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# Wild Otherness Within: A Jungian and Zen Approach to the Untamed Self in the *Ten Oxherding Pictures*

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The Ten Oxherding Pictures are an ancient allegory for the process of enlightenment. This article analyzes the series of ten paintings through the lenses of Jungian psychology and alterity studies to suggest an unorthodox interpretation of the images. This interpretation highlights the relationship between the oxherd and the ox, suggesting that the ox is a wild other that seeks intersubjective understanding. In questioning the meaning of domestication in these images, this investigation deconstructs the traditional allegory of enlightenment as a process of domestication, suggesting that these images instead point towards the importance of releasing the appropriative attitude. Ultimately, the oxherd in the series must surrender his perceptual lens to make space for what seems untamed and unencompassable to speak to and through him.

**Keywords:** *nonhuman alterity, nonhuman others, Ten Oxherding Pictures, Zen Buddhism, Jungian psychology*

*What all three have in common – soul, spirit, and nature – is their wild Otherness, the fact that they are indisputably beyond what we can create or control or claim as possession.*

—Bill Plotkin, *Soulcraft* (2003, p. 26)

It is common practice for meditation teachers to employ the metaphor of “training the puppy” to teach students how to bring the meandering mind back to an object of focus. A teacher might explain that, like an untrained puppy, the mind easily wanders. Meditation students should be gentle yet firm, consistently bringing the mind back to where it is supposed to be, as they would an untamed puppy. Like the metaphor of training the puppy, *The Ten Oxherding Pictures*, an ancient pictorial allegory for the enlightenment journey, depict the domestication of an untamed animal as an instructional guide. However, close inquiry into the oxherding series reveals that the metaphor of domestication is not as straightforward as it may initially appear. The following investigation problematizes this process and suggests a different understanding of the journey towards self-realization.

In so doing, this article brings the *Ten Zen Oxherding Pictures* of Zen Buddhism into conver-

sation with the Jungian concept of individuation to dismantle and reverse the metaphor of domestication and to explore the role of the wild Other in the process of self-realization. I borrow the term “wild Other” from Plotkin’s (2003) opening quotation, using this term to describe a type of Other perceived to be unknowable, unattainable, and unassimilable by the human mind, an Otherness often attributed to the nonhuman world and to the numinous. This wild Other is also present in the unseen relationship between the conscious ego and the wild contents of the shadow and the Self, intrapsychic relationships that are mirrored in humanity’s relationship with the nonhuman world. Throughout this inquiry, I will suggest that self-realization (or enlightenment) involves a refinement and reorientation of the conscious ego’s relationship with wild Otherness. As the paper concludes, I will propose that both Zen realization and Jungian individuation involve posthuman reorientations of the ego towards what it

perceives to be beyond understanding, assimilation, or instrumentalization.

This investigation takes advantage of inherent tensions and ambiguities within the *Ten Oxherding Pictures* and corresponding commentaries to propose unorthodox interpretations that intend to remain true to the spirit of Zen. These interpretations slide into gaps in meaning while entering into dialogue and reverie with the images. As such, I hold the oxherding images in a similar regard as Freud (1995) did dream images: as overdetermined, meaning that multiple interpretations can be simultaneously true. It is important to note that this article is not the first to explore the oxherding series in dialogue with Jungian individuation. A number of theorists have compared the *Ten Oxherding Pictures* to the individuation process (Kawai, 1996; Kosugi, 2022; Spiegelman & Miyuki, 1987; Stein, 2019), some noting parallels between the ten paintings and the ten images in the *Rosarium Philosophorum* (Kawai, 1996, Spiegelman, 1987). In general, the outcome of these explorations was to indicate the ways in which the process of awakening depicted in the *Oxherding* series was roughly parallel to the process of individuation (with the exception of Kosugi, 2022).

Based on this foundational research, I take as a starting point the assumption that the individuation process and the oxherding images are in many ways parallel. However, this article diverges from previous inquiries in its close examination of the relationship between the oxherd and the ox. This analysis also engages the oxherd's process of finding, capturing, taming, and ultimately releasing a wild animal as an allegory for self-realization. Critically, I will question how the complex interrelationship between wildness and domestication, so central to the oxherding images, sheds new light on parallel processes of enlightenment and individuation, and consequently humanity's relationship with nonhuman nature.

While the project of domesticating a wild Other in the *Ten Oxherding Pictures* has not itself been closely examined, Maraldo (2022) re-envisioned the series as a commentary on alterity. He imagines that champions of alterity may criticize the oxherding images because they depict erasure

of the Other in pursuit of non-dual realization. He counters this anticipated criticism by drawing upon Ueda's (1982a) interpretation of the images, that "to allow another to be fully other, to be himself or herself, one becomes selfless" (p. 190). In other words, achievement of Satori is not an obliteration of self and Other, but an emptying of the self so that it finally has space to allow Others to be themselves without assimilating them.

This paper concurs with Maraldo's (2022) and Ueda's (1982a) opinions that the oxherding images preserve self and Other and affirm alterity, but differs in that it foregrounds the alterity of the non-human self. In emphasizing nonhuman subjectivity, I bring attention to what I argue is a misperception that there exists an unknowable, silent abyss between human and nonhuman being, unbridgeable because each is enclosed in separate sensory object worlds of experience (Heidegger, 1967; Nagel, 1974). In his articulation of the shadow as *lumen naturae*, Jung also suggests that nature possesses a form of perception that is destined to remain mysterious. The *lumen naturae*, an alchemical concept, was among Jung's (1967) understandings of the shadow archetype. Jung (1967) noted that shadow possessed its own light, the light of nature, in contrast to the unitary light of consciousness:

In the very darkness of nature a light is hidden, a little spark without which the darkness would not be darkness. ... The *lumen naturae* is the light of the darkness itself, which illuminates its own darkness, and this light the darkness comprehends. (para. 197)

Jung goes on to suggest that this light emanates from and illuminates the thing-in-itself, the unconscious of things, a perspective foreclosed to human understanding.

The allegedly unknowable wild Other does not only abide in the mystery of the nonhuman world. According to analytical and psychoanalytic theory, wild alterity is built into the structure of the human psyche. In this context, the wild other *within* is an intrapsychic alterity that behaves autonomously and cannot be encompassed by discourse. It refers to portions of the personality that the ego experiences as strange or alien. This self goes by

many names, including the shadow, the Self, “O,” and the Lacanian Real, a mode of sensual being that slips through where language fails. As the shadow, it is “the animal sphere of instinct” directed toward the inside of things, an alternate center of awareness without which humans lack three-dimensional aliveness (Jung, 1946/1966a, para. 452). The Jungian concept of the Self is imbued with wild Otherness, in that it possesses a view of the whole psyche (and perhaps, the whole of creation), that the conscious ego can never share (Edinger, 1972, p. 90), and can only glimpse in encounters with the numinous Self. Jung (2020) explains that

The world of consciousness is inevitably a world full of restrictions, of walls blocking the way. It is of necessity always one-sided. All else must lie in shadow, withdrawn from sight...What would happen if an individual consciousness were to succeed in embracing at one glance a simultaneous picture of all that it could imagine is beyond conception...if we add to those the unconscious contents...then try to imagine a complete spectacle, why, this is beyond the most audacious fantasy...The unconscious is an unglimpseable completeness of all subliminal psychic factors. (p. 22)

The *Ten Oxherding Pictures* of Zen Buddhism offer a path towards fully realizing what Jung suggests, above, is audacious and unthinkable. In the oxherding series, we see that the chasm between conscious ego and wild Otherness is Maya, or illusion, borne of alienation from both the internal and external world. Masao (1985) notes that “the Zen student not only digs out the root of the [collective unconscious] but also becomes one with it. For the Zen student the [collective unconscious] is not something ‘over there’” (p. 66). In the oxherding series, the illusion of separation dissolves as the human subject reorients itself towards wild Otherness, moving from trying to assimilate and instrumentalize its mystery to being carried and filled with it, ultimately recognizing this mystery as the ground of its very being. This realization involves embracing a plural, posthuman identity, a position realized in the final image, *Entering the City with Bliss-Bestowing Hands*.

## The Ox of No-Mind

*The Ten Oxherding Pictures* take a number of forms, but this inquiry will draw upon the set of images created by the monk Kakuan Shion Zenji, a Buddhist priest said to have lived in China in the 12<sup>th</sup> century CE (Mumon, 2004). However, the version of the paintings that appear in this article are attributed to Tenshō Shūbun, a Zen priest from the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Kakuan created the original images and wrote accompanying verses, while his student, Jion Osho, added a short preface to each verse (Mumon, 2004). The oxherding images expanded upon a Taoist story of the ox and the oxherd, using the training of a wild ox as an instructive metaphor for the realization of Buddha-nature. According to Mumon (2004), in Chinese Zen, the ox represents the heart-mind, a way of understanding Buddha-nature, or true self, the realization of which is the object of the enlightenment journey. Consequently, the oxherd represents the one who seeks true self, or enlightenment. From a Jungian perspective, the ox may symbolize the Self, or the teleological totality of a person’s being, a transpersonal power beyond control of the ego that Jung (1966) called the “God within” (para. 399). Through this lens, the oxherd represents the conscious ego embarking on the individuation journey, the aim of which is the realization of the Self and the psyche’s inherent wholeness.

Daisetz Suzuki noted that the ox comes from *niu* in Chinese, or *ushi* in Japanese, which refers to an ox, cow, or bull, without specific gender (Jaffe, 2015). The ox is a sacred or totem animal in countless cultures, representing both benevolent and fearsome deities. While it is not unusual for an (untamed) animal to stand in for the sacred in religious imagery (Spiegelman & Miyuki, 1985) it is worth drawing attention to this choice. Spiritual or mystical qualities have been attributed to animals since ancient times, when animals were painted on the walls of caves, and Egyptian gods and goddesses possessed animal heads and human bodies (Lawrence, 1997). Even Jesus is represented as a lamb. Like the Self, animals are thought to possess an orientation that we cannot fully inhabit, yet, as Derrida (2008) reports, can “look upon us with the eyes of a visionary, a seer, an extra-lucid blind



person" (p. 4). Instincts – one hallmark of the wild self, and cousin of intuition – the spontaneous, pre-cognitive movement of nature, may be numinous, the same impulse that drives the Self to want to know itself.

Otto Rank (2021) noted that in the 38<sup>th</sup> chapter of the biblical book of Job, God emphasized animals' *mysterium* in order to prove his own transcendence. In this chapter, God presented nonhuman nature as overwhelming evidence of the numinous. In lecturing Job, God pointed to animals' "sheer absolute wondrousness that transcends thought, on the *mysterium*, presented in its pure, non-rational form" (Rank, 2021, p. 81). Nonhuman animals are full of what Rank calls "strangeness and marvel, in whom the wonderousness of its creator becomes apparent," and, according to God, are moved by "inexplicable instincts" (p. 81), pointing to their incomprehensibility. In the Book of Job, God also implied that nature possesses perceptive capacities that surpass those of humans when he speaks of the "knowledge of dayspring, winds, and clouds" (p. 81). Throughout his sermon, God emphasized the wholly incomprehensible character of the eternal creative power, "incalculable and 'wholly other' – it mocks at all conceiving yet can stir the mind to its depths, fascinate and overbrim the heart" (p. 82). Thus, the numinous, as the wild Other, is "incommensurable with thoughts of rational human teleology and is not assimilated to them" (p. 83).

God's sermon on nature produced, in Job, a feeling of awe and tremendum (trembling) (Rank, 2021, p. 83). One might imagine that the children in C. S. Lewis's (2017) *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* felt something similar:

"Aslan is a lion--the Lion, the great Lion."  
"Ooh" said Susan. "I'd thought he was a man. Is he-quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion"...  
"Safe?" said Mr Beaver ...  
"Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good." (p. 97)

In this passage, Susan expresses what Rank calls tremendum (trembling) (p. 83), at the thought of meeting the numinous in the form of a wild animal. Mr. Beaver confirms that this tremendum is appropriate in affirming that Aslan is not safe. In

another quote, Aslan is described as untamed: "He is not a tame lion," said Tirian. "How should we know what he would do[?]" (Lewis, 2017, p. 109). In this quotation, it becomes evident that Aslan is not safe because he cannot be tamed, controlled, or predicted. However, he is "good," and thus worth encountering. Just as the children come to love Aslan in his wild state, this paper will argue that the Zen oxherd, depicted as a man in the oxherding series, slowly learns that what is "good" is connected to what is "untamed." The journey to this understanding begins with the oxherd's inexplicable yearning to search for a numinous wild Other without knowing what will come from the encounter.

### Picture One: Searching for the Ox



Fig. 1. "Searching for the Ox." From *Ten Bulls*, by Tenshō Shūbun (1414–1463). (see reference list for image source and license link)

In the first image, *Searching for the Ox* (see Figure 1), the oxherd's irrepressible yearning calls him into the wilderness, where he searches for his lost ox. From a Jungian perspective, the wilderness journey represents a state of alienation, a state that often initiates the individuation process (Edinger, 1972), or the search for wholeness. The oxherd, depicted as a man, has fallen from primordial oneness with the Self (unconscious identification with the Self characteristic of infancy and early childhood), and

finds himself exiled and lost in the wilderness of ego and conditioned mind (Edinger, 1972, p. 25). In this image, the oxherd experiences what Edinger (1972) called "a tremendous nostalgia for the original unconscious state" (p. 25). As the oxherd becomes conscious that he has been severed from something vital, he searches in the wilderness of the mind and heart for the unknown lost object, whose presence he infers through his yearning. Agambon (2004) associated the progression from unconscious identification with the world to alienation with the human condition, stating that

A human being is simply an animal that has learned to become bored; it has awakened *from* its own captivation to its own captivation. This awakening of the living being to its own being-captivated, this anxious and resolute opening to a not-open, is the human. (p. 70)

In becoming aware of his not-open, alienated state, the oxherd experiences an essential crisis that ignites him to embark upon the wilderness journey in search of wholeness. Mumon (2004) stated that "everyone has to experience this crisis of being pushed to the extreme. If you do not, you will not amount to anything" (p. 26). Kakuan went on to explain that, "The beast is lost, for the oxherd himself has been led out of the way," giving a hint about what must be recovered: the oxherd must come to terms with the "beastly"—the wild, posthuman knowing that abides within his own heart—to find his way home to the undivided self. Through his longing for the ox, the oxherd senses that "perhaps even the most luminous sphere of our relations with the divine depends, in some way, on that darker one which separates us from the animal" (Agambon, 2004, p. 16).

However, the preface to this image counters that, "Till now, the ox has never been lost. Why then do you need to search for it?" (Mumon, 2004, p. 20). What was thought to be lost is always already present, the very ground of being. Each image of the series is surrounded by a circle, a mandala-like symbol for the Self (Kawai, 1996; Spiegelman & Miyuki, 1985). The oxherd is held and subsumed within the circle of the Self, so all-encompassing that it is invisible. Indeed, the oxherd's seeking is

spurred by a sense of deep intimacy with what was lost. He is haunted by what Bollas (1987) might call "an unthought known," a wild calling that feels "profoundly familiar to the unconscious—though unknown, surprising, and even frightening to the conscious personality" (Campbell, 2004). Edinger (1972) noted that, "In the early stages of psychological development, God is hidden—in the cleverest place of all—in identification with oneself" (p. 102). Although the oxherd is always already the wild Other that he seeks, the stage of alienation depicted in Picture One is necessary for his eventual conscious reunion and relationship with the untamed Self.

### Picture Two: Seeing the Traces



Fig. 2. "Seeing the Traces." From *Ten Bulls*, by Tenshō Shūbun (1414–1463). (see reference list for image source and license link)

Mumon (2004) taught that the stage depicted in Picture Two was one of understanding true heart-mind indirectly through the sutras, absent a direct experience of Buddha-nature. However, the verse attests to a budding capacity to understand the language of the wild Other, as it continues, "The whispering pines teach the salvation of sentient beings... . And a mysterious bird toys with the truth" (p. 33). Like the bird, the man's wild soul begins to consider revealing itself.



In the wilderness journey, which began in Picture One and marked entry into the individuation process, Picture Two depicts the stage where the Self gives a sign. Edinger (1972) observed that “the experience of the supporting aspect of the archetypal psyche is most likely to occur when the ego has exhausted its own resources and is aware of its essential impotence by itself” (p. 50). The discriminating mind has tried, in every way, to apply its customary ways of knowing to this search. But the ox, like the Self as wild Other, is conceptually unattainable. Otto Rank (2021) notes that “The holy is set apart from the rational...in the sense that it completely eludes apprehension in terms of concepts” (p. 5). The ox cannot be discovered on the well-worn paths of the sutras, with the narrowed eyes and furrowed brows of conceptual understanding. The dividing gaze only pushes it further afield. In this image, the ego is beginning to exhaust its usual ways of seeing; lacking the energy to assimilate what it encounters, it suddenly becomes more receptive to listening. The Self responds by giving a sign. Suddenly, the oxherd can better hear the teachings of the whispering pines and the mysterious bird. Ueda (1995) confirmed that

Language opens a world as a cognitive horizon, but it also determines and limits that world...The power of language may allow us to approach reality, but it can also keel over to alienate us from it. Indeed, the linguistically constituted world is, to begin with, mostly a net or a cage into which we are locked. (pp. 1–2).

This cage that Ueda (1995) described above is also one of separation, alienating us from others and from the original wild language shared with all of nature. While at this stage, the oxherd is still peering out from within the linguistic cage, apprehending the ox only through tracks and signs, the walls of the cage are beginning to crack, and what seemed to be wholly Other becomes almost-decipherable. Whereas, in the verse for the first image, “evening cicadas shrill in the maples” (Mumon, 2004, p. 25), in this second image, the “shrill” cacophony gives way to a “mysterious bird [who] toys with the truth” (p. 33). The oxherd has been emptied enough for the wild Other to reach

him, in contrast with when the wild Other was shrill and incomprehensible—all the oxherd could hear was his own delusion. Each step towards the unknown ox, whose shape he is beginning to infer, takes him one step closer to the untamed other within the Self with whom he longs to reunite.

### Picture Three: Glimpsing the Ox



**Fig. 3.** “Glimpsing the Ox.” From *Ten Bulls*, by Tenshō Shūbun (1414–1463). (see reference list for image source and license link)

In Picture Three, Glimpsing the Ox (see Figure 3), the oxherd briefly catches a direct view of the ox. In doing so he encounters something “unspeakable, incomprehensible and yet clear and powerful...an unspeakable presence that deprives us of language,” what Ueda (1995) called “the first primordial sound of the unspeakable” (p. 4). At this stage in the oxherding series, the enclosed membrane of the discriminating ego is pierced by the appearance of the wild Other in the form of the ox. This appearance interrupts the “enclosed world of I-am-myself” (Ueda, 1995, p. 4) and opens the oxherd to direct, non-conceptual contact with what felt wildly unmeetable from the perspective of divided consciousness.

Mumon (2004) explained that Picture Three refers to the attainment of Kensho, a direct glimpse into the nature of the Self. But why is the

ox face-less? Why does only the back half of the ox appear, the oxherd appearing to gaze upon its behind? Mumon (2004) instructed that the ox's face is absent because it "cannot be reduced" by the conceptual exercises of drawing and symbolizing (p. 41). However, Spiegelman and Miyuki (1985) offered a different explanation: that meeting the ox's hindquarters suggests a visceral encounter with the shadow, the first doorway into the unconscious that must be traversed during the individuation process. Indeed, Jung (1966b) often correlated the bodily dimension of the shadow with the animal realm, asserting that "the assimilation of the shadow gives a man body, so to speak; the animal sphere of instinct" (para. 452) and that the body, as shadow, is a "beast's body with a beast's soul" (para. 35). Spiegelman and Miyuki (1985) noted the importance of this stage, musing that "we all partake in materiality and unknowingness...No body, no true spirit; no shadow, no true light..." (p. 59). It seems that the shadow half of the ox appears, here, to assert the importance of confronting the immanent half of the unfathomable, the shadow face of the Self.

While I concur with Spiegelman and Miyuki's (1985) interpretation of Picture Three, I wish to propose an additional layer of meaning: The appearance of a faceless fragment of the ox may suggest that the oxherd is still engaged in a dividing attitude. In Picture Three the ox is not a wild Other with its own subjectivity, as it would be if it had a face, but is instead an object for the oxherd to gaze upon while it cannot gaze back. According to Levinas (1979), it is an encounter with the face of the Other that reveals the irreducible infinity of this Other, and implies a moral obligation to avoid reduction or objectification. Without a face, the ox is reduced to parts. The oxherd has glimpsed the ox, but in gazing at its derrière may have quickly reduced it, assimilating it into preconceived understandings.

This image is reminiscent of the Western, secularized attitude towards cows. Absent in Westernized culture is the holding of cows as sacred others, permitted, in their wild immanence, to meander freely through streets (Mumon, 2004). In the Westernized, alienated model of consciousness,

the cow is an instrumental object to be divided and appropriated. This objectifying attitude is visible in comparing the type of gaze that is invited in Figure 4, where the cow's body is portrayed as a division of parts to be consumed, with the image in Picture Three of the oxherd gazing upon the part of the ox that cannot gaze back (see Figure 3).

Similarly, when the conscious ego glimpses the spark of the wild Other within, as Buddha-nature or Self, an intrapsychic wild alterity that eludes the ego's understanding, the dividing mind rushes to conceptualize, segment, and dissect it. In my personal meditation practice, when I encounter a wild arising of Buddha-nature, my mind instinctively steps forward and attempts to classify the experience: "Oh, here it is. How wonderful." As soon as the mind latches on in such a way, the

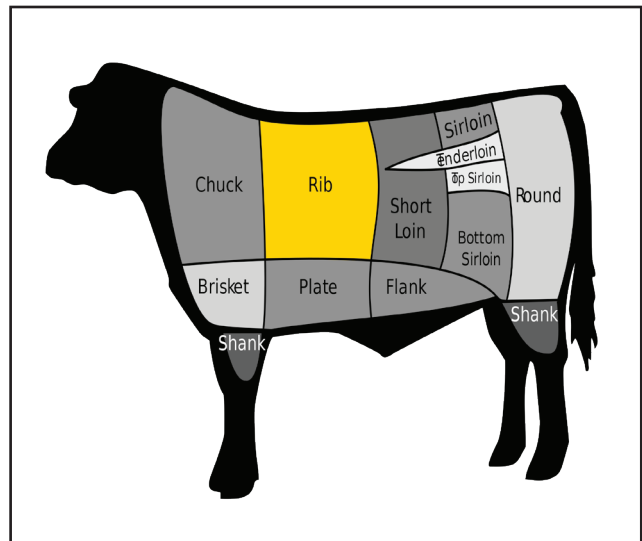


Fig. 4. "Standing Rib Roast." (see reference list for image source and license link)

wild arising disappears, ceasing to be a living other that relates to me and me to it. Jung (1968) proposed that

The effect of projection is to isolate the subject from his environment, since instead of a real relation to it there is now only an illusory one. Projections change the world into the replica of one's unknown face. In the last analysis, therefore, they lead to an autoerotic or autistic



condition in which one dreams a world whose reality remains forever unattainable. (para. 17)

This description brings to mind Ueda's (1995) linguistic conceptual prison, a mode of seeing that leads to solipsistic relations with the world and the inability to engage in mutuality with wild Otherness. We may venture that, before awakening, the ego is involved in nothing *but* projection, unable to see through its own snares. In the next image, *Catching the Ox*, this attitude is brought to a climax as the conscious ego makes a final attempt to dominate and control the ox of wild becoming.

#### Picture Four: Catching the Ox



Fig. 5. "Catching the Ox." From *Ten Bulls*, by Tenshō Shūbun (1414–1463). (see reference list for image source and license link)

The traditional interpretation of this image is that it depicts the stage of discipline in Zen practice. A student has experienced *Kensho*, a glimpse of the wild alterity of Buddha-nature, but easily slips back into separating awareness, desire and aversion, good and bad, and thus needs training. Kakuan's verse proclaims, "If you want to tame it, you must lay on the whip" (Mumon, 2004, p. 47). Mumon concurred, stating that "If you want to tame the Ox so that it will be compliant, well-behaved and always right by

your side, then you must hold it on a tight rein and lay on the whip" (p. 48).

However, it may be that instead of a necessary stage of discipline, *Picture Four* depicts another instance of delusion, a failed attempt to relate to the wild other. Daisetz Suzuki argued that *Picture 4* was misleading, and "shows confusion on the part of the creator...it is really not the animal but the man himself that needs training and whipping" (Jaffe, 2015, p. 152). Dogen confirmed that Buddha-nature is "things as they are in suchness. No traps or snares can ever reach it" (Abe & Waddell, 2002, p. 6). Even Mumon (2004) noted that the "Ox of Fundamental Wholeness...is strictly pure. It hates the world of desires and attachments, passions and self-delusions, and will trot right off to the mountains" at the slightest whiff of a delusive mind (p. 47). If Mumon's characterization of the ox is true, it seems it is the oxherd's attitude, not the ox's, that must be transformed so that the ox will gain affinity for him. Indeed, Kakuan's verses point towards the futility of whips and ropes in the same breath that they insist upon their necessity. Even as the ox is whipped, he is "even more willful, wild as ever" (Mumon, 2004, p. 49). Mumon confirmed that the ox, "stubborn and strong...won't be broken" (p. 49).

Diverging from Daisetz Suzuki's contention that the oxherd needed to be whipped, I suggest that *neither* the oxherd nor the ox need to be whipped, but that it is the encompassing, dominating attitude symbolized by tethering and whipping that needs to be shifted. The futility of roping an untamed Other demonstrates the hungry-ghost-like qualities of clinging, desire, and attachment. The oxherd is so filled with desire for the wild Other that he seeks to possess it, effectively devouring it in his delusive projections. Here, domestication is an attempt to make the wild Other more predictable and controllable, to assimilate it into the ego's horizons of awareness. It is unsurprising that the untamed Other remains unavailable for relationship. From this position, there can be no true Others, because the conscious mind cannot meet them without devouring them, and the ox cannot and will not be subsumed.

Jung's (1970) description of the ego's experience of the Self further illuminates the struggle

at hand. He explained that, because of its all-encompassing nature, the Self “is brighter and darker than the ego,” and that thus “the experience of the Self is always a defeat for the ego” (para. 778). When framed in this way, Picture Four depicts the death-throes of an ego unwilling to be de-centered in relation to wild Otherness. This is the stage of resistance, where the ego-mind thrashes and pulls, trying to assimilate and domesticate the wild Other to maintain its position. The ego senses that there is a Copernican revolution of the psyche underway, and that it is actually conditioned by and arises from wild Nature “beyond what I can create, control or claim as possession” (Plotkin, 2003, p. 26). In Buddhist lore, this is the stage before Buddha’s enlightenment, when Mara jealously accosted the Buddha, attempting to pull him back into Maya.

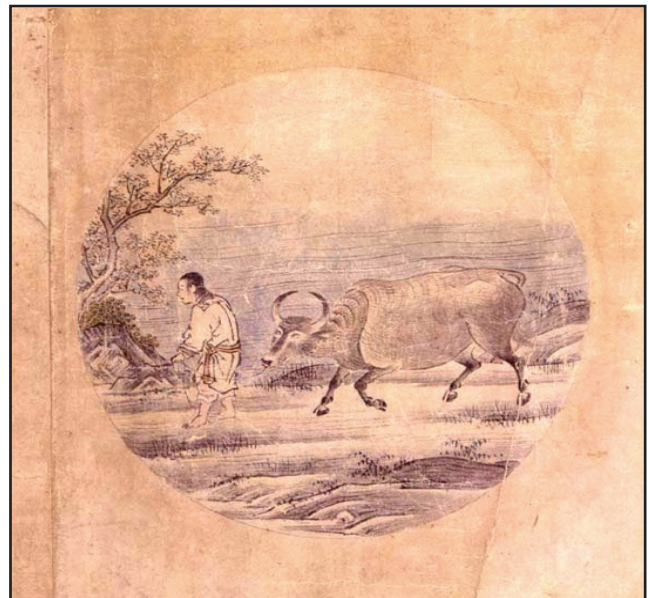
From the perspective of psychoanalysis, the wild ox is an uncharted, untamed part of the self, an alien other within me that is both me and “not-me,” a voice that I “cannot even hear properly,” and thus deeply threatening to the ego’s sense of unitary wholeness (Austin, 2009, p. 586). The ego’s relationship to the Other within is an ambivalent one, just as humanity’s is with animals. The ego alternates between longing for connection with the untamed unconscious in the form of the wild Other, and attempting to dominate, domesticate, and destroy it (Austin, 2009; Lacan, 2006; Laplanche, 1999). Austin (2009) describes this ambivalence as “the ways we long to be (and fear being) brought undone by others” (p. 584). Individuals enact these ambivalent feelings by pre-emptively imposing meaning on the wild other within, engulfing it in what is already-known, effectively devouring it. This devouring is as an act filled with aggression and yearning, an act that seeks to both possess and destroy its object (Austin 2009; Laplanche, 1999).

David Abram (2011) suggested that similar feelings arise in relationship to nature, musing that

we cannot abide our vulnerability, our utter dependence upon a world that can eat us. Vast in its analytic and inventive power, modern humanity is crippled by a fear of its own animality, and of the animate earth that sustains us. (p. 69)

In his writing, Abram presents a primal anxiety, a fear of becoming “undone” as a unitary, seamless self in control of one’s thoughts, bodies, and emotions that is sparked in relationship to the wild otherness of nature. Searle (1960) referred to this primal anxiety when he described the vulnerability and powerlessness humans feel in apprehending their inextricable connection to and dependence on nature. Daisetz Suzuki observed that “Man strives to make Nature amenable to his idea of rationality” (Jaffe, 2015, p. 115). Perhaps it is the man’s primal ambivalence, his desire for and fear of the wild ox that leads him to use the whip, hoping to domesticate it back into the ego’s horizons. However, the ox only becomes more unruly and unwilling to accompany the man. Just as the unconscious turns toward us the same face we turn towards it (Jung, 1980), the ox turns toward the oxherd the same face the oxherd turns toward the ox.

#### Picture Five: Walking Side by Side



**Fig. 6.** “Walking Side by Side.” From *Ten Bulls*, by *Tenshō Shūbun* (1414–1463). (see reference list for image source and license link)

Several generations of Jungian analysts have claimed that Picture Five (Figure 6) marks the beginning of the ego’s unification with the Self (Kosugi, 2022). In reference to the ox, Kakuan’s



verse for this image instructs us to “pull again and again, till it’s tame and gentle. Of itself, it will follow without any bridle or chain” (Mumon, 2004, p. 54). According to Mumon (2004), this image corresponds to the unwavering repetition of practice. He teaches that “when the Ox has been tamed, it will always follow you like a well-trained dog” (p. 57).

This interpretation once again begs a question: Does the ox follow because it has been domesticated through use of force? Is the ox really now under the oxherd’s control, its wild spirit, the one Mumon (2004) claimed “won’t be broken” (p. 49), now broken? How could this be so, if, as Dogen stated, “no traps or snares could ever reach it” (Abe & Waddell, 2002, p. 6)? When viewed in this way, Mumon and Kakuan’s explanations of causality seem unlikely. An alternative explanation may be that the ox now chooses to accompany the oxherd because he has laid down the whip. Perhaps it *seemed* to the oxherd that the wild Other walked calmly beside him due to the man’s strenuous effort at domination. Similarly, for the student of meditation, an experience of Kensho may seem causally related to their effort. But what if this control is an illusion, and the ox chooses to walk beside the oxherd when his efforts are exhausted, and he slackens the rope, just as Kensho occurs when the mind’s efforts reach a dead end? The loose rope between the oxherd and ox shows a softening of the ego’s possessive hold on the emerging wild contents of the untamed Other. In softening the rope, the ego gives space for the ox to exist beyond its desire for it, allowing it to be (partially) self-determining, and the ox softens in turn. Spiegelman and Miyuki (1985) affirmed that “the ox will come by himself when the time is right. He ultimately needs no chain, no discipline, only a relationship” (p. 66). Only from the slackened line can this true relationship blossom.

In Picture Five, the oxherd has taken what Dogen described as “the backward step,” another way of describing the withdrawing of projections referenced earlier. The oxherd ceases to chase concepts and engulf others within them, and instead begins to soften back into what Daisetz Suzuki called “pure subjectivity.” Suzuki claimed that this mode of awareness

gives soul to even non-sentient beings and makes them readily and friendly react to human approach. The whole universe, which means Nature, ceases to be hostile" to us as we have hitherto depicted from our selfish point of view. Nature, indeed, is no more something to be conquered and subdued and humiliated. (Jaffe, 2015, p. 134)

### Picture Six: Riding the Ox Home



**Fig. 7.** "Riding the Ox Home." From *Ten Bulls*, by *Tenshō Shūbun* (1414–1463). (see reference list for image source and license link)

In Picture Six (Figure 7), “you lay your no-mind body down on the back of the no-mind ox and leave everything up to the ox” (Mumon, 2004, p. 64). Here, the oxherd rides upon the ox, his hands free to play the flute, and allows the ox to carry him home. Not only has the oxherd slackened the line, he has completely let go of the rope. Stein (2019) views this image as a *coniunctio*, an act of individuation that unites conscious and unconscious aspects of the self. However, this image depicts not just a unification, but a reorientation. As Dogen taught in *Genjokoan* (1233), “to carry the self forward and illuminate myriad things is a delusion. That myriad things come forth and illuminates the self is awakening” (Tanashi, 1985, p. 35). In this image, the oxherd seems to



have absorbed Dogen's teaching. He does not carry himself forward, but is carried home by the wild Other. Jung (1938) stated that

The ego stands to the self as the moved to the mover, or as object to subject, because the determining factors which radiate out from the self surround the ego on all sides and are therefore supraordinate to it. The self, like the unconscious, is an *a priori* existent out of which the ego evolves...It is not I who create myself, rather I happen to myself. (Para. 391)

The conscious self finally releases the illusion that it is the prime mover, and surrenders to being carried. The oxherd is carried home to the ground and origin of his being, that place from which he was alienated in the first image.

The preface to this verse reads, "We call you but you won't turn around, catch at you but you won't be tied down" (Mumon, 2004, p. 62). These lines are strangely reminiscent of earlier verses referencing the ox who insisted on being wild, resisting the rope. It seems that the oxherd has been re-wilded, joining the ox in its unencompassable meanderings. The oxherd, like the ox, will not be domesticated. In this image of the human relinquishing control to the nonhuman, the oxherd becomes centaurian, ox-bottomed and human-topped. Picture Six depicts a form of coniunctio that marries not male and female, but human and nonhuman. Even the oxherd's flute intones a nonconceptual primordial language of the wild Other, perhaps engaging in call and response with the birds and cicadas.

The final line of the verse, "to a close companion, what need to move your lips?" reveals that the oxherd has broken free of his cage of words (Ueda, 1979). He embodies the unfiltered way of knowing and communicating (via the flute) characteristic of the wild Other, directly transmitting to all those he meets. Indeed, in speaking this primordial language, the oxherd begins to enter an intersubjective relationship with the wild Other. Just as the unconscious turns the face towards us as we turn towards it (Jung, 1980), the wild ox now turns upwards with what appears to be a slight smile, (almost) meeting the man's gaze. This upward glance is particularly powerful in comparison with the ox's

demeanor in Picture Three, where the wild Other was faceless and thus unable to gaze. However, there is still work to be done, because the oxherd does not return the ox's gaze. The relationship is not yet fully realized.

### Picture Seven: The Ox Forgotten



Fig. 8. "The Ox Forgotten." From Ten Bulls, by Tenshō Shūbun (1414–1463). (see reference list for image source and license link)

In Picture Seven (Figure 8) the oxherd is home, the ox "forgotten." Mumon (2004) explained that "Self and ox are one. Satori can only be that place where self and Dharma are one, where person and ox have become one entity" (p. 72). According to traditional explanations, this image refers to the man's realization of unity with the Self, a realization that makes representation of Buddha-nature unnecessary, the coniunctio complete. While this explanation describes the "not two" of non-dualism, it omits "not one." Spiegelman and Miyuki (1985) clarified that "in the Taoist tradition, the word 'forgotten' (*wang*) has been used synonymously with *wu-wei*, 'non-doing' or 'letting something be,' or *tsu-jan*, 'naturalness' or 'being through itself'" (p. 38). With this translation, the title could read something like, "Letting the Ox Be," suggesting that the ox may not have been forgotten, but deliberately left to be just as it is.

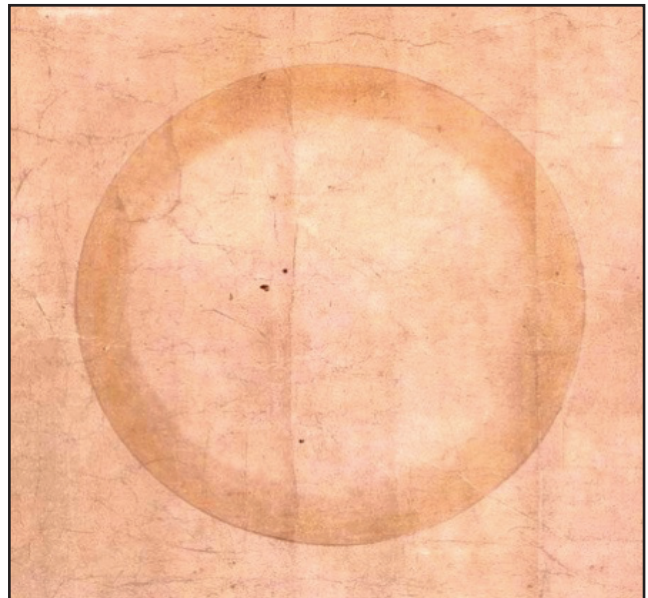
Mumon (2004) pointed out that “since there is no need to keep hold of the line, you can let it go. You may let the ox go wherever it wants to go, whether it be feeding on grass or lying in the fields” (p. 74). Implied in this description is that the oxherd has released the ox because he has no further use of it. It could also be that releasing the ox into the wilds was not about casting aside a useless tool, but edging towards a dialogical relationship with the wild Other.

In the image, the oxherd sits in his own ground of being, symbolized as his home, and gazes out at the wilderness in a gesture that looks like prayer. Rather than seeking, capturing, clinging to, or even riding the ox, he now prostrates himself toward the untamed Other of nature. It was necessary for him to take what Dogen called “the backward step,” a movement away from the outer world and towards the self (Abe & Waddell, 2002, p. 4). In this case, he moves away from the ox and toward himself to become a silent witness, listening to and acknowledging the polyphonous voice of the wild Other without merging with it as he does in Picture Six, *Riding the Ox Home*. In Picture Six, the self is carried by the wild Other but risks betraying mutuality and instrumentalizing the ox. In riding the ox, he surrenders to its directionality, but risks using the wild Other for the pleasure union with it brings. In Picture Seven, the oxherd has been nourished by this experience of union, infused with the ox’s wild spirit, a fulfillment that allows him to give the ox space without further instrumentalizing it for the purposes of awakening.

Picture Seven emphasizes the importance of stepping back from identification with the Self or the achievement of Satori. Edinger (1972) noted that ego-Self identity leads to ego inflation, a condition that causes the ego to think it is bigger and more God-like than it is. Like Adam and Eve eating from the tree of knowledge, finding, capturing, and riding the ox might all be interpreted as inflated acts. Edinger (1972) deemed these inflated acts necessary for the emergence of consciousness: “In order to emerge at all, the ego is obliged to set itself up against the unconscious out of which it came and assert its relative autonomy by an inflated act, ” (p. 25). However, these inflated acts must be released

(either consciously or through a fall) for individuation to progress, and the ego to re-experience itself as subsumed by the Self. In Image Seven, the oxherd takes a reverential, non-appropriative posture, releasing the ox along what he thinks he knows and who he thinks he is to, in order to listen anew.

### Picture Eight: The Ox and Man Out of Sight



**Fig. 9.** “The Ox and Man Out of Sight.” From *Ten Bulls*, by *Tensho Shabun* (1414–1463). (see reference list for image source and license link)

In Image Eight, ox and oxherd are gone, and an empty circle appears. Mumon (2004) explained that this image depicts Sunyata, Buddhist emptiness, also known as the Great Death (p. 83). The walls of Ueda’s (1979) conceptual cage have cracked open, shattering the illusion of a divided self and world. The empty circle is a cosmic egg in which infinite possibilities and perspectives are simultaneously available. As such, this Great Death is actually a great becoming of everything and nothing. In this great becoming, there is an experience of what Jung (2020) thought “beyond the most audacious fantasy” (p. 22), namely, the taking of the Self’s perspective. Masao (1985) observed that

In Jung, the depth of mind is *objectively* regarded from the side of the conscious “I” as the unknown collective unconscious. In contrast,



by overcoming such an objective approach, Zen straightforwardly enters into the depth of mind and breaks through it by becoming completely identical with it. (p. 67)

This breakthrough, however, was not initiated by the ego or the oxherd. Ueda (1979) suggested that awakening is initiated by the wild Other, (just as individuation is instigated by the Self). Offering the example of a bird call as a wild agent of awakening, he shared that “The experience of a bird cry... shatters the wall in a person between inner and outer, and discloses a seamless, pure, deep and clear space in which the infinite flows intimately” (p. 19). The conceptual membrane is pierced by a true encounter with the wild Other “just as.” In other words, the ego is met by the Self, or an untamed alterity in the world, one that the ego does not, or cannot, subsume. When the wholly Other, unencompassable bird call shatters the primacy of ego-mind, the oxherd is transformed and re-oriented, recognizing that what seemed wholly Other is actually most intimate.

With respect to the individuation process, the stage depicted in Picture Eight represents the ego’s willing prostration of itself before the Self, as the oxherd gives way to an empty circle. Like Job, who finally acknowledged the primacy of God, the ego repents itself to “dust and ashes,” emptying itself so that it may become Self-centric, existing in service to the Self (Edinger, 1972, p. 94). This act of emptying can also be conceived of as a deep listening to the Self. Ueda (1995) argued that Picture Eight portrays a type of absolute silence known as

*moku*; this is originally a Buddhist term and implies “silence *per se*.” The idea is silently to enter the absolute realm of infinite stillness which is not disturbed by speaking and cannot be broken, but rather endows speaking with a depth of meaning. (p. 11)

In this image, the oxherd allows himself to be utterly silenced, in contrast to Picture 6, where he still emits sound through his flute. Picture Eight represents a deepening of Picture Seven, where the oxherd took his first “backward step” into stillness and silence. Here, he goes deeper, sinking into

absolute silence so that he might truly hear the primordial sound of the wild Other.

This silencing and emptying means being stripped even of his human identity and its accompanying utterances. In the emptiness of the Enso, the ultimate caesura of man vs. animal/nature/world is also obliterated (Ox and Man Both Gone Out of Sight). This implies a withdrawing of projections born of the human word, anthropocentrism, and its objects of creation. In Picture Eight, we have wiped the slate clean, disappearing even humanness in order to see the world fresh. Without the limitation of his human form and its accompanying identity formations, he can be filled anew with whatever form of wild becoming presents itself. He is in a state of ultimate receptivity. In this sense, the cosmic egg of the Enso is also gestation chamber for the man’s posthuman becoming.

#### Picture Nine: Returning to the Source

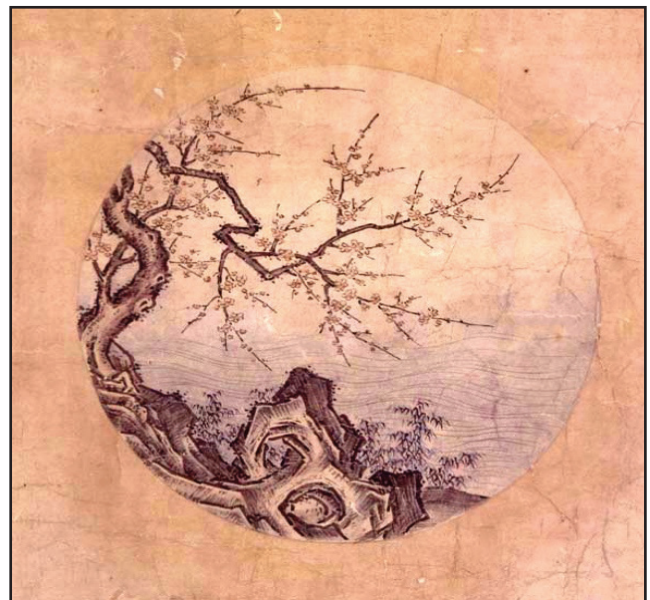


Fig. 10. "Returning to the Source." From Ten Bulls, by Tensho Shabun (1414–1463). (see reference list for image source and license link)

After the Great Death there is resurrection to Great Life. Picture Nine (Figure 10) depicts the world anew, the oxherd’s projections having been withdrawn. Mumon (2004) said, “In the heart-mind, there is nothing. But the heart-mind is identical with, not the least bit separate from, the universe



that contains all. True reality lives in the natural world as it is" (p. 88). In this posthuman image, the containing circle again shows no human subject. It is filled with nothing other than wild Others: the tree, the river, and, one might imagine, the sound of wild cicadas.

Having entered into a state of absolute listening and profound receptivity in Picture Eight, the world rises up to meet the oxherd, filling him with its polyphonous song. Here, it is revealed that the wild Other is not attainable because the oxherd is already that which he seeks. In the opening images, the oxherd could not see the wild Other because he was peering out from the wild Other's eyes. We may take a cue from Bion (1970) here, noting that "O [absolute reality] cannot be known, it can only be become" (p. 26). But just as alienation is a necessary component of individuation (Edinger, 1972), separation from the wild Other was necessary so that the oxherd could double back and gaze upon it, cultivating twoness for the sake of relationship. His prostration to and recognition of the wild Other complete, the oxherd comes back into conscious union with it: "In the sight of this simple blossoming of a flower, through its sheer power of presence, one is turned into nothingness, then is resurrected by blossoming with the flower" (Ueda, 1989, p. 17).

The oxherd has been transformed, but not into something other than what he is. The Self has been revealed to be made of what was previously imagined to be unknowable, untamed nature. In this sense, the oxherd has become the eyes of the lumen naturae able to see in the dark, or "the insistent gaze of the animal...[an] extra-lucid blind one" (Derrida, 2008, p.4). The containing circle surrounding the image becomes the man's sensory portal, his eye of awareness. This "eye" was emptied of content in Picture Eight so that it could see the world anew, sharing the perceptions of rivers and trees. Kawai (1996) associated this image with a state of vegetative consciousness. I interpret this consciousness as the wild eye of nature seeing through the human eye, sharing the gaze of the wild Other as shadow and Self. Dogen noted the convergence between nonhuman ways of knowing and Buddha-nature when he described the perspective of plum blossoms:

Now we correctly transmit and accept that plum blossoms in snow are truly the Tathagata's eyeball. We take them up and hold them as the eye at the top of the head, as the pupil of the eye. (Takahashi, 1985, p. 116)

In both being filled by and taking the perspective of wild alterity, we open to a form of relating that ceases to instrumentalize the other. Because the wild other is always already our most intimate truth, then there is no-other to use, and no-thing to be gained. Kakuan's verse, "Behold the streams flowing whither nobody knows; and the flowers vividly red—for whom are they" (Mumon, 2004, p. 134), expresses the unconditional, non-instrumental attitude that has blossomed through being filled with the wild other. This verse is particularly striking in comparison to the man's earlier overtly instrumentalist attitude toward the ox. Even Kakuan acknowledged using "the ox merely as a 'symbol' or 'tool' for teaching about self-realization," a symbol that is discarded once it has fulfilled its function. It is possible to compare the aforementioned attitude towards the ox to the treatment of cows, particularly dairy cows, in the West.

However, Kakuan's verse goes on, "nor has he any use of himself (which is artificiality)" (Mumon, 2004, p. 134). In relating to the wild Other as a subject, the oxherd deepens his relationship with wild Otherness within the self. In seeing that his own self is made up of more than his ego, he ceases to objectify and control his own untamed arisings, which he may have previously attempted to domesticate or eradicate. In coming into deep mutuality with wild Alterity, the oxherd comes to respect himself as an unconditional subject.

While this image points to unification with the wild Other, Daisetz Suzuki reminded that

identity does not at all imply the annihilation of one at the cost of the other. The mountains do not vanish, they stand before me, I have not absorbed them, nor have they wiped me out of the scene...The mountains are mountains and yet not mountains. I am I and you are you, and yet I am you and you are I. Nature as a world of manyness is not ignored and Man as a subject facing the many remains conscious of himself. (Jaffe, 2015, p. 123)

In the next and final image of this series, the convergence of self and wild other (depicted in images 6–9) blossoms into a sacred divergence where a true meeting occurs.

**Picture 10:  
Entering the City with Bliss-Bestowing Hands**



**Fig. 11.** "Entering the City with Bliss-Bestowing Hands." From *Ten Bulls*, by *Tensho Shabun* (1414–1463). (see reference list for image source and license link)

Picture Ten (Figure 11), the last image in the series, depicts a joyful, round-bellied man carrying a large sack. This man resembles a historical 10th-century Chinese monk named Budai. Budai was rumored to wander freely throughout the villages, offering treats and gifts to children. Today he is often referred to as the "laughing Buddha" (Spiegelman & Miyuki, 1985). Picture Ten is commonly thought to portray the oxherd as a Bodhisattva, a compassionate being who returns to the world after enlightenment to help others realize Buddhahood. From a Jungian perspective, this image might represent the individuated ego's "sacrificial attitude" (Edinger, 1972). Having been emptied out in service to the Self, the oxherd now empties his sack in a gesture of continual emptying and releasing.

It is important to note that in this image, self and other have reappeared from their convergence.

Perhaps the appearance of two figures is a restitution of the dialogical ego-Self axis: the ego finally comes into a conscious relationship with the Self, neither alienated from nor identified with it (Edinger, 1972). Ueda (1979) noted that "Through absolute nothingness the self is cut open selflessly and becomes a double self, an I and a Thou. Between the I and the Thou is the space in which the freedom of the self is played out" (p. 2). Kosugi (2022) continued along these lines, suggesting that

the [oxherding] process is not headed towards obliteration/depotentialization of the ego but its internal transformation. The realization of emptiness of the individual Selfhood leads to the realization of one's relational interdependency. To be 'one' is already multiple, or multiplicity. The end of subitism is this radical pluralism or multiplicity of the mind. (pp. 55–56)

The above statements suggest that coming to terms with wild Otherness reveals a plurality of the self. The untamed alterity that was thought to be external and uncontrollable (psychically and physically), must ultimately be recognized as multiple (infinite), autonomous selves within the self. In this image, the oxherd as Budai encounters the man from Picture One, the original, deluded man. His two selves are parts of one larger self: The wise Self (Budai) is present, but so is the original, deluded self. They dialogue freely, all human parts included and embraced. However, in looking closely at the image, I suggest that the plurality of the self depicted here is a posthuman one.

The fully realized self, Budai, is not an ethereal, religious man. He is fully embodied, his belly leading him forward. Kakuan's verse proclaimed, "With bare chest and feet, you come to the market. Under dirt and ash, your face breaks into a smile" (Mumon, 2004, p. 95). Shirtless, round, and feral, Budai's appearance is decidedly incongruent with that of the human he meets. He looks as much like an animal, even an ox, as he does a person. Like the wild ox, Budai has no home and lives an untethered life. He is led forward by his rotund belly which proceeds him as he walks, just as the oxherd in Picture Six was led home by the ox. Budai's head, the rational center, takes a

back seat to this alternate center of awareness. In allowing his body to guide him, he sees with the no-seeing, no-thinking part of him, the wild otherness within him that nonetheless knows how to see in the dark. In the profound receptivity of the cosmic egg (Picture Eight), the oxherd was fertilized and filled with the wild Other. From this gestation, Budai was born, depicted here as one who has been infused with untamed animality. He is, on his own, a plural self, one whose comportment suggests human-nature hybridity. His belly is a circle of wholeness and full-fillment, as well as an alternate center of wild knowing that guides him. Filled with his own posthuman becoming, he no longer hungers to relate to wild Others through assimilative practices.

In Picture Eight, the oxherd “listen[ed] out of an interlude of internal silence that lets one truly hear the Other” (Maraldo, 2022, p. 190). As a result of this deep listening, Picture Ten shows that the oxherd is finally able to meet an Other face to face. In Picture Three, the oxherd stared at the ox’s hindquarters, the ox objectified and unable to look back. In Picture Six, the ox gazes up towards the oxherd, but he is too busy playing his own tune to return the gaze. In this final image, two beings, I and thou, finally gaze eye to eye. In listening into the heart of silence, a true dialogue blossomed between self and self and self and other, words infused with the no-words of the wild Other. The oxherd can now look upon himself unconditionally as posthuman plurality. Similarly, he meets others, wild and tame, from his own feral hybridity, without need to domesticate self or other. I end this section by inviting the words of Emmanuel Levinas (1979) to speak directly to this lesson in alterity:

To approach the Other in conversation is to welcome his expression, in which at each instant he overflows the idea a thought would carry away from it. It is therefore to receive from the Other beyond the capacity of the I, which means exactly: to have the idea of infinity. But this also means: to be taught. (p. 51)

As the *Oxherding* series ends, the oxherd has acquired the art of true listening. This rests on the paradoxical becoming of the wild other

without devouring/projecting upon it, which, in turn, depends on the emptying of the self without annihilating the self. True listening preserves wild otherness in all of its forms.

### Concluding Remarks

In the final analysis, the project of domestication depicted in *The Ten Oxherding Pictures* was an inflated act. This act was enabled by humanity’s delusive sense of separation from and superiority over wild Others that seemed incomprehensible to the conceptualizing mind. The attitude of domestication needed to be softened and surrendered, the oxherd needing to learn “to receive from the Other beyond the capacity of the I” (Levinas, 1979, p. 51), withdrawing his projections and listening deeply from the empty self. Only in this receptive act of being filled by the wild Other, that which he perceived as mysterious, untamed opacity, could the oxherd experience the freedom expressed in Ueda’s (1989) line “Between the I and the Thou is the space in which the freedom of the self is played out” (p. 2). Throughout the *Ten Oxherding Pictures*, there is a dance of union and separation from the wild Other, a movement towards and away, both positions vital poles of being and knowing. This series seems to suggest that a pulsation of identification and distance supports conscious relationship with self and other, and self as other.

This investigation has been an attempt to resurrect an absent referent and allow it to speak, to attend to the ox in the spirit that Hillman (1997) suggested one attend to dream animals. In urging dreamers to resist the urge to interpret dream animals, but rather hold them as sacred mediators of real animals and the “transcendent otherness of the kingdom within” (p. 56), Hillman modeled the developmental capacity of “being-with” others, and allowing these transverbal others to speak and transform human subjects on their own terms. In shifting attention from figure to ground, from the man to the marginalized nonhuman, subject-object distinction gives way to an unfolding mutuality.

From this perspective, an additional commentary on Picture Ten, the final image, is in order. While Budai has retained the animal eye, it is



important to acknowledge that the ox himself never reappears in the series. One way of understanding the ox's disappearance is that the wild Other as nonhuman nature has been absorbed into the human. In Picture Ten, the dyadic relationship between ox and oxherd is reduced to a human dyad, however posthumanized Budai has become. This final image can be read in two ways: in one, Budai has become one with and sees through the eyes of the wild Other. In another reading, Budai has entered into one intersubjective relationship (a human one) but failed to retain human-nonhuman intersubjectivity, instead engulfing and appropriating the nonhuman.

As the earth reels from climate disaster (to which animal agriculture is a significant contributor) and biodiversity loss, the oxherding pictures serve as a modern allegory for humanity's struggle to come into right relationship with nonhuman nature. Caught up in the appropriative project of domestication, humanity's assimilation and obliteration of nonhuman beings reveals an inability to move past Oxherding Picture Four: Catching the Ox. As these attitudes and practices increasingly impact human wellbeing, there exists an opportunity to recognize the wild Other within the human self. Humans are none other than those they seek to domesticate, and do not escape their own tether. The oxherding pictures suggest, as David Michael Levin (1989) proposes, a "hermeneutic hearing." This type of deep listening means that, "if we listen well to ourselves, we can hear within our embodiment resonances and echoes that confirm the interconnectedness of all beings" (p. 272). Only when we are sufficiently infused with the language of silence can we meet the wild Other on its own terms. This requires surrendering old strategies of being and knowing to make space for an alternative, posthuman way of knowing to permeate the heart-mind—ways of knowing that are increasingly elusive in a human monoculture. The oxherding pictures reveal that, if we listen absolutely—crouching silently and patiently beside the wild animals of our dreams, the wild arisings of our body, and the wild beings of the world—the world steps forward to meet us. In this meeting, our primordial longing is fulfilled, I and Thou restored.

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