Me and other things.

An introduction to the Buddhist metaphor of self
with the application of Jäkel's model
of mental activity

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There can be seen a strong relationship between mental activity and physical experience in the field of communication. Cognitive linguistics underlines the linguistic ubiquity of metaphor, which engages physicality, embodiment and manipulation, even in regard to abstract concepts. The model of metaphor that seems to be particularly interesting for its creativeness and provocation, is characterized by the general name: Mental Activity is Manipulation. To introduce its clear example I suggest to refer to representative works of Buddhist literature instead of the colloquial speech. The metaphors present in Buddhist literature are reduced to the pure manipulation of simple objects, without ambiguity, transcendence or mysticism. The highest form of mental activity is like eating porridge and washing up the cup afterwards.

Nowadays science easily deals with the notion of dialogue and interdisciplinary approach. It can be seen in the case of the problem of mental activity, as this is the topic where neuroscience and humanities come together. At the same time there has been a revision of the attitude towards religious and philosophical tradition of the Far East. The scientist started

to appreciate its account of mental events as dynamic, diversified and not isolated (see e.g. Varela, Thompson & Rosch 1991; Austin 2009). Probably many of the streams of the eastern tradition can be described without engaging mysticism or transcendence, without verbalism and unspoken assumptions. The view that Buddhist message is essentially strange to European culture, that it is non-scientific and that its concepts can't be analyzed professionally is based on irrational beliefs and cannot be maintained any longer. Many of Buddhist ideas seem to be good material for analysis, among others in the field of cognitive linguistics. Prejudice that Buddhist concepts are a nonverbal phenomenon paradoxically encourages linguists to study them (Kozyra 2004).

The picture of the self that emerges from Buddhist literature is very concrete and real, almost reistic. The self appears to be particular for two reasons. Firstly, its picture is directed towards pointing out fluidity of the reality, as well as subject's own reception of himself. Secondly, Buddhist way of speaking about self and its relation to the environment, although rather consistent, seems to treat the law of logic in a rather perverse manner. It is especially true for koans, a kind of verbal dilemmas, which results are closely related to personal matter and non-verbal forms of expression. Its paradox resides in characterizing 'the true nature of things' altogether with the contradictions that co-exist in the things (more about this in Kozyra 2004). Since references that emerges from Buddhist metaphors are rich material for cognitive linguistic and present themselves intriguing, it is worth to specify the Buddhist substantial image of self.

I would like to pay attention especially to Olaf Jäkel's works discussing Buddhist literature, in which he develops his metaphor - Mental Activity is Manipulation. As he writes, conceptualization of mental activity, based on metaphorical relations to the domain of manipulating physical objects, may exemplify a mental strategy present in all cultures – a form of cognitive universality. Jäkel notes however, that his model doesn't apply to passion, emotions or intuition, which are usually conceptualized as Passivity

(Jäkel 2003: 167, 219). Taking this approach to Buddhism, one should be also consistent in regard to this form of mental activity as meditation, even though it is sometimes described as passive state of mind (see Jakubczak 2003).

I suggest to look closer at how Idealized Cognitive Model (ICM)[1] of Jäkel can be useful in conceptualization of self in Buddhism. A working hypothesis here could be as follows: the model of self present in Buddhist messages is grounded in reification and manipulation of things. Let me first introduce its empirical context. Connecting mental activity with physical experience affects the human's way of perceiving the world, his process of communication and conceptual systems. This issue is fundamental for the theory of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, cognitive linguists who conduct their researches on interdisciplinary field (Lakoff and Johnson 1999). They associate the embodied character of thought with its imagery and vividness. It doesn't engage any of the structures of data in the brain; the process of recalling this kind of information as a specific perceptual image (visual, auditory, olfactory etc.) is a process of forming their interpretation. As Antonio Damasio writes, these pictures, however they are not the exact content of thought, are essential for thinking (Damasio 1999: 122–130).

The universality of figurative language is related not only to literally imaginable objects and phenomena, but also to the aspects that are ineffable. Following Aneta Załazińska: *even the most abstract concepts gain their pictorial representation in our minds, the representation that concerns embodiment, being in the physical world and manipulative action of ourselves* (Załazińska 2000: 7, my translation). A metaphor is, generally speaking, a representation of one thing by another. After Lakoff and Johnson, it is an instrument of learning and acting, the main bearer of understanding, that shapes a system of concepts that is in use. Our metaphors express us, and take part in our social and political reality. Each new reality at the beginning

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[1]   Idealized Cognitive Model (ICM) – a coherent, complex model consisting of number of conceptual metaphors of substantial character, which is a pragmatic simplification of even more complex reality; a kind of cultural model of thinking (Jäkel 2003).

we define in metaphorical terms so that later we act according to the metaphor[2] (Lakoff and Johnson 1988: 186–187).

Lakoff and Johnson's cognitive theory of metaphor has been developed by Jäkel (2003). He was interested in different categories of metaphors of self, especially in the category of manipulating objects. In this category there is embedded the discussed metaphor Mental Activity is Manipulation. He proposed it in opposition to the metaphor appreciated by Lakoff: Understanding is Seeing. Jäkel decided also to include the diachronic dimension in the approach to cognitive theory of metaphor, instead of synchronic dimension only.
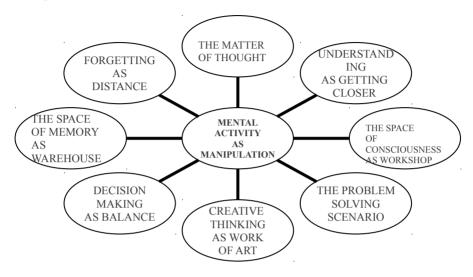
Jäkel's ICM model is a complex model with many systematically connected submetaphors. This model isn't directed at propositions regarding passivity (mentioned earlier in the text), or the sphere of intersubjectivity (involving conversation). It is about subjective, active mental processes. Jäkel divided his model into eight components[3] (Jäkel 2003: 165–168):

Discussing the model of manipulation, Jäkel pointed out some of misunderstandings of his metaphor. One of them is related to the objection towards its automatic approach to mental images. The author notes that ICM is sometimes mistakenly treated as epistemological or psychological model. He stresses that the metaphor described has only usable character, without engaging any of the contents of thoughts (Jäkel 2003: 202–203). I think it is

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[2]   For example, '(...) *it has been proved that the same physicians-theorethics that don't agree with colloquial views on physical phenomena while talking about these phenomena use the same scheme as shared by non-specialists. This can be seen in gestures they use. What is more, there is evidence that when teachers give up on introducing the pheomena to the students by referring to containers and objects, students don't understand given examples any longer, what prevents them from making progress in subject'* (Załazińska 2006: 47).

[3]   Component of the model (CM) is a superior metaphor, that forms the Idealized Cognitive Model with other metaphors, and is related to another ones, relatively distant. In spite of its superiority, it doesn't need to be engaged in hierarchical relations like 'general/specific' (after Jäkel 2003).

worth to keep this argument in mind while referring to the Buddhist metaphors.

(based on Jäkel 2003: 168–198)

Striving to conceive the reality directly doesn't exclude the possibility to express it in language. In fact practice of insight consists in both the ability to formulate the content of experience in a discursive way, and increasing capacity to concentrate up to the level when one can grasp the reality clearly and truly.

This is the status and the privilege of language, that describes Krzysztof Jakubczak, while discussing practice of meditation in Buddhism (2003: 201). He points out the paradoxicality of Buddhist thought in the context of its basic concepts (180-181). The relation between language and direct experience gains a special character in the approach of Agnieszka Kozyra, who presents the Buddhist philosophy as philosophy of paradox. To illustrate this I would use a modified statement of Wittgenstein: *what we should be silent about we can talk about*. Kozyra shows how the limited character of language can be its power, when we apply a certain approach that can be seen in Buddhist koans. Fundamental for this approach is so

called paradoxical logic, recognized in the philosophy of zen and analyzed by the Japanese philosopher Kitarō Nishida (Kozyra 2004)[4].

The idea to apply the idealized cognitive model Mental Activity is Manipulation to the domain of Buddhist concepts shows interesting opportunities; it should be noted, however, that temporal and cultural distance can modify the character of examples with the notion of object manipulation. I will illustrate this with pointing out specific domains, that can be named as general components of this model.

MC1: The space of object as hearth

One of the main 'four precious truths' of Buddhism suggests the state that normally is enjoyed by individual self[5] – it is the truth about *extinguishing the suffering* (D'Onza 2002: 37). Together with the idea of nirvana, which literally means the process of *blowing off* by the active self (Jakubczak 2003: 225)[6], we get the picture of a kind of *hearth*. This hearth *is kept* in undesirable state by no-self, so self is required to *blow off* the flame.

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[4]   According to Nishida, the status of reality can be expressed in concept of *zettaiteki mu*, which is – rather unfortunately – translated as 'absolute nothingness'. The point here is to show the nature that escapes the classic discourse, but can be grasped at some point by means of logic of 'absolute contradictory self-identity' , that is the paradoxical logic – *hairi no ri* (Kozyra 2004: 15–16).

[5]   In Buddhist literature there can be found two equally crucial ideas of self. *Individual self* (no-self) means illusory expression of stable, coherent and continuous self, here and now, with the baggage of earthly concerns as seemingly important. On the other hand, active *enlightened self* is the actual self, with the more developed knowledge about the world and self-knowledge. It is conscious of infinity of individual illusions and directed on releasing from them in future. The enlightened self doesn't come from anywhere nor is created, but is potentially, unconsciously present in every human being (*Muttāvali* 1999; Scott and Doubleday 1995; Kozyra 2004).

[6]   Contrary to popular interpretations, some of the researches indicate that ancient Indians didn't regard fire as endurable, while fading it was still alive, it was just moving on to another, more subtle form of living (Jakubczak 2003: 228).

According to the Buddhist messages, Budda Sakjamuni is an author of famous story about what happens to the monk with released mind after his death: *Existing in sansar is like a process of lighting of bonfire – it is on fire as long as supported by the fuel* (Jakubczak 2003: 228). The one that provides the fuel is illusory, anxious no-self – a firekeeper. *To prepare* oneself for *extinguishing* the suffering one has to prepare his mind, for instance in the process of meditation. Understanding this process as passive form of relieving the mind would be wrong.

MC2: Immersing into Meditation as Organizing and Using the Tools for Processing the Mind-Object

This component of model includes quite an extensive range of submetaphors, specific for the Buddhist school, various kinds and phases of meditation but not only. For example, transition from the introductory state of concentration to the higher levels is conditioned by some active factors. They are, among others: *a grasping thought, an investigating thought, focusing the mind precisely on one object*. In more advanced stages there is *anchoring the mind in the object* required (Jakubczak 2003: 205). It can be clearly seen that technical clues concerning working with one's mind use the possibilities of manipulation for a specific, narrowly defined object.

At the higher stage of meditation, when the four truths have been recognized, there comes the *removal* of some of the *pollution*, which is also called *a poison* or *a defect*. (Jakubczak 2003: 208). *Mind-object* must *undergo certain procedures of purification*, internally and externally, in order to function properly.

MC3: Mind-subject as Grasping and Loosening a Grip

It would be hard to count how many texts concern the problem of the relativity of things, and the truth about their delusional character (Merzel

1995: 64). But sometimes it is even desirable to *loosen a grip* that holds our mind and our body, to become (in terms of realizing) united with our true self (Merzel 1995: 115). Metaphor of manipulating the mental resources isn't of course reserved for Buddhism only, but it displays the development analogical to its riches of practical instructions.

Anti-metaphor in zen

Literature of zen (especially koans) is often characterized by its complication, a certain meta-level in comparison to the classical method of conceptualization. For that reason it would be hard to present here the analysis of the discussed matter in the terms of individual components of the cognitive model. Instead, I would like to present some examples with the remarks that may inspire to further researches.

It is worth to begin with the thought of Kozyra: *One of the characteristic features of the language of the masters of zen is using the metaphors and symbols that I called open metaphors, whose meaning is not conventional or made clear by the author* (Kozyra 2004: 181). Sometimes these non-conventional metaphors of zen are related to classical, popular metaphors. A sense of difference between more classical for Buddhism in general and specific for zen approach to Buddhism gives a combination of two texts. The first one was written by Shen-hsui, erudite monk, a candidate for Sixth Patriarch in the school of zen: *Our body is a tree, 'bodhi'/ And our mind is a glittering mirror./ We clean it hour after hour/ Without leaving a fleck of dust*. Another text was dictated by illiterate Huineng: *There is no such a tree 'bodhi'/ Nor a glittering mirror/ If there isn't anything/ Where can the dust fall?* (Scott and Doubleday 1995: 31–32). The second thought is an illustration of the idea of the true nature of mind. At the same time there can be seen a hidden tendency for reification of illusory no-self as an *object,* that requires *undergoing* certain *procedures*. The latter of presented texts reveals the errors of mirror analogy in the poetic metaphor of Shen-hsui. Without providing its own positive metaphor, Huineng's words become

an anti-metaphor, however, an act of *de-metaphorization* is still referred to the manipulation of potential objects.

Another characteristics of zen's postulates is reism, that makes zen a form of *de-symbolization of the world* (by Schiller 1997: 44). Actions should be what they are by their nature, due to their use, and nothing else, and mind should be 'soaked' in them *while acting*: *When you're going, just go/ When you're sitting, just sit/ Above all, act decidedly* (Umon, by Scott and Doubleday 1995: 12). Quite good illustration of this is the answer of Buddhist teacher Chao-chou when asked for spiritual guidelines by a novice: The master asked: '*Have you eaten your porridge?*', '*Yes, I have*', '*So wash up your cup*' (Shunryu Suzuki, by Schiller 1997: 305).

It should be remembered that neither the forms of metaphors in zen (according to Kozyra, grounded in paradoxical logic) nor the 'verification' of classical texts that can be met in zen have an absolute character, but rather are to prevent the unwelcome effects of the conventional reception of the latter.

The aim of this article was to make a brief presentation of the possibilities that result from the idealized cognitive model of mental activity, with the attempt to recognize the conceptualization of the self in Buddhism within the use of the domain of manipulation. It is not accidental that in the context of zen, the following words of Jacob Bronowski are often quoted: *the arm is the blade of the mind* (Schiller 1997: 310). More advanced analyses could show the level of adequacy of the model. It should be also mentioned the remark of Dignagi, a Buddhist logician and epistemologist, who divided the constructs of mind into authorized (empirically verified) and unauthorized (non-verified empirically, misleading) ones (Jakubczak 2003: 179). Even though the project of investigating Buddhist metaphors of mental activity seems to be quite risky at this stage of reflection, there should be an effort to take into consideration all opportunities that gives us cognitive linguistics. It may be that Buddhism offers a shortcut here.

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