

Daoist Aesthetics and Modern American Poetry

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Daoist Aesthetics and Modern American Poetry¹⁾

Wai-lim Yip

Daoist aesthetics refers to perceptual modes and expressive strategies developed from the highly suggestive writings of Lao Zi 老子 (the *Dao-de-jing* 道德經) and Zhuang Zi 莊子 (the *Zhuangzi* 莊子), produced between 6 and 3 B. C. The *Dao Jia* 道家 (School of Dao 道, or Way) began, originally, not as treatises on aesthetics as such, but as a critique of the framing functions of language in the feudalistic Zhou Dynasty's (12-6 B. C.) construction of Names or Norms (the Naming System 名制) to legitimize and consolidate its power hierarchies. The Daoists felt that under the Naming System (such as calling the Emperor the 'Son of Heaven' 天子, investing *lords* 君, fathers 父, and husbands 夫 with unchallenged power over *subjects* 臣, *sons* 子, and *wives* 婦, and giving special privileges to first males over other males etc.) the birthrights of humans as natural beings were restricted and distorted. Lao Zi began his project with full awareness of this restrictive and distortive activity of names and words and their power-wielding violence. It was this awareness that opened up the Daoist reconsiderations of language and power, both a political and an aesthetic project.

Politically, when Lao Zi said, "The speakable Dao is not the Constant Dao. The nameable Name is not the Constant Name" (1:1) and proposed to return to the *Su Pu* 素樸 (Un-carved Block) or the "Great Undivided Institution" (1:28), he intended to implode the so-called "Kingly Dao", the "Heavenly Dao" and the Naming System so that memories of the repressed, exiled and alienated natural self could be fully reawakened leading to recovery of full humanity. The Daoist project is a counterdiscourse to the territorializations of power, an act to disarm and deframe the tyranny of language.

This political critique of language opens up larger philosophical and aesthetic dimensions. From the very beginning, the Daoists believed that the totalizing compositional activity of all phenomena, changing and ongoing, is beyond human comprehension. All conscious efforts to generalize, formulate, classify and order them will result in some form of restriction and reduction. We impose these conceptions which, by definition, must be partial and incomplete, upon total phenomena at the peril of losing touch with the concrete appeal of the totality of things. Meanwhile, the real world, quite without human supervision and explanation, is {totally alive, self-generating, self-conditioning, self-transforming and self-complete (*wuyan-duhua* 無言獨化)}. Inherent in this recognition of the inadequacy of language is the acceptance of humans as limited and the rejection of the idea of seeing humans as preeminently the controller or orderer of

things. To represent the original condition in which things and humans can freely emerge, first and foremost, humans must understand their position in and relation to the Great Composition of Things. Humans, being only one form of being among a million others, have no prerogative to classify the cosmic scheme. We should understand that “Ducks’ legs are short; lengthening them means pain. Cranes’ legs are long; shortening them means suffering” (2:317). We must leave them as they are in nature. Each form of being has its own nature, has its own place; how can we take *this* as *subject* (principal) and *that* as *object* (subordinate)? How can we impose “our” viewpoint upon others as the right viewpoint, the only right viewpoint? “Not to discriminate *this* and *that* as opposites is the essence of Dao. There you get the Axis. There you attain the Center of the Ring to respond to the endless... Obliterate the distinctions and view things from both *this* and *that* (*liangxing* 兩行, to travel on two paths) (2:66) is called the Balance of Dao (2:70).”

It is not hard to realize that what is called *this* (the so-called subject, determining and dominating agent) is really also the *that* (the so-called object, dominated and determined), for when I say *this*, is it not also *that* from your point of view? Thus, only when the subject retreats from its dominating position—i. e. not to put “I” in the primary position for aesthetic contemplation—can we allow the Free Flow of Nature to reassume itself. Phenomena do not need “I” to have their existences; they all have their own inner lives, activities and rhythms to affirm their authenticity as things. Authenticity or truth does not come from “I”; things possess their existences and their forms of beauty and truth before we name them. Subject and object, principal and subordinate, are categories of superficial demarcation. Subject and object, consciousness and phenomena interpenetrate, inter-complement, inter-define, and inter-illuminate, appearing simultaneously, with humans corresponding to things, things corresponding to humans, things corresponding to things extending throughout the million phenomena. Accordingly, we must be aware that each of our perceptual acts, i. e., each of our makings of meaning is provisional and it has to wait for the presence of, and modification by, other angles, other perceptions, in order to be free from the fetters of naming, while using them.

To eschew the domination of things by human subjectivity now also means that we must view things as things view themselves. When Lao Zi said, “to view the Universe through the Universe” (1:54), or when Zhuang Zi said, “to hide the Universe in the Universe”, this is to reach out to the Whole instead of breaking it into units. One way of achieving this comprehensive viewing is to view from infinite space. “To see and see not.../continuous, it cannot be named,/and returns to nothingness.../the condition of no shape,/the form of no things... Dao as such/is seen, unseen./Seen, unseen/there is, in it, something forming./Forming, unforming/there are, in it, things (1:14;1:21). It is no accident that Zhuang Zi began his “Free and Easy Wandering” with the skyreaching flight of the great Peng bird, beating the water and rising ninety thousand miles (2:4).

It is no accident that most Chinese landscape paintings use aerial, mid-air, and ground perspectives simultaneously and freely. Front mountains, back mountains, front villages, back villages, bays in front of mountains, and bays behind mountains are seen simultaneously. This is because the viewers are not locked into only one viewing position. Instead they are allowed to change positions constantly to undo viewing restrictions, allowing several variations of knowledge to converge upon their consciousness. Take Fan Kuan's 范寬 "Travellers in the Valley". In this large vertical hanging scroll, a caravan of travellers, appearing very small, emerge from the lower right corner with large trees behind them. This means that we are viewing this unit from a distance. But behind the trees, a very distant mountain now springs before our eyes, huge, majestic and immediate as if pressing upon our eyes. We are given to view the scene simultaneously from two distances and from several altitudes. Between the foreground and the background lies a diffusing mist, creating an emptiness out of its whiteness, an emptiness which has physicality in the real world. It is this whiteness, this void which helps to dissolve our otherwise locked-in sense of distances, engendering a free-floating registering activity.

A similar free-floating activity is reinvented in the poetic language in classical Chinese poetry. Language now can be used to avoid being locked into one stationary, restricted, subjectively dominated, directed and determined position; this is to be achieved by adjusting syntactical structures to allow objects and events to maintain their multiple spatial and temporal extensions, and by providing a gap between objects, events, or frames of meanings, an emptiness, a subversive space, so to speak, whereby one can move back and forth between or among them to evoke a larger sense of what is given so as to constantly remodel, and, at the same time, deframe and reframe anything that gets stuck.

For example, although the Chinese language also has articles and personal pronouns, they are often dispensed with in poetry, opening up an indeterminate space for the reader to enter and reenter for double to multiple perception. Take this poem by Li Bai (Li Po 李白):

玉	階	生	白	露
jade	step(s)	grow	white	dew(s)
夜	久	侵	羅	襪
night	late	soak/attack	gauze	stocking(s)
卻	下	水	晶	簾
let-down	crystal	-	blind(s)	
玲	瓏	望	秋	月
glass-clear	watch	autumn	moon	

The verb that calls for a pronoun as the subject is "let down". If the reader supplies

“she” as the subject, then he is standing outside looking in *objectively*, so to speak, at an object (the court lady). But he can also supply “I” for “let down” in which case he is also *subjectively* looking out, being identified with the protagonist. In other words, the absence of a personal pronoun allows the reader to approach reality at once objectively and subjectively, simultaneously moving back and forth between two positions.

Then, there is the absence of connective elements (prepositions, conjunctions), and these, aided by the indeterminacy of parts of speech and no-tense declensions in verbs affords the reader a unique freedom to consort with the real-life world. The degree of syntactical freedom can be illustrated by a palindrome poem written in classical Chinese²³ by Chow Tse-tsung 周策縱; it is a five-character regulated poem arranged in a circle:



We can begin with any character, proceed clockwise or counter-clockwise, and always come out with a new poem. There are at least forty versions in this text and, according to the author, even if we also skip a character as we proceed, each five-character group will still form a perfect line. Clearly, this text cannot be translated into English and still work the same way. In English, as in all Indo-European languages, a sentence is almost always structured in a stipulated direction according to rigid syntactical rules. (For example, a subject leads to a verb to an object; articles govern certain nouns; past actions are to be cast in the past tense; parts of speech are clearly demarcated and determined, all in an act of predication to articulate and specify relationships). Chow's poem can behave as it does because the classical Chinese language, as it is used in poetry, is free from syntactical rigidities—having no articles, personal pronouns, tense declensions and other connective elements (prepositions, conjunctions), as well as being indeterminate in parts of speech.

These facts quite often leave the words in a loosely-committed relationship with the reader, who remains in a sort of middle ground between engaging with and disengaging from them. Although not all Chinese lines can be syntactically as free as the present text, many Chinese poems capitalize upon this flexibility. This syntactic freedom promotes a kind of predicative condition wherein words, like objects in the real-life world, are free from predetermined closures of relationship and meaning and offer themselves to us in an open space. Within this open space around them, we can move freely and approach them from various vantage points to achieve different shades of the same aesthetic moment. We are given to witness the acting-out of objects and events in

cinematic visuality, and stand, as it were, at the threshold of various possible meanings.

The syntactic flexibility found in many classical Chinese lines—indefinite positioning, indeterminate relationships, ambiguous and multi-roled functions of certain parts of speech, etc.—is to allow the reader to retrieve a similar space of freedom for viewing, feeling and reading in which he stays in a middle ground, engaging with and disengaging from the objects given upon his perceptual horizon. Take the common phrase *songfeng* (松風, pine/wind). Are we to read it as “winds in the pines”, “winds through the pines”, or “pines in the winds”? Each of these phrases in English imposes a clearly determinate or demarcated relationship between *pine/s* and *wind/s*, but, by doing so, it has changed the original condition of our being placed therein, as it were, in which our order of impressions is something like this: we see the pines and feel the winds simultaneously rather than being told or directed to see them only in a certain way. Take again another common phrase, *yunshan* (雲山, cloud/mountain). Three or four possible formations of relationships or articulations quickly come to mind: “mountains in the clouds”, “clouds in the mountains”, “clouded mountains”, or “cloudlike mountains”. But it is precisely because of the syntactically uncommitted relationship here between *cloud* and *mountain* that, as a mode of (re)presentation, such a phrase can subsume or evoke all three or four formations simultaneously.

Here are some more examples, which I will merely lay out word-for-word (a) to compare with (b) minimum translations with intrusive English syntactical elements inserted in brackets.

1. a. 雞 聲 茅 店 月
cock/n. crow/n. thatch(ed)/n. inn/n. moon/n.
- b. (At) cockcrow, (the) moon (is seen above?/by?) thatch(ed) inn
- a. 人 跡 板 橋 霜
man/n. trace/n. plank/n. bridge/n. frost/n.
- b. footprint(s) (are seen upon the) frost (covering the) wooden bridge
2. a. 澗 戶 寂 無 人
stream hut silent no one
- b. (a) hut (by? above? overlooking?) stream (is) silent: (there is) no one
3. a. 星 臨 萬 戶 動
Star(s) come ten-thousand house(s) move.
- b1. (While the) stars (are twinkling above the) ten-thousand households. . .
- b2. (When the) star(s) come, ten-thousand house(s) move
4. a. 月 落 烏 啼 霜 滿 天
Moon set(s) crow(s) caw frost full sky.
- b. (As the) moon set(s), crow(s) caw (against a) full sky (of) frost

5. a. 國 破 山 河 在

country broken mountain river be (exist)

b. (Though the) country (is) sunder(ed), mountain(s) (and) river(s) endure

It is not difficult to see how all the b-lines (even with minimum English syntactical elements inserted) have changed the original mode of perception, changing fluid viewing mobility (1 & 2) to restrictive, guided directives, changing visual events to *statements* about the events, resulting in an important loss of all the dramatic co-presence, spatial tensions and counterpoints and interplay between them (3 & 4), and changing the montage format that retains multiple suggestiveness into a mere commentary dominated and guided by the poet's subjectivity (5).

Let me elaborate on one example. In (3), we know from certain details—the cock's crow, the inn, the moon—that this is early morning and a trip is involved. These details are given to us at one instant to constitute an atmosphere that strongly suggests the actuality of the situation, but we can never be certain as to where, in the background, we should put the cock, the moon, the inn, and the bridge. Are we to visualize these, following the habits of English, in the manner illustrated above: (At) cockcrow, the moon (is seen above) the thatched inn; footprints (are seen upon) the frost (covering the) wooden bridge? We need not point out here that there are other possible ways of locating the relationships between the moon and the inn. The moon, for instance, could be barely above the horizon. Not to determine fixed viewing locations, or not to use syntax to articulate such relationships, is to give back to the reader-viewer the freedom of moving into and about in the scene, simultaneously engaging with and disengaging from the objects therein.

The classical Chinese language is *tenseless*. Why tenseless? Shall we cast actions into the past, as in this example from Wordsworth, "I wandered lonely as a cloud..."? The fact is that if the Chinese poet has avoided restricting actions to one specific agent, he has also refrained from committing them to finite time—or perhaps the mental horizon of the Chinese poets does not lead them to posit an event within a segment of finite time. For what, indeed, is past, present, and future in real time? As soon as I pronounce the word *now*, it is already in the *past*. The concepts of past, present and future belong to the world of ideas; it is a human invention imposed upon Phenomenon, or the undifferentiated mode of Being, which we break into many linear orders as if they were authentic representations of the reality of Time. The words of the Daoist Zhuang Zi are instructive here: "There is a beginning. There is a not yet beginning to be a beginning. There is a not yet beginning to be a not yet beginning to be a beginning..."⁸⁾ Just as the concepts of "beginning", "middle" and "end" were proposed at the risk of cutting Time into sections, those of "past", "present", and "future" are also artificial demarcations that break the undifferentiated mode of Being into units and segments for subjective control.

The capacity of the Chinese poem to be free from the arbitrary temporal constructs of the West—to maintain a certain degree of close harmony with the concrete events in reality—can be illustrated by the way cinema handles temporality, for film is a medium that most felicitously approximates the immediacy of experience. Without mulling over the complex use of time and space in the art of the film, let us address fundamental issues. For our purpose, a passage from Stephenson and Debrix's introductory book, *The Cinema as Art*, will make this clear. Cinema has "a natural freedom in temporal construction... The lack of time prepositions and conjunctions, tenses and other indications... can leave the film free to reach the spectator with an immediacy which literature is unable to match".⁴ Time prepositions and conjunctions such as "*before* he came", "*since* I have been here", and "*then*" do not exist in a film, nor in the actual events of life. There is no tense in either case. "When we watch a film", say Stephenson and Debrix, "it is just something that is happening—*now*".⁵

Language, under suitable manipulation, can evoke a semblance of the visuality of painting and the tonality of music; in particular, it can approximate the morphology of our sensing process. Significant in this attempt is not to allow the ideational activities to overwhelm or even impede the immediate emergence and presencing of things from total phenomena. Take this line from Du Fu (Tu Fu 杜甫).

綠 垂 風 折 筍
green dangle wind break young bamboo

Many readers are inclined to see in it syntactic inversion and thus read the line as "The wind-broken young bamboo is dangling green". This reading, or this way of writing (predication), ignores the grammar of experience at work. Imagine the actuality of the situation: the poet, travelling, encounters suddenly a *green* dangling. At this moment, he cannot tell what it is. It is only *later* that he finds out that it is a young bamboo broken by the wind. "Green—dangle—wind-broken young bamboo" is the grammar of language following the grammar of experience. "The wind-broken young bamboo is dangling green", which adheres to the *conventions* of language but belies the experiential process, is the *conclusion after the fact, not the actuality of the moment*.

In a sense, it is the consideration of this kind of authenticating attempt in Chinese poetics that has led Chinese poets to bypass many of the syntactic restraints from which the Chinese language is not totally free. Central to this perceptual horizon is the attempt to promote the visuality of objects, to preserve the spatial tensions and counterpoints between them and to mimic the order of appearance of these events through spotlighting phases of perception.

Words, as signs, function at the maximum when they capture the life mechanism of the moment of experience. Let us examine two more examples—the first from Wang

Wei—that suggest the articulation of visual curves and movements:

大 漠 孤 煙 直

Vast desert: lone smoke, straight.

“Vast desert”, a panoramic view; “lone smoke” from possibly one single household, a single object in the midst of an immense expanse of emptiness; “straight”, a windless condition true to the actuality of a desert. The line has the appeal of a painting; with the word “straight”, it is almost sculptural.

In this line by Li Bai from his poem “To See Meng Haoran off to Yangzhou”:

孤 帆 遠 影 碧 空 尽

A lone sail, a distant shade, lost into the horizon

we witness the progression of the boat moving from the foreground slowly to disappear into the background in the distance, suggesting both the duration of time Li Bai has been standing by the Yangtze River watching his friend’s boat move away and, indirectly, the deep bond of their friendship.

Now let us consider the following complete poem:

Dried vine(s), (an) old tree, evening crow(s);

(A) small bridge, flowing water, men’s homes;

(An) ancient road, west wind(s), (a) lean horse;

Sun slant(s) west:

(A) heart-torn man at sky’s end.

Ma Zhiyuan 馬致遠, ca. 1160–1341

In this poem, which operates pictorially rather than semantically, the successive shots do not constitute a linear development (such as *how this leads to that*). Rather, the objects coexist as in a painting, and yet the mobile point of view has made it possible to temporalize the spatial units.

*

In a session on the structure of Chinese characters that I gave in an American grade school, a boy, after I had finished explaining how some of the Chinese characters are pictorially based, the signs matching the actual objects, proceeded, naively, to pose a sagacious question: “All these are nouns—how are they to form ideas?” It seems legitimate to pose the same question about many of the Chinese lines above. I answered him by bringing out another category of Chinese characters. The three characters I chose were 時, 言 and 詩. The etymological origin of 時 (“time”) consists of the pictographs of ☉ “sun” and 止, the latter being a pictograph developed from an ancient picture of a foot touching the ground 止, which came to mean both “stop” (the modern

form of which is 止) and “go” (the modern form of which is 之). What the ancient pictograph of 𠄎 means is, then, the termination of a previous movement and the beginning of another, a measured, dancelike activity. Thus, the earliest Chinese viewed the measured movement of stop-and-go of the sun as the idea of time. The earliest pictographic stage of 言 was 詠, denoting a mouth blowing the tip of a flute. This character now means “speech”, “message”, or “word”, which, to the early Chinese people was to be in rhythmic measure. The third character means poetry, which consists of two pictographs with which we are now familiar, namely, 詠 (rhythmic, measured message) and 止 (dancelike, measured movement of stop-and-go). Here, in all three cases, two visual objects juxtapose to form an idea. As we many recall, this structural principle of the Chinese character inspired Sergei Eisenstein to conceive the technique of montage in film. In his “The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram”, for example, Eisenstein says,

The point is that the copulation... of two hieroglyphs of the simplest series is to be regarded not as their sum, but as their product, i. e., as a value of another dimension, another degree; each, separately, corresponds to an *object*, to a fact, but their combination corresponds to a *concept*. From separate hieroglyphs has been fused—the ideogram. By the combination of two “depictables” is achieved the representation of something that is graphically undepictable... Yes, it is exactly what we do in the cinema...⁶³

The same structural principle continues to be at work in Chinese poetry. Witness example (7).

國 破 山 河 在
Empire/broken/mountain/river/be (exist).

The reader feels, *without being told*, the contrast and tension in the scenery so presented. Explanatory elaboration can only destroy the immediate contact between the viewer and the scene, as it does in this translation by Bynner⁷⁾ and in those by many others:

Though a country be sundered, hills and rivers endure.

Whether by using montage or a mobile point of view, the Chinese poets give paramount importance to the acting-out of visual objects and events, letting those objects and events explain *themselves* by their coexisting, coextensive emergence from nature, letting the spatial tensions reflect conditions and situations rather than coercing these objects and events into some preconceived artificial order by sheer human interpretive elaboration.

(a) Syntactical Innovations in Modern American Poetry

The success of the Chinese poets in authenticating the fluctuation of concrete events

in Phenomenon, their ability to preserve the multiple relationships in a kind of penumbra of indeterminateness, depends to a great extent on the sparseness of syntactic demands. This freedom allows the poet to highlight independent visual events, leaving them in coextensive spatial relationships. And this language, this medium for poetry, would not have become what it is without the support of a unique aesthetic horizon—the Chinese concept of the loss of self in undifferentiated existence—ordained by centuries of art and poetry. There is an inseparability of medium and poetics, of language and world view. How, then, can a language of rigid syntactical rules such as English successfully approximate a mode of presentation whose success depends on freedom from syntax? And how, to reverse the question, can an epistemological world view developed from the Platonic and Aristotelian metaphysics, which emphasize the ego in search of the non-ego and attempt to classify Being in concepts, propositions, and ordered structures—how can such a world view turn around to endorse a medium that belies the function and process of epistemological elaboration?

The answer is that it cannot, that such a turn is impossible so long as the Platonic dichotomy of the phenomenal and the noumenal (appearance and reality) and the Aristotelian “universal logical structures” persist without any sort of adjustment. Nor can any attempt to turn the English language into one of broken, unsyntactical units as a medium for poetry succeed so long as no attempt is made to widen the possibilities of the Western aesthetic horizon to include the *other* world view, the Chinese mode of perception, at least coextensively with the native world view. It is at this juncture that the discussion of convergence becomes most cogent and significant.

The adjustment of Western world views in modern times is the subject for a book in itself. A brief scenario of some of the shifts of emphasis will be helpful here. (1) Kierkegaard questions the abstract systems of the West (the world of ideas) and opts for concrete existence. (2) Walter Pater asks that we focus upon the experience itself and not the fruits of experience and that the various experiences, each unique in and by itself, should not be measured according to “eternal outlines” ascertained once for all. (3) William James insists upon “collateral contemporaneity” and A. E. Whitehead demands “immediate deliverance of experience”; both want to resist the total real world’s being broken up into serial orders, or reduced to desirated forms. (4) Heidegger attempts to recover the original ground of being by pointing to the given as given, undoing slowly the reductionist concepts, classifications and logos-centered orders. He sees that “all essents (beings) are of equal value” and we must “avoid singling out any particular essent, including man”. Humankind, being such, should not be placed in the primary position of dominating and controlling the world. We should return to the condition before language happened—return to what his disciple Maurice Merleau-Ponty called “the world that is always ‘already there’ before reflection begins—an inalienable presence”. The word *being* should be used only as a provisional pointer; once we reach the

inalienable world of things, this word should be crossed out so as to make possible the unconcealment of things as things, i. e. the prepredicative condition of things before the closures of abstract meanings. (5) T. E. Hulme affirms the fluidity of the world and criticizes the ancients' egoistic enterprise to "construct things which should be proud boasts that they, men, were immortal". He suggests that since their uses of syntax, like their reductive scientific thinking, explain, that is, *ex plane*, the interpenetrating Intensive Manifold into Extensive Manifold, we should attempt to retrieve a language that can hand over sensations bodily to prevent us from gliding through an abstract process. (6) Partly prompted by the indeterminacy and multi-dimensionality of the French symbolists and the futurists, partly spurred by his contact with Chinese poetry, Pound, in spite of his controversial political allegiance, advances syntactical innovations (syntactical and space breaks leading to the effects of simultaneity, montage and visual perspicuity) that cut deep into the perceptual-expressive procedures,—in particular, the discursive impulses,—of Western poetry and poetics.

Hulme was arguing for a poetic ideal before which the English language, with all its rigid syntax for elaboration and clarification, becomes helpless. Hulme called for the destruction of syntax to achieve the concrete. The earliest attempt, however, was made by Mallarmé. In order to arrive at a pure state of the poetry of essences, to freely transpose objects and words for his construction of a world so absolute that it has no strings attached to physical reality,⁸⁾ he dislocates syntax and, in his later sonnets, withdraws all the links that originally riveted the poem together.⁹⁾

This absolutism of art, as well as his syntactical innovation, prepared the way for Pound and others to realize the poetic ideal that both Hulme and Pound, each in his own way, postulated. The adjustment of conventional English made by Pound to approximate the curves of experience has been a continuing process. As early as 1911, before he came into contact with Chinese poetry, he argued that "the artist seeks out the luminous detail and presents it. He does not comment" (SP, 23). After his contact with Chinese poetry, he wrote that "it is because Chinese poets have been content to set forth their matter without moralizing and without comment that one labors to make a translation".¹⁰⁾ Early in 1901, Pound advised William Carlos Williams in similar terms, and in 1916 wrote to Iris Barry emphatically about "the necessity... of presenting an image, or enough images of concrete things arranged to stir the reader" and that "statements and conclusions are purely optional, not essential, often superfluous and therefore bad" (L, 90-1).

Following the footsteps of Mallarmé's dislocation and even destruction of syntax, Pound began his adjustment of conventional English in his poem, "The Coming of War: Actaeon", by breaking the traditional lines into small units graphically arranged. Compare (a) with (b)—(a) being the rearrangement of (b), "The Coming of War: Actaeon"—back to the traditional line format.

- (a) An image of Lethe, and the fields
 Full of faint light, but golden gray cliffs
 And beneath them, a sea, harsher than granite. . .
- (b) An image of Lethe,
 and the fields
 Full of faint light
 but golden,
 Gray cliffs,
 and beneath them
 A sea
 Harsher than granite. . .

The syntactical breaks here serve to promote the visuality of the images, to isolate them as independent visual events, to force the reader-viewer to perceive the poem in spatial counterpoints, to enhance the physicality of objects (e. g., “sea” is literally and visually beneath the “gray cliffs”, which protrude from above), and to activate the poem through phases of perception (as does the spotlighting effect or the mobile point of view similar to the effects we find in Chinese poetry). These effects, modified and refined, dominate the entire *Cantos*.

In “The Coming of War: Actaeon”, Pound used a space break to occasion a time break; he had not yet dealt actively with syntactical breaks. The latter aspect started with the “Metro” poem, and the discussion of the superpository technique in his 1914 essay on “Vorticism” (by now too famous to need repetition here) launched him into more daring innovation.

The “Metro” poem was modeled after the Japanese haiku, an example of which Pound examined in the same essay:

The footsteps of the cat upon the snow:
are like plum blossoms.

As Pound explained, “the words ‘are like’ would not occur in the original”.¹¹⁾ He precisely followed the example of that original in his “Metro” poem:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd:
 Petals on a wet, black bough.

To take away the words “are like” or “is like” is to disrupt syntax, giving prominence and independence to the two visual events, letting them coexist to interdefine one another.¹²⁾ This, I need not point out here, is what later Eisenstein called montage.

Indeed, Pound's later obsessive elaboration on the Chinese ideograms such as those I discussed in the last section led him to expand it into a central technique in his *Cantos*—the ideogrammic method, juxtaposing and superposing images, events, and histories across vast space and time. The earlier version of "The Metro" that had been in *Poetry* of 1913 brings out also Pound's obsession with the visual order and importance of the perceiving act. It runs:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd:
Petals on a wet, black bough

Two more statements in Pound's poetic development need to be highlighted here. First, at about the time of his Imagist Period, Pound proclaimed that

the proper and perfect symbol is the natural object, that if a man use "symbols", he must so use them that their symbolic function does not obtrude; so that a sense... is not lost to those who do not understand the symbol as such, to whom, for instance, a hawk is a hawk (LE, 9).

which seems to suggest, along with Kafka's questioning of the metaphoric function of language, an aesthetic position similar to the Daoist emphasis on leaving things as they are in nature. Second, one finds this important passage in Fenollosa's essay from which Pound formulated his theory of the ideogrammic method, a poetics that seems to contain all the aesthetic dimensions he had been arguing for: simultaneity, montage and visual perspicuity, which happen to be also the staple of the Daoist aesthetic:

Chinese poetry... speaks at once with the vividness of painting, and with the mobility of sounds. It is, in some sense, more objective than either, more dramatic. In reading Chinese we do not seem to be juggling mental counters, but to be watching *things* work out their fate (F, 9).

"Not to juggle mental counters, but to watch *things* work out their fate", can easily taken to be within the Daoist horizon. The fact that the poems Pound has written before and after his Imagist period are found to be obsessed with the transcendental rather than the immanent is an issue too complex to be dealt with here.¹⁸⁾ But it is a fact that with these aesthetic turns both space breaks and syntactical breaks dominate his later works, the *Cantos* in particular. Here are some sample lines:

Rain; empty river; a voyage

.....

Autumn moon; hills rise above lakes

.....

Broad water; geese line out with the autumn.
from Canto 49.

Prayer: hands uplifted

Solitude: a person, a NURSE
from Canto 64.

Moon, cloud, tower, a patch of the battistero
all of a whiteness.
from Canto 79.

At this point, it would be helpful to draw attention to one aspect of my conclusion in *Exra Pound's Cathay*. I argued that instead of simply pointing out the mistakes of the Fenollosa-Pound interpretation of the Chinese character, we should consider what aesthetic horizon they found in the structure of the Chinese character that excited them and how it helped them to reaffirm their own obsession with simultaneity and visual perspicuity.

The fact is that even if the Pound-Fenollosa explanation of the ideogram were correct, as for instance in the case of EAST (東) and DAWN (旦), there is no way for the English language to reproduce them *literally* or *physically*. For if we try to reproduce the Chinese character (sun behind tree or, as Pound has it, "sun rising, showing through tree's branches"), we cannot write the word "sun" literally on top of the word "tree", for one word will be crossed out by the other, whereas the Chinese character for sun (日) on top of the character for tree (木) easily forms a new Chinese character, EAST (東). In the case of the Chinese character for dawn (旦) (Pound's "sun above line of horizon"), we cannot reproduce it merely by writing:

SUN
HORIZON

This arrangement is still different from the Chinese 旦 which comes from the pictorial 日. Any English reproduction of the elements in the two characters will involve the insertion of logical, directional links. Hence, the simultaneous presence of "sun" and "tree" in one picture is rendered into "sun *behind* tree" or "sun *rising, showing through* tree's branches". The insertion of logical, directional links between the objects immediately destroys the simultaneity of the elements in the Chinese characters and allows them to fall back upon the logic of succession. Why, then, was Pound so excited over the structure of the Chinese character?¹⁴⁾

Clearly, as we look back on it, it was the *compositional* qualities of the Chinese character that helped to define the developing goals of Pound's project: simultaneity, montage and visual perspicuity. That is why he considered Fenollosa's essay a piece of poetics rather than a treatise on the Chinese character as such. Pound seemed to be fully aware of the fact that to be true to the aesthetic ideal as proposed by the ideogram and by Chinese poetry that he finds compatible with the compositional ideals of his poetry, he must relinquish logical and directional links. The examples given above attest to this attempt. Indeed, in his *Cantos* Pound progressively tried to take away these "links" to achieve what I call "leaps of logic" on an extensive scale, leading to a non-matrixed presentation, a simultaneous "happening" or acting-out of luminous cultural moments as patterned energies in montage or polyphonic orchestration.

The graphic and syntactical innovations of William Carlos Williams are a combination of strategies from Pound/Chinese examples and those found in Stein's language experiments. First, compare the conventional line structure of the following sentence with Williams' graphic arrangement of it as poetry:

(1) So much depends upon a red wheelbarrow
glazed with rain water beside the white chickens.

(2) so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.

In Williams' graphic treatment, the space breaks enhance the visuality of different phases of the perception of the object as words gain independence and liberation from the linearity of the normal line structures. As a result, these independent visual events or moments allow the reader-viewer changing perspectives of the object as he is transposed into the midst of a scene to witness its various spatial extensions. The same is true of Williams' "Nantucket":

Flowers through the window

lavender and yellow

Changed by white curtains—
Smell of cleanliness—

Sunshine of late afternoon—
on the glass tray

A glass pitcher, the tumbler
turned down by which

a key is lying—and the
immaculate white bed

This technique of space breaks, coupled with syntactic breaks, forces the reader to focus attention *at all times*—this is the lesson that Olson and Creeley learned—on the urgency of every moment as it occurs in the process of perceiving. Williams happily approved the essay “Projective Verse” by Olson (and Creeley) as an extension and clarification of his technique.

Space and syntactic breaks abound in contemporary poetry after Pound and Williams. Indeed, most of the poets in Donald Allen and George F. Butterick’s *The Postmoderns: The New American Poetry Revised* (1982) have incorporated these strategies in their poetry. Obviously, this is no place for a thorough examination of the various ways in which each of these poets receives and makes uses of these strategies. For our purpose, let us look at some examples from Gary Snyder, a statement from Michael McClure and a palindrome attempt by Robert Duncan.

It is a well known fact that Gary Snyder has inherited from Han Shan 寒山 and Wang Wei 王維, and has incorporated Pound’s and Williams’ language (more about this in the next section). The convergence of these influences is most clearly expressed in his translation of Wang Wei done while a student at University of California, Berkeley.¹⁵⁾

空 山 不 見 人
empty mountain not see man
但 聞 人 語 聲
but hear men(’s) voice(s) sound
反 景 入 深 林
reflect shadow enter deep forest
(sun’s reflection)

復 照 青 苔 上
again shine green moss upon

Empty, the mountain—
not a man,
Yet sounds, echoes
as of men talking
Shadows swing into the forest.
Swift light flashes
On dark moss, above.

It is, therefore, not surprising that many of his lines come very close to the working dynamics of the Chinese line. Here are some examples:

Burning the small dead
branches
broke from beneath
Thick spreading white pine
a hundred summers
snowmelt rock and air
hiss in a twisted bough
sierra granite;
mt Ritter—
black rock twice as old
Deneb, Altair
Windy fire.
—“Burning the Small Dead”

First day of the world
white rock ridges
new born
Jay chatters the first time
Rolling a smoke by the campfire
New! never before.
bitter coffee, cold
dawn wind, sun of the cliffs.
from “Hunting. No. 15”

In Snyder’s first example, like the Chinese poem, there is noticeably the absence of the personal pronoun, allowing the action (“burning the small dead/branches..”) to be

equally open to several participants, and thus leaving the action and the objects in their prepredicative conditions without the intrusion of a dominating, aggressively directing subjectivity. There is a muted drama acting out before our eyes, beginning with the local, moving through the larger nature toward the cosmic and back, very much like our travelling in and out of a Chinese landscape painting. Syntactical and space breaks are everywhere, achieving a similar montage layout to that of the Chinese poem.

Michael McClure, in his *Scratching the Beat Surface* (San Francisco, 1982), after quoting a poem of Su Dungpo (1036-1101) from my *Chinese Poetry* (1976) in its word-for-word layout, gives this comment: "Professor Yip then versifies this way—*it is not as good—but clearer*" [italics mine] before he quotes my English rendering. The two versions read as follows:

Tune: "Immortal by the River"
 night drink East Slope wake again drunk
 return—it-seems third watch
 home boy nose-breath already thundering—
 knock door all no response
 lean staff listen river sound
 long regret this body not my possession
 when—forget—busy-buzz
 night deep wind quiet waves—smooth
 small boat from here gone/drift
 river sea entrust rest-of-life

Drinking into deep night at East Slope, sober then drunk.
 I return home perhaps at small hours,
 My page-boy's snoring already like thunder.
 No answer to my knocking at the door,
 I lean on my staff to listen to the river rushing.
 I grieve forever: this body, no body of mine.
 When can I forget this buzzing life?
 Night now still, wind quiet, waves calm and smooth,
 A little boat to drift from here.
 On the river, on the sea, my remaining years.¹⁶⁾

As if to echo Stein's statement that "there is no such thing as putting [words] together without sense", Michael McClure goes so far as to accept the word-for-word format as a more than adequate medium for poetry, believing as he does with Stein, that each word is radiating with more connections than conventional syntactical structures can handle.¹⁷⁾

Lastly, a palindrome attempt by Robert Duncan from his *Bending the Bow*:

The Fire Passage 13

jump stone hand leaf shadow sun
 day plash coin light downstream fish
 first loosen under boat harbor circle
 old earth bronze dark wall waver
 new smell purl close wet green
 now rise foot warm hold cool

which reappears a few pages later, reading backwards and vertically:

cool green waver circle fish sun
 hold wet wall harbor downstream shadow
 warm close dark boat light leaf
 foot purl bronze under coin hand
 rise smell earth loosen plash stone
 now new old first day jump¹⁸⁹

(b) Immanence in Modern American Poetry

Williams Carlos Williams once said, “unless there is/a new mind there cannot be a new line”. In classical Chinese poetry, freedom from syntactical rigidity is directly related to the Daoist idea of noninterference with Nature’s flow and this noninterference is also an affirmation of the immanence of things in Nature. In the words of one Daoist-inspired Chan (Zen) Buddhist, “Mountains are mountains, rivers rivers”. The whole art of landscape poetry in China aims, therefore, to release the objects in Nature from their seeming irrelevance and bring forth their original freshness and thingness—return them to their first innocence—thus, making them relevant as “self-so-complete” objects in their coextensive existence. The poet focuses attention upon them in such a way as to allow them to leap out directly and spontaneously before us, unhindered.

Man (at) leisure. Cassia flower(s) fall.
 Quiet night. Spring mountain (is) empty.
 Moon rise(s). Startle(s)—(a) mountain bird.
 (It) sing(s) at times in (the) spring stream.
 Wang Wei, “Bird-Singing Stream”

(High on the) tree tips, (the) hibiscus
 Set(s) forth red calyces in (the) mountain(s).

(A) stream hut, quiet. No man.

(It) bloom(s) and fall(s), bloom(s) and fall(s).

Wang Wei, "Hsin-i Village"

The scenery *speaks* and *acts*. There is little or no subjective emotion or intellectuality to disturb the inner growth and change of the objects. The poet does not step in, or rather, the poet, having opened up the scene, has stepped aside. The objects spontaneously emerge before the reader-viewer's eyes whereas, in most nature poems in the West, the concreteness of the objects often gives way to abstraction through the poet's analytical intervention, or his symbolic, transcendental impulse where an apple cannot be viewed purely as an apple. In both of these poems, Nature rules as an ongoing entity unrestricted by human makeover. "No man./It blooms and falls, blooms and falls."

The philosophical and aesthetic shift from transcendence to immanence in the West is a complex issue. I have written another essay that addresses this question in Pound, Stevens, and Williams. Here, I will give a brief summary. In this connection, Pound's role is intriguing and complex. On the one hand, his advice to his good friend Williams to get rid of didacticism and his contribution to Imagism, together with his syntactical innovations learned from Chinese and Japanese poetry, as we have said, point toward a poetics of immanent objects, such as his call for the natural symbol ("to call a hawk a hawk") with effects of simultaneity, montage, and visual perspicuity that cut deep into the discursive impulses of Western poetry; on the other, his poetry before and after his Imagist period often travels away from things as things to end up in some transcendental vision. It was Wallace Stevens and Williams who helped focus readers' attention on "real" objects. When Stevens wants "[t]o see the world with an ignorant eye" and titles his last poem, "Of Mere Being", and when Williams insists on "no ideas but in things" or "to embody in a work of art a new world that is always 'real'", these can be seen as the first major attempts to break away from transcendental obsessions toward recovering the "immanence" of things as they are. While Stevens' "unresting mind" still intrudes upon his "mere being", most of his poems, as poems-as-aesthetic-discourses about the real, often staged and acted out, not only make him a fully terrestrial poet, but also pave way the for later poets to embark on the journey toward the immanence of things. While, strictly speaking, Williams is still a Mallarmean expressionist, he has also inherited from Hulme's rejection of abstract thought for concreteness and Pound's anti-discursive imagistic thinking. Thus, his statement "No ideas but in things" and "A life that is here and now is timeless. That is the universal I am seeking: to embody in a work of art a new world that is always "real"... No symbolism is acceptable". But more importantly, it was William James' emphasis upon the real order of the world before the dissection by ideational intrusions and Whitehead's insistence upon "immediate deliverance of experience" that have led Williams and the other postmodern poets to embrace the things as they really are

in the original real world. What is, is real.¹⁹⁾ Like the Daoist-inspired Chinese landscape poets who feel that there is no need to even rhetorically justify the existence of things as things, Williams, too, thinks that an object possesses “an intrinsic movement of its own to verify its own authenticity”, and so he takes it as his task to diffuse as much as possible such rhetorical traces, traces such as those that we still find in Stevens, as, for example, in his “Of Mere Being”. To illustrate my point, let me bracket out some of these rhetorical traces in Stevens’ poem.

Of Mere Being

The palm (at the end of the mind,
Beyond the last thought), rises
In the bronze decor.

A gold-feathered bird
Sings in the palm, (without human meaning,
Without human feeling), a (foreign) song.
(You know then that is not the reason
That makes us happy or unhappy.)
The bird sings. Its feathers shine.

The palm stands on the edge of space.
The wind moves slowly in the branches.
The bird’s fire-fangled feathers dangle down.

In a sense, this poem can be written without the bracketed parts. In such case, the poet, after providing the ambience, steps aside to allow the reader move in to experience directly the immediate presences and acting-out of the objects in their full visual dimensions. The question now is, of course, *how*, in Kenneth Rexroth’s words, the Western poet can bypass epistemological procedures.²⁰⁾ The HOW has sometimes become part of the rhetorical justification of the poet’s object-oriented poem. This we sometimes still find in examples by Rexroth himself:

The holiness of the real
Is always there, accessible
In total immanence.²¹⁾
—“Time is the Mercy of Reality”

The seasons revolve and the years change
With no assistance or supervision,

The moon, *without taking thought*,
 Moves in its cycle, full, crescent, and full.²²⁾
 —“Another Spring” (italics mine)

The questioning of the artificially “constituted” transcendence and affirmation of the immanence of things prepared the way for poets like Gary Snyder, Charles Tomlinson, the later Rexroth, the later Robert Creeley, Robert Bly, Cid Corman, Lew Welch, James Wright and many postmodern poets to meet, receive and present landscape on its own terms with a humility and freedom from egoistic intrusion quite unmatched by previous landscapists.²³⁾

Here, we will only examine the works of Rexroth and Snyder.

1. Kenneth Rexroth.

Rexroth was probably the first American poet after Pound who embraced Chinese culture with almost complete passion and seriousness. He tried to read almost anything about Chinese culture and literature. In his *An Autobiographical Novel, Assays, Classics Revisited*, and many reviews on things Chinese, he generously acknowledged his debt to Chinese culture and art, to Chinese poetry in particular. He related how Pound’s *Cathay* led him into Chinese literature, how as a young boy read with elation Waley’s Chinese translations which had incalculable influence on him, and how an hour of talk with Witter Bynner, translator of Tang poetry, changed his interest and led him to read and translate Du Fu (Tu Fu) fervently whose works have become an important marker of his art.²⁴⁾ As he puts it:

I have saturated myself with his poetry for thirty years. I am sure he has made me a better man, as a moral agent and as a perceiving organism.²⁵⁾

I have had the work of Tu Fu by me since adolescence and over the years have come to know these poems better than most of my own.²⁶⁾

In fact, Du Fu, according to Rexroth, is in some ways “a better poet than either Shakespeare or Homer,²⁷⁾ and that his poetry comes from “a saner, older, more secular culture” as it “embodies more fully the Chinese sense of the unbreakable wholeness of reality. . . . It can be understood and appreciated only by the application of what Albert Schweitzer called ‘reverence for life’. What is, is what is holy”.²⁸⁾ He was greatly excited to find a sounder universe from Joseph Needham’s book on Chinese science:

The dominant influence in this volume seems to be the organic philosophy of Whitehead, shorn of its Platonic excrescences. It serves as an available bridge to the

comprehension of a world in which Nature works by "doing nothing" instead of passing laws, in which the universe moves as a great web of interrelatedness of which man and his imperatives are only part. This is basically a true picture of the Chinese universe. It is a universe full of strange and wonderful things. It is a universe Western man is going to have to understand if we are going to survive happily together...²⁹⁾

We recall in his poem, "Another Spring" (quoted earlier), which was constructed with images and lines from various poems from the Tang Dynasty,³⁰⁾ he affirms the self-generating, self-immanent OTHER world outside ourselves that needs no thought nor supervision. It is clear that his stance is Daoist-oriented. Thus, in an interview conducted by Cyrena N. Pondrom in March, 1968, he repeatedly emphasizes that "poetry deals with much more concrete things. It possesses an intense specificity—the intense specificity of *direct* contact and *direct* communication; rather than dealing intellectually and discursively with permanent archetypes it does so directly via Whitehead's 'presentational immediacy'.³¹⁾ To resort to argument as a form of mastering life and experience is to doom oneself. Man kills himself by defining the indefinable, grasping the inapprehensible. We do not apprehend reality, since this implies an outstretching effort; rather it apprehends us. We are simply in *reality* [italics mine]. We are in being like fish in water, who do not know water exists".³²⁾ The last statement is a free translation of Zhuang Zi's "Fish forget themselves in water; men forget themselves in Dao [Nature's Way]" (2:272).

By returning to the natural function of humans, objects and humans can enter into direct mutual emulation. All evidence shows that Rexroth accepted the Chinese aesthetic horizon, but the early Rexroth accepted it with a certain trepidation. In spite of large paragraphs of landscape in his early poems, there still remain presentational difficulties. First, as we have observed above, he has to introduce into his poems rhetorical justification. Second, he still clings to the method of equivalence (a subtle form of metaphoric structure) by merging landscape somewhat mysteriously into eroticism which, according to Rexroth, is another form of direct experience.³³⁾

Beyond the hills
 The moon is up, and the sky
 Turns to crystal before it.
 The canyon blurs in half-light.
 An invisible palace
 Of glass, full of transparent
 People, settles around me.
 Over the dim waterfall

The intense promise of light
 Grows above the canyon's cleft.
 A nude girl enters my hut,
 With white feet, and swaying hips,
 And fragrant sex.

"Mirror"⁸⁴⁾

I must say, however, that Rexroth was very sincere in his attempt to emulate Chinese poetry. He once said that he wrote poetry according to a kind of Chinese rule, that is, it is a certain place, at a certain time. . . "A gong sounds far off among the pines"—it is a monastery in the mountains. What this does is to put the reader in a poetic situation. It put him in a place, just like it puts him on the stage, makes him one of the actors. He is in the poetic situation. . . This is the fundamental technique of Chinese poetry.⁸⁵⁾

Indeed, we find many of his poems trying to emulate this "rule". His "Yin and Yang", inspired by Du Fu, is a such poem disclosing different activities in spring within the movement of the natural cycle. This desire to become "Chinese" was finally more fully realized in his *New Poems* (1974):

The air has the late summer
 Evening smell of ripe foliage
 And dew cooled dust. The last long
 Rays of sunset have gone from
 The sky. In the greying light
 The last birds twitter in the leaves.
 Far away through the trees, someone
 Is pounding something. The new
 Moon is pale and thin as a
 Flake of ice. Venus glows warm
 Beside it. In the abode
 Of peace, a bell calls for
 Evening meditation.
 As the twilight deepens
 A voice speaks in the silence.

"Star and Crescent" (p. 20)

The objects and events in nature (echoing Chinese motifs) have a fairly spontaneous emergence without the poet's disruptive commentary. Here is another example, from the

same book, of self-sufficient landscape poems in a kind of “presentational immediacy” without going through, in his words, “permanent archetypes intellectually and discursively”:

A cottage in the midst
 Of a miniature forest.
 The only events are the distant
 Cries of peacocks, the barking
 Of more distant dogs
 And high over head
 The flight of cawing crows (p. 28).

2. Gary Snyder.

Snyder’s long and deep identification with Chinese culture and poetry is too well-known to need recounting here. His translation of Han Shan (“Cold Mountain Poems”) turned Han Shan and himself and their lifestyles into a modern legend; and the two together became a sort of popular cultural hero to college youths of the sixties and the seventies through his fictionalization in Jack Kerouac’s *The Dharma Bums* (1959).

When I met him in 1972, I asked him why he was so interested in Chinese landscape poetry; he said, “I grew up in the forests of the Pacific Northwest. When I was about 10, my parents took me to Seattle to see an exhibition of Chinese landscape paintings. I loved them instantly because these were mountains and rivers I recognized; they were as real as those I saw”. The mountains he saw every day were real and alive rather than allegorical, symbolic or artificial. This virgin contact with Nature and the confirmation of this Nature by Chinese landscape paintings prepared him to become one of its staunchest apologists.

Among the most ruthlessly exploited classes: Animals, trees, water, air, grasses.⁸⁶⁾

So many mountains, on so clear a day, the mind is staggered... From Canada to Oregon, and ranges both east and west—the blue mass of the Olympics far over hazy Puget Sound... My companion, who is a poet, said: “You mean, there is a senator for all this?”

Unfortunately, there isn’t a senator for all that. And I would like to think of a new definition of humanism and a new definition of democracy that would include the non-human, that would have representation from those spheres. This is what I think we mean by an ecological conscience.⁸⁷⁾

Gary Snyder’s position is clear. If poetry speaks at all, it should speak for and from

the silent but lively world outside man. It should be at once the voice of man and the voice of Nature. "We must find a way...to incorporate the other people...—the creeping people and the standing people, and the flying people and the swimming people—into the councils of government" (*TI*, p. 108). Poetry must be at once mysterious (as voices from an awe-inspiring sacramental world long lost to modern man), aesthetic (as "a pure perception of beauty"), and moral-political (as an assertion of the rights of the non-human).³⁸ Thus, one of the titles of Snyder's essays reads "The Politics of Ethnopoetics" (*OW*, p. 15).

His commitment, too, is clear: it is not the "Return-to-Nature" of armchair philosophers, not the sublimation and glorification of self through the use of Nature. It is certainly not the view of the Forest Service: "treat it right and it will make a billion board feet a year", which sees forests as crops and scenery as recreation (*EHH*, p. 12). He means a *literal* return to Nature (or re-habilitation, *OW*, p. 57), to re-learn and re-experience man's original relationship with the cooperative, interdependent, interdefining, interrelated total composition of things. He means man's ceremonial participation in the holistic communionism (*RW*, p. 39), to recover his original "natural being" (*EHH*, p. 155), so that "men, women, and children... follow the timeless path of love and wisdom, in affectionate company with the sky, winds, clouds, trees, waters, animals and grasses" (*EHH*, p. 116). "Gratitude to Wild Beings, our brothers, teaching secrets,/freedoms, and ways; who share with us their milk;/self-complete, brave and aware/*in our minds so be it*" (*TI*, p. 24).

It is no accident that his early Amerindian studies, his love for Daoism and Chinese landscape poetry and his Chan Buddhist training all converge into one center of awareness where man becomes truly "moral" by trusting his natural being and by "following the grain" (*EHH*, p. 115). There is a clear convergence in all his three areas of deep interest. The primitive mode of perception of Nature is concrete, viewing things as (w)holistically self-complete (*TI*, p. 24); it was a state of total harmony between humans and nature before polarization. On this level, it resonates with the Daoist aesthetic presented earlier. Chan Buddhism, Daoist-oriented, attempts to teach us through intuition and poetry, to live and function within Nature's way. All these contributed to Snyder's complete identification with Nature, and made him cherish "an attitude of openness, inwardness, gratitude; plus meditation, fasting, a little suffering and some rupturing of day-to-day ties with the social fabric" (*OW*, p. 37).

Snyder's call for the retreat of the dominating ego and readjustment of man's relation with the "living, exciting, mysterious" phenomenal world which continuously fills "one with a trembling awe leaving one grateful and humble" (*EHH*, p. 123) easily led him to a kind of non-individualistic poetry. We have already discussed an example of this earlier, "Burning the small dead"; here is another:

Mid-August at Sourdough Mountain Lookout

Down valley a smoke haze
 Three days heat, after five days rain
 Pitch glows on the fir-cones
 Across rocks and meadows
 Swarms of new flies.

I cannot remember things I once read
 A few friends but they are in cities.
 Drinking cold snow-water from a tin cup
 Looking down for miles
 Through high still air.⁸⁹⁾

A set of simple and unassuming images from Nature, relatively free from rhetorical embellishments, open up an ambience into which the reader is invited to move about, to pause for a moment or to expand upon it in his mind. This is followed by a brief comment like a personal aside, but it is not a comment that would disturb the objects around him. The reader's attention is almost immediately reverted back to the original scene which now stretches into the distance as Nature acts itself out. The operative dynamics in this poem works very much like the Chinese poems. Snyder once said: "A poet sort of faces two directions: one is to the world of people and language and society, and the tools by which he communicates his language; and the other is the non-human, non-verbal world, which is the world of nature as nature is itself, before language, before custom, before culture. There are no words in that realm".⁴⁰⁾ This paraphrase of the Daoist-Chan Buddhist idea of the unspeaking, self-generating, self-conditioning Nature is the best commentary on the poem just quoted. This commentary sometimes also slips into his landscape poems, such as this passage from his "Piute Creek". Somewhere in the midst of gorgeous landscape, the poet says:

All the junk that goes with being human
 Drops away, hard rock wavers
 Even the heavy present seems to fail
 This bubble of a heart.
 Words and books
 Like a small creek off a high ledge
 Gone in the dry air.
 A clear, attentive mind
 Has no meaning but that

Which sees is truly seen.⁴¹⁾

“That which sees is truly seen” is very much like the Daoist “what we see is where the Dao resides”. In many of his landscape poems, Snyder effortlessly dropped the commentary as, for example, these two poems:

Pine Tree Tops

in the blue night
 frost haze, the sky glows
 with the moon
 pine tree tops
 bend snow-blue, fade
 into sky, frost, starlight.
 the creak of boots.
 rabbit tracks deer tracks
 what do we know.⁴²⁾

For Nothing

Earth a flower
 a phlox on the steep
 slopes of light
 hanging over the vast
 solid spaces
 small rotten crystals;
 salts.
 Earth a flower
 by a gulf where a raven
 flaps by once
 a glimmer, a color
 forgotten as all
 falls away.
 a flower
 for nothing;
 an offer;
 no taker;
 snow-trickle, feldspar, dirt.⁴³⁾

Overwhelmed by the richness of the presences of objects in Nature, the poet finds himself wavering at the edge of speech. Should he break the spell of this expressive silence and elaborate on this richness for the reader-viewer? Should he let the objects express their presences and speak for themselves? Thus, he stops short at an indecisive phrase: "what do we know". Should we read it as a question[?] or as a statement[.]? Nature has continually offered itself: "an offer/no taker". Forget your mind, forget your words, there—

Snow-trickle, feldspar, dirt.

there—

Fishermen's song deep into the cove.⁴⁴⁾

Note

- 1) Two primary Daoist Texts are used here. (1) Lao Zi's *Dao-de-jing* will be indicated by chapters as follows: 1:1 means *Dao-de-jing*, Chapter 1. (2) Zhuang Zi, *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集積 edited by Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 (Taipei: He Le, 1974) will be represented as 2 followed by page number: ex. 2:66. Other abbreviations: LE=*Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, edited with an introduction by T. S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1954); SP=*Selected Prose 1909-1965*, ed. William Cookson (New York: New Directions, 1973); L=*The Letters of Ezra Pound 1907-1941*, ed. D. D. Paige (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1950); F=E. Fenollosa, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, with foreward and notes by Ezra Pound (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1963).
- 2) There is no attempt here to equate the syntactic freedom of the palindrome poem to that found in all classical Chinese poems. But the syntactic flexibility revealed in the palindrome poem and the horizon of representation constituted therein can be used as a yardstick to measure the degree of freedom and the aesthetic functions in other classical Chinese lines.
- 3) *Complete works of Chuang Tzu*, trans. by Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), p. 19.
- 4) Ralph Stephenson and Jean R. Debrix, *The Cinema as Art* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 107.
- 5) *Ibid.*, p. 100.
- 6) *Film Form and Film Sense*, trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1942), p. 29.
- 7) Bynner, *The Jade Mountain* (New York: Anchor, 1964), p. 119.
- 8) In spite of some stylistic resemblances, Mallarmé is, at root, different from the Chinese aesthetic position, which seldom deals with an artificially created world that has no reference to physical reality.
- 9) See Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, "Mallarmé" (New York: Dutton, 1958), pp. 197-8. See also Frank Kermode, *The Romantic Image*, "Symons" (New York: Vintage, 1957), and my *Ezra Pound's Cathay* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 48ff.
- 10) Ezra Pound, "Chinese Poetry", *Today* 3 (April, 1918), 54.
- 11) Pound, *Fortnightly Review*, XCVI (Sept. 1, 1914), p. 471. Reprinted in Pound's *Gaudier-Brzeska* (New York: New Directions, 1961), pp. 94-109.
- 12) For my discussion of the origin of this poem and other related aesthetic questions, see my *Ezra Pound's Cathay*, pp. 56-60.
- 13) See my essay "Ezra Pound's Tensional Dialogue with the Chinese Concept of Nature" in *Crosscurrents in the Literatures of Asia and the West: Essays in Honor of A. Owen Aldridge* edited by Masayuki Akiyama and Yiu-nam Leung (London: Associated University Presses, 1997).
- 14) *Ezra Pound's Cathay*, pp. 161-2.

- 15) *Phi Theta Annual* (Papers of the Oriental Languages Honor Society, University of California), Vol. 5 (1954-55), p. 12.
- 16) pp. 102-103.
- 17) See my *Diffusion of Distances: Dialogues between Chinese and Western Poetics* (University of California Press, 1993), pp. 54-56.
- 18) *Bending the Bow* (New York: New Directions, 1968), pp. 40, 45.
- 19) For my discussion of Williams' convergence with Daoist views, see my *Diffusion of Distances: Dialogues between Chinese and Western Poetics*, Ch. III.
- 20) Interview in *The Contemporary Writer*, ed. Dembo & Pondrom (Wisconsin, 1972), p. 154-5.
- 21) Rexroth, *The Collected Shorter Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1966), p. 248.
- 22) Rexroth, p. 145.
- 23) See various statements made by contemporary American poets in the 1976 Conference on "Chinese Poetry and American Imagination", *Ironwood* 17 (1981), pp. 11-59. See also Charles Altieri, "From Symbolist Thought to Immanence: The Ground of Postmodern American Poetics", *Boundary 2* 1:3, pp. 605-637.
- 24) *An Autobiographical Novel* (New York: New Directions, 1969), p. 122, abbreviated here as AAN; Kenneth Rexroth Papers in The University of California, Los Angeles Library, 175/2/box 11 (I am indebted to Ling Chung's dissertation, *Kenneth Rexroth and Chinese Poetry: Translation, Imitation, and Adaptation*, University of Wisconsin, 1972 for this information); AAN, p. 318-9.
- 25) AAN, p. 319.
- 26) "Introduction" in his *One Hundred Poems from the Chinese* (New York: New Directions, 1964), p. xi.
- 27) AAN, p. 319.
- 28) *Classics Revisited* (New York: New Directions, 1969), p. 131.
- 29) "Science and Civilization in China", *Assays* (New York: New Directions), p. 86.
- 30) See Ling Chung, pp. 164-166.
- 31) *The Contemporary Writer*, p. 159.
- 32) *Ibid.*, p. 161.
- 33) *Ibid.*, p. 155.
- 34) Rexroth, p. 221.
- 35) *Classics Revisited*, p. 130.
- 36) Gary Snyder, *Regarding Wave* (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 39, hereafter abbreviated as RW.
- 37) Gary Snyder, *Earth House Hold* (New York: New Directions, 1969), p. 101, hereafter abbreviated in the text as EHH. Also in his *Turtle Island* (New York: New Directions, 1974), p. 106, hereafter abbreviated in the text as TI.
- 38) EHH, p. 123. Also in his *The Old Ways* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1977), p. 9, hereafter abbreviated in the text as OW. For Snyder's relationship to Amerindian culture, aside from *The Old Ways*, read also his B. A. Thesis he did at Reed College in 1951 now published as *He Who Hunted Birds in His Father's Village: The Dimensions of a Haida Myth* (Bolinas, Calif.: Grey Fox Press, 1979) and my essay "Against Domination: Gary Snyder as an Apologist for Nature", *The Chinese Text* ed. Ying-hsiung Chou (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1986), pp. 75-84.
- 39) *Riprap & Cold Mountain Poems* (San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation, 1969), p. 1.
- 40) David Kherdian, *A Biographical Sketch and Descriptive Checklist of Gary Snyder* (Berkeley: Oyez, 1965), p. 13.
- 41) *Riprap* . . . , p. 6.
- 42) TI, p. 33.
- 43) *Ibid.*, p. 34.
- 44) From Wang Wei's "Answer to Vice-Prefect Chang".