

ZENWACKY

By David Bernstein & David Kirshoff, 2015

What is the sound of one hand clapping?"

Well it depends on who was just performing.

Maybe it was John Fare, who decided on September 17th, 1968 to cut off his right hand at the Issacs gallery (Toronto) in an elaborate, brutal performance artwork. What a quack! What a looney tune! What a silly string! Or maybe the most serious guy you'll never meet.

"What is the sound of one hand clapping?"

The question is a well-known Koan. A Koan is a story, a dialog, a question, or a statement, which is used in Zen practice to provoke the "great doubt". According to Caleb Eamons, "Zen Buddhist masters use these paradoxical stories or questions to force their pupils to slough reason in favor of sudden enlightenment. Koans are designed to be nonsensical, shocking, or humorous." Through the absurdity, we have the chance to travel to a transcendent place.

A central theme found in Koans is the subject of opposites. Koans explore non-duality. "What is your original face before your mother and father were born?" "Look at the flower and the flower also looks." The guest and host interchange, "Artworks curate too."

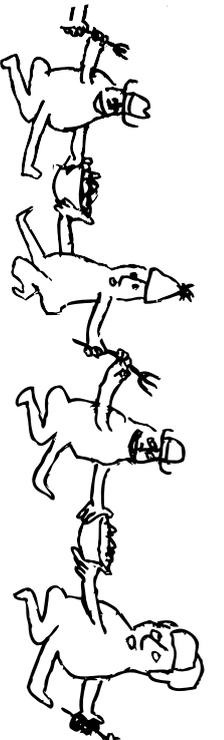
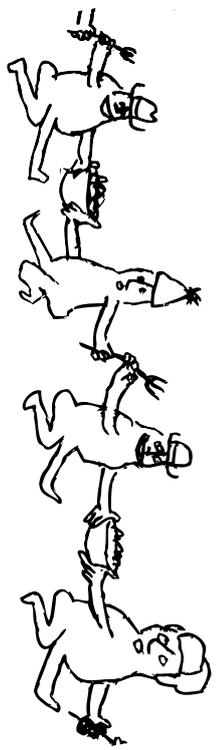
Every hand that claps has another hand somewhere, in a jar or in a pocket perhaps, but it's the very idea that we wonder where it is. Zen makes space for wonder, wonder makes space for wacky, and wacky makes space for Zen, it's a crowded table and everyone who's anyone is there.

But how did we get to wacky? How did The Zen first meet The Wacky?

The Zen is waiting for the train and standing next to him is The Wacky. The Zen looks over at The Wacky who is jumping up and down, dancing up a storm, but there is no music playing. "What is The Wacky dancing to?" wonders The Zen. The Wacky starts shooting spaghetti out of his fingertips and his head turns into a disco ball. The Zen realizes that The Wacky must be listening to a song in his head. The Zen wants to dance too. But how do you dance to a song stuck in someone else's head?

Wacky is silly, amusingly eccentric, images of 90s cartoons immediately enter the head: Rocko's Modern life, Ren and Stimpy, Pee Wee's Playhouse, Spongebob Squarepants. There is something communal about wacky, perhaps because it is an outpouring of dynamic joy. That outpouring flows into others and it is contagious. The Zen master also needs the wacky energy to feed the solemn space in his mind. At the same time that wackiness knows no bounds and feeds off the Zen.

Zenwacky is about a certain consciousness of the wacky, a meditative perspective of exuberant ridiculousness.



Zenwacky is about dualities and about meetings:

Enlightenment)-----((confusion
Silly))-----((serious
Slaphappy))-----((Sincere
Earthy))-----((Fluorescent
Focus))-----((Pocus
David))-----((David

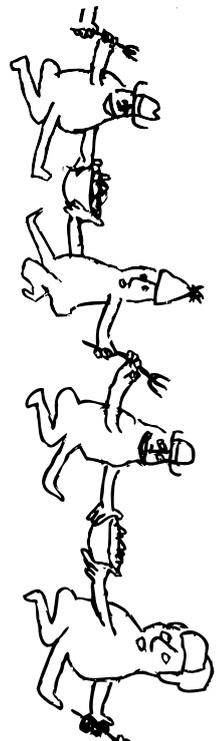
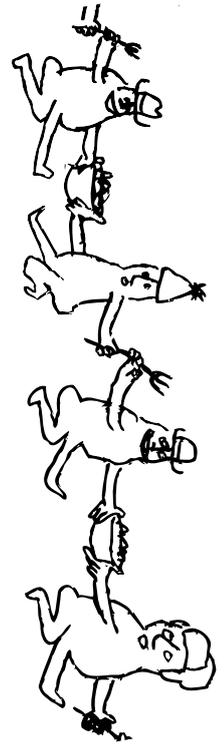
We are a duality, two sides of the same coin. The coin is a perfect way to understand Zenwacky. On the one side is Zen, on the other is wacky, but they are fused together. And what happens when you flip that coin and it just so happens to land on the third side of the coin, on the edge? In an NFL match in 2013 between the Philadelphia Eagles and the Detroit lions, the coin landed on the edge and then we wonder what it can mean in our binary logical world. It's not that we didn't receive an answer to the flip; we received an answer to the question that we were not asking. The edge is a queer answer; it's a Koan; it's in the mind of Monty Python, when they said, "And now for something completely different." Zenwacky is the third side of the coin. It's a dynamic side because it is a spectrum; it is rolling and fading, a swirling conclusion to the flip. And if you can imagine the third side of the coin getting thicker, just a bit more thick, and just a little bit more, until it is thick enough that it looks like a little sausage coin and when you flip it, it is statistically more likely to land on the Zenwacky answer.

It's a comfortable phrase, "hakuna matata". It rolled off the tongue and came out when the time was right, squeezed out like a newborn slimy baby.

Zenwacky is an approach, a way of seeing and doing. It is an aesthetic philosophy that proposes an appreciation based on a dualistic idea. On the one hand it is about intake, about what we see. To see through a Zenwacky lens is to arrive into a meditative state of mind, focusing on the wacky world. It is to stare so deeply at something silly, to the point that even the silly wonders why you keep staring. It is not that the subject you are looking at is necessarily Zenwacky; it is about finding a Zenwacky way of looking at things. It is to search for nonsense Koans that surround us all the time; loopholes and gaps in logic where poke-a-dot impulsive goo will flow. It's a profound silliness that goes on and on. Some Buddhists will study one Koan for their entire life.

But Zenwacky is also a way of doing. It has an output and can be embodied in things like a monochrome painting that's slipping and folding onto the floor. It's there to say, "Uh oh, this perfection is getting a little bit funny!" To do Zenwacky is to create outwards with a focused ridiculousness. It is not wacky for the sake of wacky, but wacky that provokes the Zen. We find this Zenwacky quality in things and it reminds us that meditative absurdity is a skilled art.

Of course, Zenwacky is difficult because it carries ambiguities, the duality is constantly flipping, it's a word that can't be nailed down exactly, it ate too many Mexican jumping beans and now it has to do the fart fart fart dance. But we can try to get close to understanding it through examples:



I remember when I first saw the car in Italy as a teenager and thought it was very wacky. It was more than wacky. It was so foreign and strange; I was intrigued to know more.

The Fiat Multipla is considered by many as the ugliest car ever made, but at the same time it was rated as the best car of the year in 1999 by Topgear, and then as the best family car for four years in a row. The Museum of Modern Art exhibited the car in their exhibition "Cars of the 21st Century". The car is the same length of the Volkswagen Golf but can seat six people, three in the front row, and has ample storage in the back. It has good kilometers per liter and is quite an affordable car. I also hear it's good for first dates.

They say that when you look at the car from the outside, you see all the people smiling inside it. And then you wonder to yourself, "what are they all smiling about?" But if you were inside, you wouldn't need to ask the question because you would already know. The car produces good social cohesion; it's like a living room. Imagine all the people living life in peace.

But listen, I'm no car salesman, no, I'm a conceptual salesman, I'm trying to sell you an idea. And this car, the Fiat Multipla, well it is much more than a car, it's a statement. It's a statement from God. It's a decree, because in Latin "Fiat" means "let there be" as in "Fiat lux" or "Let there be light." So "Fiat Multipla" literally means, "Let there be Multiples." And "Multiples" is the term in the scientific community for the phenomena of simultaneous discovery. In hundreds of examples recorded throughout history, people came up with the same idea or invention at the same time, but in different places. Newton and Leibniz both discovered Calculus, six people claimed to be the inventors of the thermometer, and nine people were the first creators of the telescope.

Not only is love in the air, but ideas are floating in the air as well, they are traveling as specially charged particles bouncing around from bubble to bubble. You may have been wondering why the Multipla has this extra bubble on the front. It's not there just for your amusement; it contains a gaseous reservoir of compressed Simultiplaneous Particles.

The Fiat Multipla is God's decree for the existence of Simultiplaneous Particles. These particles are around us at this very moment feeding our thoughts. It's a bit like telepathic communication except there is no communication; we are just thinking the same things at the same time.

And it's no wonder we are constantly repeating each other, we are part of the same bubble, we are breathing the same air.

Are you thinking what I'm thinking?

