 64-page catalogue, which covers Buddhism in India, Central Asia, China, Japan, Tibet, Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Indonesia, does not discuss any given area in detail. As the sole Western study which utilizes ritual objects to understand the way in which Buddhism varies between and functions within each of the cultures within which it has had a long history, this study is extremely important. However, due to the brevity of its treatment of Japanese Buddhism (and specifically of Japanese Zen, on which the authors have written only three paragraphs) it was not extremely helpful to the author of this thesis. This thesis is the first study which has sought to interpret the material culture of American Buddhism and specifically
A model for the interpretation of object systems is presented by Louis Binford in his essay "Archaeology as Anthropology." Binford sets forth a taxonomy through which to interpret different types of artifacts within archaeological assemblages.\textsuperscript{29} Binford divides artifact types into three categories based on primary function. Technomic artifacts are those objects whose primary function is in "coping directly with the physical environment."\textsuperscript{30} Sociotechnic objects mediate and designate social relationships and represent the nature and structure of social systems. Ideotechnic artifacts "signify and symbolize the ideological rationalizations for the social system and... provide the symbolic milieu in which individuals are enculturated."\textsuperscript{31}

Binford's object categories may serve as a basic framework for understanding object systems within the Zen Center communities. However, due to the philosophical and ideological foundation of the communities, the majority of American Zen.


\textsuperscript{30}Binford, p. 23.

\textsuperscript{31}Binford, p. 24.
objects found within them are directly associated with ritual and/or worship. In order to accurately reflect and thus correctly analyze object groupings I have chosen to divide objects into utilitarian (or technomic) and symbolic (or ideotechnic) objects, and to discuss them first in terms of their utilitarian function and then in terms of their symbolic function.

Zen objects, both symbolic and utilitarian, play a crucial role in the daily life and practice of members of the Suzuki-roshi communities. They identify and

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32 In the Zen Center communities, ideotechnic, religious objects fulfill sociotechnic (social) as well as ideological functions. Religious structures and objects orchestrate the core experience of life. They symbolize and embody essential linkages to the past, to tradition, and in the case of American Zen communities, to a foreign cultural context. Community life is organized around the use of religious objects and buildings which order and reinforce social structure and relationships because they provide evidence of the foundation of this structure, that is evidence of the religious/philosophical system and of the explicit hierarchy of roshis, head priests, priests and novices. This hierarchy in turn forms the basis for the articulation of "individuals one with another into cohesive groups capable of efficiently maintaining themselves and of manipulating the technology". (Binford, definition of sociotechnic objects, p. 24)

The last part of this phrase is significant in light of a definition of technology given earlier in the essay. Binford defines technology as "those tools and social relationships which articulated the organism with the physical environment." (p. 22) Ideotechnic objects function as tools for articulating community members with their physical environment. These objects are an integral part of the practice of Zen through which one achieves consonance with the physical world.
categorize space, synchronize activity, facilitate and order ritual, regulate and systematize time, aid meditation, enforce community identity, and reify tradition. These objects, from pots and pans used by the tensho to the bells, drum, and clappers utilized in meditation practice, may be divided categorically by utilitarian, and by semeiotic or symbolic function. Nevertheless, categories are often ambiguous. Some objects serve multiple functions, and can be viewed in a variety of ways.

Within the category of utilitarian function, there are altar objects, meditation objects, objects of time, informational or educational objects, and domestic/work objects. When classified in terms of symbolic purpose, there are objects that ritualize time, objects that aid in ritualizing the mental state, objects that reinforce conformity and community identity, and objects of transitional space. The following discussion begins by describing the role of objects in the Zen Center communities by discussing the types of objects that are used, and listing them according to their utilitarian function.

33 The tensho is the head cook in a monastery.
Utilitarian Function of Objects

Altars and Altar Objects

The standard set of objects found within the zendo in each of the Zen Center communities includes altar objects, meditation objects, and instrumental objects.

An altar, placed against the wall or set in the middle of the meditation space, is present in the zendo in each of the Zen Center communities. The altars are small and unassuming, relative to the overall size of the zendo space. Their placement around the periphery or in the midst of the room signals their integral involvement with, rather than separation from and position above, the activity in the meditation space. The altars serve as the focus of attention during the morning and evening services, when teachers and students bow and chant before them, and a priest offers incense. The altars are made of hand-crafted wood and most were fashioned by community members. They are made of unfinished wood, treated in the Japanese manner.34 (figs. 7-9, p. 118-120)

The objects which are present upon the altars are used for ritual offerings. Altar objects consist of

34Altars may be made of any available wood which has been hand-planed rather than painted or stained.
incense in one or more forms (stick, powdered and chipped), incense holders and burners (lacquer, bronze, or ceramic), candles and/or kerosene lanterns, match containers, flowers (in bronze or ceramic vases), and a statue of Manjusuri, the bodhisattva of wisdom. These objects are arranged in calculated randomness. Each component has its place, but the goal is the appearance of non-arrangement. Thin wooden plaques about two inches wide and six inches high are also often found on Zen Center alters. These plaques sit on carved wooden stands and exhibit Chinese characters and/or English lettering. They bear the name of a teacher, student, lay member or community friend who has died.

**Meditation Objects**

The term "meditation objects" applies to a group of objects considered necessary for the practice of zazen, or sitting meditation. These objects are the **zafu** (a round black cloth sitting cushion approximately 7" high and 13" in diameter) and **zabutan** (a 30" by 35" by 1" square mat also made of black cloth, which is used under

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3 The calculated randomness apparent in the arrangement of altar objects is a reflection of the Japanese aesthetic of asymmetry, which may also be seen in flower arrangement and garden design, and which is derived from the desire to replicate the suddenness and ephemeral nature of nature.
the zafu) (fig. 10, p. 121) and the tan (a sitting bench made of tatami mats set into a wooden frame. The tan contains a built-in eating board, which consists of a planed wooden board set between the edge of the tatami and the frame and is used for taking oryoki meals. This section, known as the meal board, must not be touched by the buttocks or feet when climbing on and off the meditation cushion. (fig. 11, p. 122) Communities which have not yet been able to acquire tans, or which require additional sitting space, use tatami or thin straw mats placed directly on the floor around the perimeter or in the center of the room. (fig. 12, p. 123) The zafus and zabutans, because they can be inexpensively made or purchased and are essential to meditation practice, are ubiquitous to American Zen sitting groups or communities. Zafus and zabutans, together with a mokugyo and a set of bells (which will be discussed in the next section), a Buddha figure, and some straw matting, represent the minimum essential elements necessary to define or designate a zendo space.36

36A mokugyo is a fish-shaped wooden drum used to maintain rhythm and tempo during chanting.
Objects of Time

The objects of time within the zendo are the objects which are used to divide, measure, and differentiate time. They signal the beginning and ending of individual parts of the combined period of sitting meditation, walking meditation, and worship service, and provide and maintain rhythm during the chanting of the sutras. These objects consist of drums, bells, clappers and a clock. The clock, set to standard Pacific time, is the absolute arbiter of time. It is given to and watched by the individual charged with orchestration of the meditation periods and chanting service, and is not visible to other participants. Typically the clock is small, silent, and battery-operated, although sometimes a watch is used. The use and arbitration of the clock is interesting because it represents a compromise between absolute time and daily time. Absolute time is all time and no time, time without time; daily time is time defined by the orbit and rotation of the earth, and by the schedule of activities imposed upon the hours that make up each day. The zendo clock is the symbol of the encroachment of daily time on absolute time, the absolute time which is the province of meditation and thus of the zendo space. The bells and clappers which are the objects
of time are the communicators of the imposition of daily time on absolute time. They are transitional objects in the sense that they signal the transition from one activity to another.

The meditation bells are made of spun brass, and imported from Japan. Each has its own striker, and sits upon a round silk brocade cushion. They vary in size, but are consistent in that there are always two, and the smaller one is roughly half the size of the larger. These bells are struck to indicate the beginning and ending of periods of sitting meditation.

Wooden clappers announce the beginning and end of walking meditation. Rectangular with rounded edges and

37 Placement of the brass bells and wooden mokugyo (discussed in the next paragraph) on brocade cushions fulfills both symbolic and functional purposes. The instruments are elevated off the floor thus improving their tone and increasing their resonance, while at the same time their significance as mediators of the relationship between sacred and profane is visually attested.

38 It is necessary to have a pair of bells because of the role that the different sounds play both in relation to each other within the meditation practice and service. The bells are used to punctuate the ritual experience; they announce the beginning and end of periods of sitting meditation, bowing and chanting. There is no verbal communication between practitioners during the periods of meditation and service. Thus individuals must rely upon the prescribed system of sounds and signals to designate action and locate them within the experience.
about six inches long, they come in pairs. The mokugyo is a fish-shaped wooden drum which is struck at even intervals and used to maintain rhythm during chanting. It is painted in red, gold, white and several other colors, and sits on a round, brocade cushion, as do the bells. Like the bells, it varies in size, and is an integral and necessary part of meditation and chanting practice. (fig. 13, p. 124)

The meditation bells, clappers and mokugyo are the instrumental counterparts of the zafus, zabutans, and tans, in that they are always present in the Zen Center community zendos. There are several other instrumental and time-related objects, which, even though they are found outside the zendo, play an important role in the ordering of zendo activities. They are the han, and the community bell. The han, a hanging rectangular block of wood which is hit in its center with a wooden mallet, and the community bell, a cast bronze Japanese bell, (fig. 14, p. 125; see fig. 4, p. 115) are used to call community members to morning and evening zazen, evening lectures, meals, and afternoon service. As mentioned in Chapter two, The Zen Life, a complex series of signals has been developed to announce the type of activity that will occur and the amount of time until it will begin. This
pervasive auditory system is an important element in the designation of time and in the maintenance of community discipline. Neither community members nor visitors can innocently violate the timetable.

**Informational or Educational Objects**

The fourth type of utilitarian objects found in the Suzuki Roshi Zen communities is informational or educational objects. This group consists of books and bulletin boards, and is mentioned because of the very important role which the written word plays in communication and dissemination of information. Each community has a library, a bulletin board, and a bookstore. The libraries, which are for the use of community members, lay members, and guests, contain books on Buddhism, Zen, and Japanese art and culture, as well as offerings from outside the Buddhist world which are considered to be of interest (the Tassajara library, for example, has works of Western philosophy, books on horticulture and gardening, and novels). The bulletin boards, which are always placed directly beyond or outside the meditation space, provide a place to post notices concerning community and inter-community schedules and activities, and a way to communicate with the lay and guest communities who frequent the practice centers.
The importance of the written word as tool of education and communication within the Zen Center communities is highlighted by the educational system which is consciously employed. Classes on Zen practice, Buddhist history and teachings, the life of the Buddha, current issues in Buddhist study, Sanskrit, models and archetypes of Buddhist practice, and specific Buddhist texts are taught at Green Gulch, Page Street, Hartford Street and several other centers. Traditional Zen training includes demanding intellectual and scholarly attainment as well as proficiency in the art of tea ceremony and in calligraphy. While Zen Center students may not become accomplished at calligraphy, they are required to gain a thorough grounding in Buddhist history and doctrine and traditional Zen practice, and to become acquainted with influential Buddhist thinkers (Indian, Chinese and Japanese) and important texts, to study priestcraft, and to participate in at least one year of monastic training, prior to receiving ordination. The current training program for the San Francisco Zen Center, Green Gulch and Tassajara includes three years of residence and coursework and a fourth year of monastic
Domestic/Work Objects

The fifth and final type of utilitarian objects, is domestic/work objects. This group is made up of the pots and pans, plates, cups and glasses, chairs, futons, gardening tools, shoe racks, kitchen utensils, office equipment, oryoki bowls, and other practical objects with which the communities have outfitted themselves. Although seemingly insignificant, the group of objects which have been chosen, their proportional numbers and generic type, attest to the primacy of particular needs, priorities, and activities within the Zen communities. The existence of large numbers of kitchen utensils and gardening tools reveals the emphasis and value placed on food preparation and cultivation. The absence of radios and televisions, of stereos, newspapers, fashion magazines, knick-knacks, disposable goods and dispensable clutter, is indicative of a culture that does not esteem entertainment, amusements, and immediate sensory gratification in the way that is common in America today.

39 Zen Center operates a State accredited vocational school with a priest training program, called the Mountain Gate Study Center. Visiting professors from Stanford and the University of California, at Berkeley, as well as Zen Center priests, teach courses on the topics listed above. The Center has been in operation since 1973.
Symbolic Function of Objects

The objects utilized in the Zen Center communities may also be discussed in terms of their symbolic meaning or function. Objects play an important part in the meditation process; it is through the use of objects that both time and the mental state are ritualized, and space is re-ordered and sanctified. The alteration and transformation of the daily time/space orientation which is achieved through zazen is aided by objects that ritualize time, space and individual and collective consciousness, and that reinforce communality and community identity.

Objects That Ritualize Time

The delineation and organization of time by the objects of time provides a structure within which the ritualization of time may occur. The structure which is so created is critical to the transformation of the individual and collective mental state because it is within the context of this structure that the transformation is able to occur. The mind can relax within the acknowledged and increasingly unconscious framework created by the bells, clappers, han and drum
confident of and comfortable within the established sequence of events. This freeing of the mind within a time/space structure which releases it from concern over and responsibility for immediate decision making is the principle upon which the daily schedule of work, study, meals, and zazen operates within the Suzuki-roshi communities. Such release is essential because it allows for the expansion of the mind beyond the limits of the reality of immediate sensory perception.

Objects That Ritualize Space

The main objects of spatial transformation, re-ordering, and/or transition are the shoe racks and bulletin boards which are placed just outside the entrance to each of the Zen Center zendos. They mark the entrance into sacred meditational space, and the departure from largely undifferentiated worldly space. The ritual which demarcates this transition is the removal of shoes, and the placing of them on the rack together with the shoes of the community of all of those individuals who will participate in the meditation practice. In Japan shoes are never worn inside a temple or a traditional dwelling. They are part of the outside world, and are kept in a shoe rack in an entrance area that is outside or below the level of the house or temple. Taking off the shoes is
requisite for entrance into the house. The same is true of ingress into the Zen communities' meditation space, but the transition or transformation is more deeply symbolic.

In Zen Buddhist practice, every act is an element of or an opportunity for practice, and requires one's entire and perfect attention. The action of taking off shoes necessitates full awareness as a ritual. The communal nature of the shoe rack is also an important element of its symbolic essence. By removing one's shoes and placing them on a rack together with the shoes of the rest of the community members, one is in essence renouncing his or her individual identity which requires an individual place for an individual's things, and subordinating it to the larger collective identity, or to the Buddhist goal of no identity.

The community bulletin boards provide necessary information on the activities of the sacred realm thereby announcing entrance into and reinforcing the concept of the existence of that realm. They broadcast their messages directly, yet impersonally. They also speak individually as well as collectively. Bulletin boards are beacons, objects of communication from the worldly to the sacred realm. As such they help to bring individuals into
the sacred realm by offering suggestions of that realm. Both shoe racks and bulletin boards are integral to the ritualization of space because they mark the boundary between ordinary and meditative space, and provide a link between the two realms.

**Objects That Ritualize the Mental State**

As objects of transitional space, the bulletin boards and shoe racks initiate the ritualization of consciousness which occurs in the zendo during zazen. The objects within the zendo, the altar objects, pictures of Suzuki-roshi, scroll paintings, and objects of time aid in the continuation and deepening of this process. The combined sensory experience of the scents of fresh flowers and of burning incense,\(^{40}\) the sounds of bells and drums, and the soft, flickering light of candles and kerosene lanterns, elicits a bodily as well as a mental response,

\(^{40}\) Flowers are placed on altars and incense burned as an olfactory offering to the Buddha. Flowers and incense contribute both olfactory and visual elements to the ambience of the zendo. The flowers used are those, both domestic and wild, grown in community gardens. They are placed in simple vases and arranged with seeming non-arrangement so that they resemble a bunch of flowers growing together in a garden.

Flowers are placed throughout the Suzuki-roshi communities, on tables, desk tops, mantles and altars, and play an important role in overall community ambience as well as on the dissemination of the Buddhist spirit which is so carefully cultivated.
and furthers the process of mind-body integration.\footnote{As a non-dualistic tradition which seeks the complete integration of mind and body, the practice of Zen involves all of the senses.}

The ritualization of time, by the objects of time, may also be seen as a ritualization of the mental state. The sounding of the bell, which begins the period of zazen, signal the official entrance of the participants' minds and bodies into the meditative state. To the experienced practitioner this sound may thus be synonymous with or preface this state. The use of an instrument (because it is tonally consistent and always sounds the same) rather than a human voice to announce the beginning of zazen contributes to the ritualization of the mental state by minimizing the need for intellectual interpretation and cognition, and allowing an immediate and integrated response. The conclusion of each period of zazen, and the commencement of kinhin (walking meditation), is also announced by the sound of a bell.

The mokugyo, a fish-shaped wooden drum, is used to maintain a constant and even rhythm during chanting. It is extremely important to the ritualization of consciousness and continuation of the meditative state into and through chanting. Chanting of the sutras
follows, and is an extension of, sitting meditation. It is said that the quality of one's practice (of zazen) may be judged by the depth and character of one's chanting. 42 The steady, even beat of the mokugyo provides a framework for the chanting in much the same way that the bells and clappers structure the periods of sitting and walking meditation. Within this framework the mind is free to relax, to become absorbed, and finally to lose itself in the power and unity of the collective voices.

Small altars, whose semiotic function is to ritualize consciousness, also exist outside of the meditation space. They are placed at various points, inside and outside, within the communities, and act as reminders and stopping points amidst the flurry of activity that characterizes the non-meditative periods of the day. They are simplified versions of the zendo altars

42 Interview with Jakusho Kwong-roshi, abbot of Sonoma Mountain Center, 7/87; interview with Mel Weitsman, abbot of Berkeley Zen Center and co-abbot of San Francisco Zen Center, 8/22/87.

The goal of zazen is to empty one's mind and experience the unity of all living things. One method for accomplishing this which is taught in the Zen Center communities is to repeatedly silently count to ten. When you realize that you are no longer counting, then you know that your mind has wandered. The mental discipline which is attained through this exercise will carry over into the chanting and result in even, methodical chanting in which the chanter is one with the chant, one with her/his breath, one with the cosmos and thus one with her/his chanting.
and usually contain a small Buddha figure or a photograph of one, a vase of flowers, and an incense holder and burner. (figs. 15 and 16, p. 126, 127) Short and pithy verses are also often included. When community members come upon these altars they raise their hands, and placing them together, palms facing and fingers pointed upward, bow towards the altar in a gesture called gasho.

Objects That Reinforce Conformity and Community Identity

The achievement of the Buddhist goal of realization of the illusion of individual identity and individual consciousness is furthered by personal objects which enhance the creation of a single community identity and ideal. The orderly and unvarying appearance and placement of zafus and zabutans, the use of shoe racks, the wearing of identical Chinese robes, the eating of communal meals, and the use and possession of like sets of oryoki bowls, combine to reinforce conformity and a singular community identity. The simultaneous action—the fact that all community members are engaged in the same activity at the same time—which results from the daily schedule is another manifestation of the transcendence of the individual and emphasis on the collective, which is enhanced by all objects in the Zen Center communities.
CHAPTER THREE

ZEN STRUCTURES

Buildings are vital indexes to a community because they crystallize the channeled flow of day-to-day commerce. Buildings are the results and therefore the signs of what a community values and believes in.

Zen Center architecture is a particularized architecture with an identifiable set of aesthetic characteristics which come from a combination of American and Japanese forms, traditions and structural techniques. The architecture is symbolic of the communities themselves and of the amalgamated religious, philosophical, and cultural tradition which they represent. By looking carefully at the types and arrangement of buildings, materials, structural techniques, and stylistic characteristics of Zen Center architecture it is possible to gain insight into the workings of the culture within which they were both formulated and formed.

1Bernard L. Herman, "Multiple Meanings, Multiple Materials" in Winterthur Portfolio, vol. 19, no. 1, Spring 1984, p. 68.
Most of the buildings in the Zen Center communities are adapted rather than new structures. Urban buildings and developed rural properties have been purchased, and extant structures redesigned to meet community needs. Through the process of decorative and structural adaptation a group of visual characteristics which define the architecture of the Suzuki-roshi communities has been established. This distinctive body of architectural elements, created through the exercise of choice over a given group of material, structural, and decorative options, constitutes a unified visual vocabulary symbolic of the Zen Center communities' united purpose and joint parentage.

In this thesis the structures of Green Gulch Farm will be examined in order to provide a detailed assessment of the components and characteristics of the architecture of the Suzuki-roshi communities.

**Green Gulch Farm**

Located on fifteen acres of land on the Marin County coast about twenty miles north of San Francisco, Green Gulch Farm is devoted to Zen meditation and to ecologically-sound farming. The property on which Green Gulch lies was purchased in 1972, and the Green Dragon
Temple (Soryuji) was established. The name Green Gulch is derived from the site’s topography; the community is literally situated in a green gulch between foothills of northern California’s coastal range. (fig. 17, p. 128) Residential and spiritual buildings are located at the top of a narrow, rectangular piece of property which extends down to the beach and the sea. A flower garden and fields of organic potatoes, lettuce, and spinach, span the gap between human habitation and raw nature. The natural setting and predominantly outdoor life of Green Gulch Farm set it apart from the San Francisco Center and from everyday urban and suburban life. This setting, characterized by rolling hills (green in spring and winter, gold in fall and summer), wildflowers, and eucalyptus trees, softened by fog and the ever-present ocean breeze, defines the experience of Green Gulch Farm, through which the union of physical work and meditation is achieved.

Three types of structures predominate at Green Gulch Farm and in the Zen Center communities: traditional structures, residential structures, and commercial structures. Traditional structures are derived from
Chinese and Japanese temple complexes which included both religious and utilitarian buildings. Religious buildings are the *zendo* or meditation hall, the *Buddha* or ceremony hall, and the *dharma* or lecture hall; functional buildings include the dining hall, kitchen, bath, toilet, and temple gate, marking the entrance into and boundary of the community.

Residential buildings in the Zen Center communities include a wide range of sizes and types of spaces: single, detached units to house the roshis, cabins and trailers for married couples and families, and dormitory-style double and single rooms. Housing arrangements and types vary from community to community. As with other types of structures, they depend upon community size, location and the character and presence of buildings built prior to Zen Center's purchase of the property.

Commercial structures within the Suzuki-roshi communities consist mainly of guest facilities. Revenue derived from guest visitation provides a significant proportion of the Zen Center operating budgets. Buddhist

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monasteries have always had programs to accommodate guests, so the openness of the Suzuki-roshi communities to the public is consistent with the Buddhist tradition. These communities, however, consciously cultivate a clientele of both visitors and prospective Zen students.\(^3\)

As stated in a Green Gulch Farm guest program brochure:

Twenty-five minutes from the Golden Gate Bridge, you arrive at a place outside of time. A place where the noise stops and peace begins. Above you, the gentle slopes of Mt. Tamalpais. Before you, the rolling blue of the Pacific. Around you, a verdant coastal valley alive with birds and breezes.

This is Green Gulch Farm, a place both of work and reflection. Green Gulch is a Zen meditation center and temple. It is also a meeting and retreat center, a working organic farm, a flower and herb garden...

As our guest, you are welcome to join us in our activity as much or as little as you like. Our facilities are open to you... An atmosphere of caring, simplicity and clarity surrounds you.\(^4\)

The offices or libraries of the Zen Center communities serve as bookstores which sell a wide range of books, and often Buddhist practice accessories, to the visiting public as well to community and lay members, and

\(^3\) Specifically Green Gulch and Tassajara, which have extensive guest programs, and to a lesser extent the Sonoma Mountain and Page Street Centers. Tassajara has a summer guest season which runs from early May through early September, and Green Gulch has year-round conference and guest facilities.

\(^4\) Green Gulch Guest Program brochure.
thus also function as commercial structures. In neither case, however, are the structures or spaces used solely for commercial purposes; their primary function is to conduct community business (offices) or to facilitate spiritual education (bookstores and libraries).

Traditional structures at Green Gulch Farm consist of the zendo serving the tripartite functions of a ceremony, meditation and lecture hall; the kitchen; the dining hall; library or study room; and Japanese tea house serving as a residence for Suzuki-roshi's wife when she visits the community, and as a kaisando, or founder's hall, in her absence.

Residential buildings include an adapted barn called the guitan which contains the entrance to the zendo as well as single rooms for residents and guest students; an abbot's house; and a collection of trailers and assorted types of permanent dwellings. Among commercial buildings are the Lindisfarne Guest House, the Wheelwright

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5Green Gulch Farm, along with Tassajara, the San Francisco Center and the Sonoma Mountain Center, have programs for individuals interested in Zen practice to live and work in the communities as guest students for periods from a couple days up to several weeks or months. For longer stays one can apply for a term of residency. Programs vary, but all include daily meditation and work practice, help with cleaning and other community chores, communal meals, and participation in lectures and study.
Conference Center (both "Done in the Japanese style"\(^6\)) and the office/bookstore. In addition to these categorized buildings, there are also miscellaneous carpenters' shops and sheds, community office space, parking facilities, and a swimming pool. The descriptive discussion in this chapter will focus on the zendo or meditation hall as the heart of the community, and the center from which all conscious activity emanates.

The Zendo

The Green Gulch zendo is located in an L-shaped adapted barn adjacent and internally connected to a dormitory-style, residential structure called the guitan. The zendo occupies one wing, and they are joined by an interior wall through which a door has been cut to create an entrance from the guitan into the zendo. In addition to housing residents and guest students, the guitan serves as reception area and transition space between the exterior world and the world inside the meditation space.

\(^6\) Green Gulch Farm Guest Program brochure, 1987. The point to note is that the communities are actively advertising their "Japanese-style" buildings as a community asset. The Wheelwright Center and its complementary facility, the Lindisfarne Guest House (named for the Lindisfarne Foundation, a group dedicated to the perpetuation of traditional craft practices, by which it was partially subsidized) provide the community with a nearly continuous source of revenue from outside groups and beautiful facilities for community use.
The central, open interior of the guitan is divided into two parts by the placement of tatami mats in the area outside the entrance to the zendo. These mats, with their requisite ritual of shoe removal (shoes are not worn in houses or temples in Japan or in Zen Center residential or worship spaces), designate entrance into the meditation space.

The zendo is a flat-roofed structure with exterior walls made of corrugated iron. The interior is characterized by white walls and unfinished natural wood. The interior wall which divides the zendo and guitan is made of one foot wide vertical boards, placed side by side and painted white. The three exterior walls are of white plaster interspersed with four inch studs. The unpainted studs divide the walls into sections, simulating the division of Japanese mud, sand, and straw walls by the studs, posts and beams which support them. The studs combine with the central load-bearing posts to create a unified visual composition of dark vertical members set against white walls. (fig. 18, p. 129)

Tatami mats are the straw mats which constitute traditional Japanese floor covering. They are framed mats of specified dimensions and are used to define interior space. Rooms in houses are dimensioned and referred to by the number of tatami mats used to cover the floor.
The floor and ceiling of the zendo are made of natural wood, providing another level of balance, and visual integration in the zendo's interior. White or off-white walls, often accentuated with horizontal and vertical wooden members, (which make reference to traditional Japanese architecture and construction) are characteristic of Zen Center interiors, both communal and residential. Wooden floors and ceilings are also common, particularly in meditation halls; the presence of wooden floors is a feature of all seven Zen Center zendos.

Green Gulch Farm's Green Dragon Temple has four banks of windows, arranged in groups of three and four openings, at each corner on the long side of the zendo walls. The window groupings with three sections sit adjacent to the internal wall; those with four divisions are seated at the end of the structure opposite the internal wall. The windows are placed over seven feet above the zendo floor, with the rows at the far end located above the opposite doors.

The presence of elevated windows is another key characteristic of the Zen Center zendos. Because they permit the entrance of light and air, windows are essential to the meditation space. However if set too low they could become a distraction to meditation practice.
Windows are therefore always placed high on the walls, above the level of outside activity and traffic.®

Zendo Plans

When one sits zazen, one literally and figuratively faces the wall. That is to say one mentally faces the wall of nothingness, and one physically sits one to three feet away from, and looking towards, the wall of the room. The arrangement of furniture and objects within the meditation halls conforms to this physical and philosophical need to face the wall. Tans, or seating benches, are placed around the perimeter of the room. If additional sitting space is required, tatami mats are arranged in the center of the room, with screens placed amidst the rows to serve as walls. (fig. 19, p. 130) Formal meditation is conducted with the head in an upright position, chin slightly back, and eyes half-closed, focusing on a point on the wall. Students sit in lines upon their benches, mats and cushions. The Zen Center altars serve as a focus of ritual activity in the

® In the San Francisco Zen Center zendo painted plywood coverings have been hung over the bottom third of the windows of the former dance hall and theatre which has become the meditation hall, in order to prevent practitioners from viewing and being viewed from the street.
meditation halls. They are placed either in the center of the room, or against a wall, and practitioners gather around them during morning service, for prostrations (deep bows) and chanting.

The fabric of adapted structures such as the Green Gulch zendo consists of the modified framework of the original structure, and the details and finish added by the Zen Center carpentry crew. There are, however, also new buildings in the Suzuki-roshi communities which exhibit a fascinating blend of Western and Japanese architectural styles and construction techniques within a unified decorative mode. The theme of white walls interspersed with horizontal and vertical wooden structural members is carried out throughout the new and adapted structures at Green Gulch. (figs. 20-22, p. 131-133) Together with wooden floors, visual simplicity and a lack of applied decorative detail, this wall treatment constitutes the body of visual elements which defines the architecture of the Zen Center communities.

The Green Gulch carpentry crew is headed by Zen priest and Japanese master builder Paul Discoe. A trained

9Two such structures, the Wheelwright Conference Center and the Lindisfarne Guest House, are discussed below.
carpenter by trade, Discoe was sent to Japan to learn temple carpentry by Suzuki-roshi, who felt that the skills he would acquire were needed for future work at Zen Center. Discoe served a five-year term of apprenticeship in Japan during which he gained familiarity with temple forms as well as obtaining technical, structural, and design skills. A Japanese carpenter, or master builder, is an architect, an engineer, a carpenter, and a joiner. Carpentry has traditionally been the province of family-run guilds, based around separate systems of domestic, shrine and temple construction. Of the differences between these three traditions and of the situation regarding their practice in Japan today, Kiyosi Seike in his book *The Art of Japanese Joinery*, says:

In Japan today, carpenters still specialize in the construction of Shinto shrines, Buddhist temples, or residences; but we have yet to hear of a carpenter qualified in all three fields, and for good reason. The vastly different histories and design and engineering requirements of these varied structures resulted in...a seemingly endless proliferation of joints, with a combined total of several hundred distinctly different joints (one practicing carpenter of our acquaintance has put the number at somewhere around four hundred joints in common use today). Surprisingly few of these joints are used in all three types of construction, and some are reserved for only one type of construction.¹⁰

Thus Discoe’s apprenticeship in Japan taught him the specific components, joints, and structural techniques necessary to design and build Buddhist temples.

When asked about his occupation, Discoe answers: "My occupation is (that I am) a priest. The way I express it is through building."\(^1\) Since his return from Japan, Discoe has run the building and training program and has been involved in a number of building projects at Tassajara and Green Gulch. However, he has never viewed his construction work as anything other than an extension and an expression of his meditation practice. Discoe also served as assistant to the abbot for three years, led meditation services, and performed priestly functions. He does general maintenance work and organizes and participates in community development projects. He created long term master building plans for both Tassajara and Green Gulch, and accepts design commissions from Zen groups outside of Zen Center. He is currently designing a temple for the Minneapolis Zen Center.

In the range and diversity of projects undertaken, and the spirit with which they are carried through, Paul Discoe represents the actualization of the Zen ideal of

\(^{11}\) Interview with Paul Discoe, Green Gulch Farm, 6/21/87.
work as meditation practice. Discoe's life and work illustrates the fulfillment of the five basic philosophical premises of life within the Zen Center communities. His buildings are both products and symbols of his practice. They are physical embodiments of the hours of concentrated physical and mental effort which has gone into their construction and constitutes practice.

In terms of methodology and source material, Discoe uses copies of interior and exterior Japanese temple designs and plans, which describe structure—especially of the roof—and designate construction techniques. The material was drawn up by engineers through a Japanese government sponsored project which sought to document temples and the details of their structural systems, when they were rebuilt or restored. Discoe works from the plans and drawings provided in these books, adapting them to the needs, location, climate, available materials, work force, and financial resources.

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12 The doctrine of non-dualistic thinking, the primacy of the present moment, the illusion of the individual self, the notion of a circular rather than a linear life process, and the essential unity of all sentient beings. For a complete explanation see chapter 2, The Zen Life.
Discoe's ability to design and execute buildings and to combine Japanese joinery, aesthetics, and techniques with available Western materials, has resulted in the creation of structures that unite principles of Japanese architecture with specific American Zen Center community needs and values. The union of Eastern and Western forms and thought processes is exemplified at Green Gulch in both the Wheelwright Conference Center (fig. 22, p. 133) and the Lindisfarne Guest House (fig. 23, p. 134). Octagonal in shape, open in the center, and illuminated by skylights, the guest house replicates neither a temple nor a Japanese residential form. Discoe has used the technology of temple carpentry to create a semi-institutional domestic structure that exhibits the Japanese design features of sensitivity to and conscious use of natural materials, decorative detail achieved through structural articulation (rather than concealment), coordination of interior and exterior form and finish, a heavy shingled roof with overhanging eaves, use of the post and lintel system of construction, and the

Many Japanese joints and structural techniques are far too complex and time consuming to be executed by a trained American carpentry crew, let alone Discoe's group of untrained Zen students. Interview with Paul Discoe 6/21/87.
combination of a series of geometric rather than organic shapes.¹¹

The proliferation of hand-planed wood (used for horizontal and vertical structural members, doors, door and window framing, interior posts, balconies, interior and exterior railings, ceilings and all other functional and decorative detailing) is the most striking feature of this two-story, twenty-one room guest house. (figs. 24 and 25, p. 135, 136) The careful attention to detail required for the handplaning of wood and the fashioning of joints reflects a way of regarding and interacting with the physical world which has long been cultivated by the Japanese. These characteristics of Japanese craftsmanship have been adopted and perpetuated by Discoe in the creation of structures which embody an organic relationship with their surrounding environment as well as with the ideals and values that have spawned them. The purposeful omission of soundproofing in the guest house walls creates an environment in which occupants may participate fully in a communal living experience, as well as increase their awareness of the natural and human world

¹¹Discoe was assisted in the design of the Lindisfarne Guest House by Bay Area architect and University of California, at Berkeley, professor Sym van der Ryn.
which surrounds them. As stated on the Green Gulch Guest House sheet: "The rooms are not soundproof, so we ask you to remain mindful of the privacy of others." and on a note pinned to the bulletin board in the vestibule:

The building is intended to give us a deep sense of mindfulness of the physical world. How we place our shoes, how we walk, how we open and close doors are all part of the feeling of quiet built into the wood and workmanship.

In addition to the absence of soundproofing, sliding windows have been placed on an interior wall of each guest room. These unite the room with the central communal area and echo the spatial fluidity found in traditional Japanese architecture with its lack of fixed walls and use of portable screens for dividing space. The guest house is intended to accommodate conference participants, retreat visitors, and workshop attenders. The synthesis of familiar and unfamiliar individuals into a single, interdependent community creates a microcosm of real world life and spawns ways of thinking about relationships that serve as models for human interaction and behavior.

Analysis of Zen Center Structures

In a traditional monastery monks live and sleep, as well as meditate, in the meditation hall. The
establishment of separate residences, as well as of accommodations for single male and female students, for married couples, and for families in the Zen Center communities, marks a departure from traditional conceptions of monastic life and practice. This break with Buddhist tradition may be attributed to the contemporary American social climate, the composition of the group of people who first approached Suzuki-roshi, and the American ideal of individuality.

The segment of American society out of which the Suzuki-roshi communities grew was, at the time of the communities' formation, in the process of challenging traditional American religious, social, and political roles and values. These roles included those of women in the larger society and of men and women in relation to each other. Individuals concerned with male and female roles were calling for a redefinition of roles allowing for greater equality and sharing, rather than the traditional segregation and separation of situations and societal functions. Within this social climate the establishment of traditionally separate monastic communities would have seemed to reaffirm the values which
were being fought against.  

Because Suzuki-roshi's initial sitting group was made up of male and female students it seemed natural that the communities which grew out of it would accommodate both men and women. In contrast to Japanese Zen temples, whose adherents would be unmarried men or women, a tradition of diversity in terms of members' age, sex, and marital status grew up within the Suzuki-roshi communities. As the individuals and communities matured marriages took place and families were started.

The American desire for, and value placed upon individuality, identity, and separate space, would make it difficult for a group of Americans to commit themselves to a life without personal space.

Personal space consisting of dormitory size single rooms, and larger accommodations for married couples and families (35-40% of the Zen Center residents are married, and many have children), has been incorporated into the

\footnote{For a thorough discussion of the countercultural context--and of the goals, values and beliefs of its participants--out of which the Suzuki-roshi communities grew, see Theodore Roszak's \textit{The Making of the Counter Culture}. (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1969).}
six communities which include residential facilities.\textsuperscript{16} The establishment of communities and practice centers which address the spiritual needs of both men and women, and the provision of different types of housing, are important characteristics of American Buddhism which separate it from its Asian antecedents and indicate the beginning of a new tradition with its own guidelines and distinctions.

The appearance and character of structures in the Suzuki-roshi communities are affected by factors as diverse as economics, Japanese aesthetics, the community design process, the assistance of outside professionals, community needs and goals, residents' skills, community members' knowledge of and feelings about Japanese culture, the limitations imposed by extant structures, the physical environment and the American cultural environment.

Economic constraints have forced the Zen Center communities to purchase existing urban structures and groups of buildings on rural sites, and to utilize American materials in constructing buildings which employ Japanese structural and aesthetic techniques. They have also had to rely on the volunteer labor of unskilled

\textsuperscript{16}Kannon Do in Mountain View is the only non-residential center.
residents for much of the construction work that has been done. Thus the Tassajara kaisando which has a double Japanese roof and traditional mud walls made of rice straw and clay set against a wooden latticework frame, and has been built using a sixteenth century Muromachi Period design, is supported by a nailed rather than a joined roof structure and frame.¹⁷ (fig. 26, p. 137)

Zen aesthetics—ideals of austerity, simplicity, and understatement, as well as the orchestration of textures through the combination of contrasting natural materials and the integration of interior and exterior space—affect the interior and exterior appearance of both new and adapted structures. Zen interiors, characterized by wooden floors, plain board or white walls articulated with unfinished wooden members, and a lack of ornamentation, conform to Zen ideals of simplicity and clarity and aid in focusing the mind.

The community design process involves the input of key community figures, such as the abbot or roshi, and the Japanese master builder Paul Discoe, and the assistance of outside architects who act as consultants and facilitate the translation of community ideas and ideals into

¹⁷ Muromachi Period: 1336-1600 A.D.
concrete form. The actual set of plans, as well as the octagonal conception for the Green Gulch guest house, for example, came from Sausalito architect and University of California, Berkeley, professor Sym van der Ryn. Van der Ryn also designed Green Gulch’s Spring Valley or abbot’s house and the Wheelwright Conference Center.

Two other Bay Area architects (Chuck Davis of Esherick, Homsey, Dodge and Davis, and Peter Calthorpe of Calthorpe Associates) have recently been working with Discoe and the Zen Center planning committee on master plans for Tassajara and Green Gulch. When asked about the reason for introducing outside architects into the design process, Zen Center vice president Robert Lytle said:

Due to the size of Zen Center, he (Paul Discoe) doesn’t have time to do everything. Paul is a master carpenter, but he has basically been trained in Japanese forms. This is not Japan, it’s America. Chuck (Davis) helps translate Paul’s ideas into concrete forms.18

Thus, the community design process, which includes the integration of ideas, values and suggestions of professional architects, with the input of individual community members in regards to their needs and preferences, and Paul Discoe’s expertise on Japanese design and form, is crucial in determining the nature,

18 Interview with Robert Lytle, 1/29/88.
As discussed in chapter one, "The Zen Environment," the relationship between the Zen Center communities and the surrounding natural or urban environment has been deeply affected by the Buddhist belief in the sacredness of all life and of all beings. Buddhism is an ecologically focused religion, and deep respect is accorded to all elements of the physical world. Buildings made of natural materials are meant to embody and perpetuate qualities of the physical world, and, through the use of sliding doors and windows, to provide an encapsulation rather than a separation of interior and exterior space. As places for activity amidst, rather than apart from the physical world, Zen Center structures perpetuate the Japanese conception of the meaning and purpose of architecture and the relationship between building and human being. The notions of care, precision, and attention are conceptual elements of Zen Center architecture, as is evident from a note tacked to the bulletin board of the Green Gulch guest house and quoted on page 96.

The American cultural environment, which until very recently has had no place for Buddhism, has played an
important role in determining the form and shape of American Zen. The lack of a supportive cultural structure for Buddhism and of a Buddhist tradition has meant that there are no absolutes for determining building form, style, arrangement or structure. Because the Zen teachers who first came to this country were from Japan, the spaces that they adapted and the traditions that they followed tended to look Japanese. But, due to the lack of objects and material, finances, and large numbers of followers, they were forced to content themselves with whatever spaces, accouterments and practitioners could be had. Thus American Zen has been, and continues to be both diverse and eclectic in its material and structural manifestations.

The Suzuki-roshi communities represent a new and an evolving cultural tradition created out of the interaction between a Japanese philosophical, religious and cultural tradition and American society. The nature and content, form and meaning of this culture may best be understood by looking at its architecture, its objects and at the environment which it has created and selected to express its basic nature and value system.
The objects, architecture and shaping of the landscape utilized and wrought by the members of the Zen Center communities reveal a culture of mixed origins and impulses which has successfully constructed an identity and created a place for itself within the larger American cultural environment. It has done this by adopting the forms, objects, and practices which it has deemed necessary to the essence of Japanese Soto Zen. This then is the key to the material culture of the Zen Center communities: it replicates that which is perceived as essential to Japanese Soto Zen.\(^{19}\)

Within the America cultural landscape, which had no previously assigned place for or methodology for understanding Buddhism, Zen Center adherents were forced to select the elements that they would utilize to define and structure their lives and to construct their tradition. The on-going creation of a distinct cultural identity through the mediation of cultural contexts in the attempt to distill the essence of Zen, reveals a dynamic

\(^{19}\)It is ironic that a group which began as part of the counter culture of the late 1950's and early 1960's should achieve popularity, cachet and economic success within the dominant culture of the 1980's (see footnote 4, page 4). It is their economic achievement and cultural viability that has allowed the Zen Center communities to practice and to develop in the way that they desire without making substantial concessions to the dominant culture.
culture actively engaged with itself and with the world around it.

Self-consciousness and dynamism are essential characteristics of the Suzuki-roshi communities. Community members are cognizant of their creation of a new culture and of new cultural forms. They believe that what they are doing must be their own. They are American and not Japanese; thus their forms and practice must be American. A concerted and on-going effort is being made to analyze Zen tradition in order to separate that which is Japanese from that which is essential to Zen. Tied to this analysis and scrutiny is a very clear sense of mission: the Zen Center communities perceive themselves as occupying a central place in the perpetuation of the Buddhist tradition, in its transmission to America and to the Western world, and in the shaping of American and Western Buddhist culture.

The Zen Center communities have been analyzed in order to determine and to understand their essence—what they are and how they function—and their meaning. The meaning of these communities is multilayered: there are internal, external, religious, philosophical, structural, racial, intellectual, cultural, social, environmental, and economic meanings and components. Another layer or level
of meaning is that of significance; in what ways are these communities significant? for whom? why? This study has not sought to answer all these questions, but rather has put these communities forward as a case study of an alternative subculture in the social, physical, philosophical, structural and intellectual development of American culture.

Historically, American reactions to Oriental cultures have taken three primary forms: material, intellectual and racial. Asian peoples and their cultural perspectives have tended not to be as acceptable as Asian objects and design ideas.20 The adoption of an Eastern philosophical, religious and cultural tradition as a model for daily life and thought is therefore a radical departure from the traditional objectification, fascination, curiosity, and/or cultural borrowing. The success of the Zen Center communities is significant

because it is indicative of an unprecedented openness to what had previously been perceived as "foreign" (and therefore alien and suspect) cultures and cultural traditions and of a willingness as well as an ability to move outside the Western Christian perspective and to consider non-Western sources for potential life paradigms.
Figure 1. Plan of Green Gulch Farm, January 1988. (Courtesy of Chuck Davis of Esherick, Homsey, Dodge and Davis.)
Figure 2. Proposed master plan for Green Gulch Farm, January 1988. (Courtesy of Chuck Davis of Esherick, Homsey, Dodge and Davis.)
Figure 3. Proposed master plan for Green Gulch Farm, 1987. (Courtesy of Peter Calthrope of Calthorpe Associates.)
Figure 4. Han, community bell, and drum (left to right). San Francisco/Page Street Zen Center.
Figure 5. Oryoki bowls, wrapped. Sonoma Mountain Center.
Figure 6. Orokyi bowls and utensils; unwrapped, laid out and ready to receive food. Sonoma Mountain Center.
Figure 7. Bell; zafu and zabutan; mokugyo; bronze bells, cushions and strikers; altar and altar objects. Sonoma Mountain Center.
Figure 8. Altar and altar objects. San Francisco/Page Street Zen Center.
Figure 9. Altar and altar objects. San Francisco/Hartford Street Zen Center.
Figure 10. Zafu and zabutan. Saturday Morning Store catalogue, Sonoma Mountain Center, 1986.
Figure 11. Zendo seating arrangement with tans. Tassajara Mountain Monastery. (Courtesy of Dan Howe.)
Figure 12. Zendo seating arrangement without tans. San Francisco/Hartford Street Zen Center.
Figure 13. Hanging bell and striker; zafu and zabutan; mokugyo (on cushion on floor); pair of bronze bells, cushions, and strikers. Sonoma Mountain Center.
Figure 14. Community bell and han. Sonoma Mountain Center.
Figure 15. Small altar. San Francisco/Page Street Zen Center.
Figure 16. Small altar. Tassajara Mountain Monastery.
(Courtesy of Dan Howe.)
Figure 17. Green gulch valley. Green Gulch Farm.
Figure 18. Zendo interior. Green Gulch Farm.
Figure 19. Zendo interior. San Francisco/Page Street Zen Center.
Figure 20. Staff residences. Green Gulch Farm.
Figure 21. Library/study room end wall. Green Gulch Farm.
Figure 22. Wheelwright Conference Center. Green Gulch Farm.
Figure 23. Lindisfarne Guest House. Green Gulch Farm.
Figure 24. Interior, Lindisfarne Guest House. Green Gulch Farm.
Figure 25. Interior, Lindisfarne Guest House. Green Gulch Farm.
Figure 26. Kaisando. Tassajara Mountain Monastery. (Courtesy of Dan Howe.)
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