The Zen Buddhist Experience of the Truly Beautiful

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A DISCUSSION OF what Zen has to say about beauty best begins by presenting Zen as an integral whole. That is because single manifestations of Zen often appear to be bafflingly simple, at times pointed, at times muddled, often quite one-sided or strange, paradoxical or even contradictory and meaningless. In previous articles I introduced Zen by way of the classical Oxherding Pictures, focusing particularly on the final three pictures that form a triad, interpenetrating and presenting a self-portrait of the Zen Buddhist understanding of the true, selfless self.[1]

The first of these pictures is an empty circle in which nothing is depicted—it is really not a picture at all, but rather, as it were, an image of imagelessness. What is intended here is absolute, infinite nothingness. And that means that the true self is first of all something imageless, formless, and selfless. To accord with this true self, with its unconditioned selflessness, one must once and for all leap into pure nothingness; one must "die the Great Death." In this unending, desubstantialized nothingness that is not even a "nothingness," a radical turning takes place, a "death and resurrection." We come thus to the second picture, which depicts simply a tree in bloom alongside a river. Now that this resurrection out of nothingness has shattered any

*Originally a lecture given at the Eranos Conference in Ascona, and published in Eranos Yearbook 53 (Frankfurt: Insel Verlag, 1984).

[1] On the Oxherding Pictures, see Ueda Shizuteru, "Emptiness and Fullness: Śūnyatā in Mahāyāna Buddhism, tr. James Heisig and Frederick Greiner, *Eastern Buddhist* XV, 1 (Spring 1982), pp. 10–22; and "Ascent and Descent: Zen Buddhism in Comparison with Meister Eckhart," tr. Ian Astley and James Heisig, *Eastern Buddhist* XVI, 1 (Spring 1983), pp. 58–64.

dualism of subject and object, a "a tree in bloom alongside a river" signifies an unobjectified but concrete embodiment of the selflessness of the true self in all its immediacy. The flowing of the river and blossoming of flowers is at once the play of the selfless freedom of the self.

It is this reality, embodying selflessness in nature, a tree alongside a river, that allows the selfless "self" to appear in the third picture. There an old man and a youth encounter each other on a road; "old man and youth" signify here the selfless self-unfolding of the old man. Through absolute nothingness the self is cut open selflessly and becomes a double self, an I and a Thou. Between the I and the Thou is the space in which the freedom of the self is played out. Whatever concerns the other becomes the self's own concern in its selflessness. Meeting the youth, the old man asks him—for the sake of his true self—"Do you see the flowers blossoming there, just as they are blossoming?" Or perhaps, "Where are you from? Who are you?" And here, between the I and the Thou, the question of the true self is awakened in the youth.

The true self involves a movement of existence, drawing an invisible circle from nothingness, nature, I and Thou: a movement both of *de* becoming without a trace into nothingness, for instance, in blossoming selflessly along with the blossoms, and of recognizing selflessly one's other self in the encounter with an other. What is important is the movement itself, which is never reducible to fixed images, which is, after all, nothingness. When Zen Buddhism speaks of absolute, infinite nothingness, it refers to this entire dynamic configuration.

Where in this configuration do we find an opening to the theme of our discussions, the question of beauty? The root experience of beauty, as seen by Zen Buddhism, finds expression in the poem attached to the second picture: "Boundlessly flows the river, just as it flows. Red blooms the flower, just as it blooms."[2] In Zen this can be expressed even more pointedly: Flowers blossom. Or: Clouds drift. Storms rage. In the following we shall remain with the formulation, "flowers

[2] The pictures treated here represent the last three stages in the ten oxherding pictures. The verse is quoted from H. M. Trevor's translation of a German version by K. Tsujimura and H. Buchner: *The Ox and His Herdsman* (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1969).

blossom just as they blossom." Behind this statement is something simple, is utter simplicity, based on that infinite nothingness of the first picture, or rather not based on, but abyssed[3] in nothingness, in the space of infinite nothingness, the infinite openness of nothingness. What is simple becomes divided, articulated: flowers blossom just as they blossom. What is thereby articulated again withdraws into infinite nothingness so that the simple can be articulated ever anew.

We have here a mutual, dynamic interpenetration of nothingness and simplicity whereby the being of what is simple on the one hand becomes so transparent that it is nothing, and, on the other, *is* all the more. On the one hand, then, so transparent that it is nothing; on the other, overflowing with being. We can say that the Zen Buddhist experience of beauty concerns a "transparent overflow of Being," as long as we remember that this transparency or nothingness is infinitely abyssal and neither beautiful nor not beautiful. In the language of Indian Mahayana Buddhism, "beauty" is "permeated by suchness (*tathatā*)." On the one hand the notion of suchness qualifies that of emptiness, *śūnyatā*; on the other, suchness abysmally withdraws again into emptiness. Something is beautiful in truth when it is more than beautiful. We are reminded of a line from a poem by Rainer Marie Rilke: "For Beauty's nothing/but beginning of Terror that we're still just able to bear."[4]

Since the Zen saying, "The flowers blossom just as they blossom," points to a truth that pertains both to nature and to people, we may raise a double question. What about these flowers that blossom? What about us, who experience them as flowers that blossom just as they blossom? How does one experience himself when he says, "The flowers blossom just as they blossom"?

Once when Tsujimura Kōichi was studying under Martin Heidegger in Freiburg, he showed Heidegger the Oxherding Pictures. Heidegger was impressed with the poem and picture of the tree in bloom alongside a river, and brought to Tsujimura's attention a closely related verse of

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[3] "*Auf Un-grund des Nichts.*" In Meister Eckhart *Un-grund* points to abyssal nothingness as the ultimate ground or basis. *Tr.*

[4] Translation by J.B. Leishman and Stephen Spender, *Duino Elegies* (New York: Norton, 1939), p. 21.

the poet Johannes Scheffler (1624-1677), better known as Angelus Silesius:

> The rose is without why / it blossoms / because it blossoms
> To itself it pays no heed / asks not if it is seen.[5]

A comparison of this verse with our "flowers blossom just as they blossom," will help us pinpoint the sense of the Zen saying. We notice immediately that both verses spring from a nearly identical spiritual well. The attentive ear will nevertheless perceive a fine difference between the one and the other. This difference appears in the "just as" of the Zen verse vs. the "because" of Angelus Silesius. What sort of difference is this? It pertains first of all to the the mode of being of the blossoming, then to the mode of existence of the one who speaks the verse and thereby also expresses his self.

Let us first take up Angelus Silesius' "the rose is without why." The turn of phrase, "without why," reminds us immediately of his ancestor in spirit, Meister Eckhart (1260-1328?). Compare another poem by Angelus Silesius:

> The rose here
> that with your outer eye
> you see
> has blossomed in God
> since eternity.[6]

Here the rose bursts through the world of nature and blossoms in God, indeed blossoms as God, for, as Meister Eckhart says,

> Whatever is in God, is God.[7]

And, as Angelus Silesius says,

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[5] Angelus Silesius, "Cherubinischer Wandersmann," in *Sämtliche poetische Werke und eine Auswahl aus seinen Streitschriften*, vol. I, ed. Georg Ellinger (Berlin: Propylaen Verlag, 1923), p. 61.

[6] Angelus Silesius, vol. I, p. 36. See also Frederick Franck, "Angelus Silesius, 1624-1677—A Bridge Between East and West?" *The Eastern Buddhist* VIII, 2 (October 1975), pp. 130-142.

[7] Meister Eckhart, *Deutsche Predigten und Traktate*, ed. and tr. by Josef Quint (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1978), p. 167; hereafter referred to as Q.

In God all is God: a single mite
In God
counts as much as a thousand deities.[8]

We would not do Angelus Silesius justice if we were to elevate these and similar words to a theological level and understand them as speaking of some primal idea or image in the mind of God. On the contrary, they convey a theology that has been made concrete in reality. When Angelus writes, "The rose here . . ." it is the "here" that is significant. In this context the blossoming of the rose is no longer a merely natural occurrence; it is a immediate event in God, an eventuating of God. The life of God blossoms in itself as God, in such a way that God blossoms in himself just as the rose *here* blossoms. The rose here, blossoming *in* God, that is, *as* God, is "without why," as only God can be. This being without why is not a manner of speaking, but actually a matter of the rose here being God in God.

It is a question, then, not of any objective state of affairs, but of a concrete event of God. In order to see the rose here blossoming thus in God as God, we ourselves must be born of God in God.

God's favorite work/ so dear to him and true
Is that he can bear his son in you.[9]

Holiness consists in this alone
That one truly is of God born.[10]

God makes nothing as God: if he makes you his son
You become God in God/ Lord on the Lord's throne.[11]

But an ineluctable condition is added:

Becoming nothing is becoming God.

These words mirror the thoughts of Meister Eckhart. Further:

If you be born of God/ God blossoms in you[12]

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[8] Angelus Silesius, vol. I, p. 82.
[9] Angelus Silesius, vol. I, p. 166.
[10] Angelus Silesius, vol. I, p. 167.
[11] Angelus Silesius, vol. I, p. 246.
[12] Angelus Silesius, vol. I, p. 32.

The blossoming of God "in you" is the same blossoming of God as that of "the rose here." The blossoming of the rose, in its "without why," becomes here our own event. It is in our "non-attached souls" (Meister Eckhart) that God bore his son, our souls that are thereby elevated to God. "The rose is without why; it blossoms because it blossoms." To speak of the rose here is to speak of nothing other than God himself and—inseparably—of man. Within western intellectual history such an integration of God, man, and nature is by no means a matter of course.

Meister Eckhart strongly emphasizes that God is without why. God is the absolute being whose reason for being is in himself and as himself, who is his own cause and, as such, the cause for the existence of all other things. God is the plenitude of being. From this fullness the divine deed flows naturally, "without why." God works out of himself and unto himself. Nothing moves God to perform his deeds, and God intends nothing by his deeds. "God works without why and knows of no why."[13] One cannot inquire "why" of God, just as he is, nor of his deeds as emanations from the plenitude of being. This "without why" rejects any questioning about reasons as inappropriate to God, and thus lets God appear in his own being without why. This "without why" is an ontological sign of God.

Eckhart carries out this sort of onto-theological reflection very consistently, but it is also basic to the theology and metaphysics of his time in general. What is peculiar to Eckhart is that he directly transfers this divine "without why" to human existence, consummated when the soul is one with God, when "God is born in the soul" or "the soul breaks through to the Godhead." In so doing Eckhart gives this "without why" its real vitality. He writes, for example:

> [The justified man] wants nothing and seeks after nothing, for he knows of no why for the sake of which he would do something. Just as God works without why and knows of no why, so too, in exactly the same manner, does the justified man work. And just as life lives for its own sake and seeks no why for the sake of which it would live, so too does the

[13] Q, p. 371.

> justified man know of no why for the sake of which it would do something.[14]
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> . . . [the justified person] is life itself. If someone were to spend a thousand years asking life: "Why do you live?" and if life could answer, it could only reply: "I live *because I live* (*Ich lebe dar umbe daz ich lebe*)." That is because life lives from its own ground, and springs from what is its own; thus precisely in living for itself it lives without asking "why" (*Daz ist dâ von, wan leben lebet ûzer sinem eigenen grunde und quillet ûzer sinem eigen; dar umbe lebet ez âne warumbe in dem, daz ez sich selber lebet*).[15]

Expressed negatively,

> As long as you perform your works for the sake of heaven or God or for your eternal blessedness . . . things are not truly right with you.[16]

These words impress us as a statement of how Meister Eckhart translates into the very existence of man that divine "without why" that is lived in the unity of man and God. God as life itself, "without why," flows into the non-attached nothingness of man and brings him to live life "without asking why." The person himself now lives "without why" as a life lived for its own reasons, springing out of its own ground. "Here I live from what is my own, as God lives from what is his own."[17] For Meister Eckhart, life-without-why means supreme freedom for humans.

This "without why" appears as a basic notion in Zen Buddhism as well. Nishitani Keiji, a modern Japanese thinker who philosophizes in the spirit of Zen, once put the idea of life-without-why as man's lived freedom this way:

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[14] Q, p. 371.

[15] Meister Eckhart, *Die deutschen Werke*, ed. and tr. by Josef Quint (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1958–76), vol. I, p. 450 (p. 92). Hereafter abbreviated DW; pages in parentheses refer to the corresponding Middle High German text in the same volume).

[16] DW, vol. I, p. 450 (p. 92).

[17] Ibid.

> At the foundation of life we have no ground beneath us on which to stand. We must rather say that life is life because it is grounded precisely where there is nothing upon which it could stand. And from the self-awareness of this groundlessness a new subjectivity of the self is realized, one that flows through the intellect, reason and natural life.[18]

In the idea of "without why" we find a deep spiritual affinity between Meister Eckhart and Zen Buddhism. In both this notion is applied to the Absolute and translated into human existence as lived freedom. In sharing this dimension of "without why," both Eckhart and Zen are relevant for our modern existential crisis.

The most poignant and succinct expression of this crisis occurs in Nietzsche: "Nihilism stands at the door: whence comes this uncanniest of all guests? . . . What does nihilism mean? That the highest values devaluate themselves. The aim is lacking; 'why' finds no answer."[19] From the very outset, radical nihilism invalidates all possible answers to "why." To the extent that we seriously seek to overcome radical nihilism, Meister Eckhart and Zen Buddhism together can show us a way in which the nihilistic lack of an answer to "why" is in one leap overtaken by life's "without why." We see here a reversal from a negative lack of an answer to an explicit "without why," from a privative nothingness to a complete, fulfilled nothingness. Perhaps Zarathustra's godlessness finds its affirmative fulfillment in Eckhart's life-without-why. In Zen this turn-about occurs in "dying the great death," in Eckhart as the "death to the very ground," in both then as that great death that is the death of nihilism as well. For in nihilism there is still the one who proclaims, "God is dead."

For all the affinity between Meister Eckhart and Zen with respect to being-without-why, a difference still remains. There are situations in which a small difference has enormous consequences. To the proverbial Zen question, for example, of why the patriarch came from the West, a master may simply answer, "without why." The patriarch spoken of

[18] Nishitani Keiji, *Kongenteki shutaisei no tetsugaku* ("The Philosophy of Fundamental Subjectivity") (Tokyo, 1940), p. 2.

[19] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann & R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), pp. 7 & 9.

here is Bodhidharma, the founder of Zen Buddhism, who came to China in the first half of the 6th century from the West, i.e., from India, the birthplace of Buddhism. The question of why the patriarch came from the West is not a historical inquiry but a fundamental question of soteriological import about the origin of Zen. And to this question of ultimate import a master simply answers, "without why." The corresponding question in Christian salvation history, *cur deus homo*, why did God become man, might have been answered by Meister Eckhart simply with "without why," in accordance with his own notion of God's working without why. In fact, however, Eckhart answered differently. In one instance he said, "Why did God become man? So that I might be born as this same God."[20] In another,

> People suppose that God became man only there [in his historical incarnation]. That is not the case, for God has equally become man here [right here in this place of preaching] , and he has become man for the reason that he would bear you as his only begotten son and nothing less.[21]

As typical as these answers are for Eckhart, they remain on the level of "so that" or "for the reason that," a level he actually wanted to overcome by his "without why." In actually answering the question, why has God . . . ," his notion of God's being without why vanishes. If Eckhart had answered "without why," his answer would have totally negated both the form of the question and the questioner himself. Such immediate, total negation would cut open a space where that which is without why would be made present just as it is. And in this presence the questioner who had been totally negated would come to life again. If Eckhart had answered "without why" to the question, why did God become man, his reply would really sound like a Zen answer. Because he answered differently, despite an emphasis in common with Zen on the Absolute's being without why, a difference appears in the way this notion is actualized in various situations. I will not delve further into the significance of this difference. It is conceivable that in another situation, even if not historically documented, Eckhart might indeed have simply answered "without why."

[20] Q., p. 292.
[21] Q., p. 357.

The difference between Meister Eckhart and Zen emerges even more clearly in another area, that of nature. Eckhart transferred God's being without why to human existence, but not to nature, to the rose for example. Eckhart's sole true concern is the immediacy of God and the soul; nature for him is an aside and not a primary place wherein salvation occurs. In the Barock mystics, on the other hand, nature gradually acquires its own status as reality, over and above its status as something merely created. The philosopher-physician Angelus Silesius is an outstanding example of this shift. His mysticism, formed in the spirit of Meister Eckhart's, goes a step further by transferring God's being without why directly to nature itself. Thus he can say, "The rose is without why; it blossoms because it blossoms."

The rose, being without why, assumes the character of an ontological sign of God. Angelus Silesius also implies a connection to human life here, for the second part of his verse, "to itself it pays no heed, asks not if it is seen" is a forceful and unmistakable, if not explicit, instruction about human existence and life. We can say, along with Heidegger, "that man in the innermost ground of his essence is not truthful until he is, in his own way, like the rose—without why."[22] Here the absolute aspect of nature as seen by Angelus Silesius appears and gives direction to human existence. In this context, he is close to the world of Zen. Yet Zen itself puts it slightly differently: flowers blossom just as they blossom. How can we articulate this subtle yet undeniable difference?

"The rose is without why." This is the negative side of Angelus Silesius' insight—negative in the sense of negative theology, whereby the essence of God is defined as being without why. In its positive expression—positive again in the sense of positive theology—it becomes, "[the rose] blossoms because it blossoms." The esteem of nature here as a place in which truth occurs is similar to Zen, but in Zen the negative expression is radicalized to the point of infinite nothingness, infinitely consummated nothingness. Analogously, the positive expression is simplified to a straightforward "the flowers blossom just as they blossom." And the span between infinite nothingness and straightforward simplicity is at the same time the place of death and resurrection for our existence.

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[22] Martin Heidegger, *Der Satz vom Grund* (Pfullingen: Gunther Neske, 1957), p. 73.

In Zen we see the negative-theological aspect of nature radicalized to the point of infinite nothingness in that the "without why," as an ontological sign of the Absolute, entirely vanishes without a trace, and there is no more talk of flowers or of the Absolute. The first Oxherding Picture points to this radicalization. Where on the other hand infinite nothingness is articulated in words or images, instead of retrieving what is articulated back into itself, we may find paradoxical formulations that read, roughly, "the blossoming flowers do not blossom." Another paradoxical expression of nothingness in Zen is "When I cross the bridge, the bridge flows, the stream stands still." The turn from nothingness to positive affirmation is expressed in this straightforward, simplified way: "the flowers blossom just as they blossom." This is simpler, more straightforward than the formulation, "the rose blossoms because it blossoms." What is simple becomes even more so when "because" turns into "just as." In this unmediated affirmation, reality is given as it originally is, in its simple, fully realized form, prior to any giving of reasons, prior even to any self-grounding as a self-reflection of such fulfillment. Due to the simplicity of this fulfillment it suffices in Zen just to say, "the flowers blossom."

In order to clarify further the difference between this "just as" and "because," we can draw upon Heidegger, who thought deeply about the verse by Angelus Silesius. " 'Why' is the word that inquires after reasons, and 'because' is the word that indicates reasons in answer. 'Why' seeks reasons; 'because' gives them."[23] "The rose is without why, yet—with respect to 'because'—is not without a reason."[24] The rose is without why, that is to say, "without a reference to a reason or supposition that there is one to be inquired after."[25] This means that "the rose is a rose without having to pay heed to itself,"[26] as the second verse implies. "Blossoming happens to the rose in that it is absorbed in blossoming."[27] But "Angelus Silesius does not want to deny that the blossoming of the rose has a reason. It blossoms because—it blossoms."[28] What does this mean? "This 'because' actually says nothing,

[23] Heidegger, p. 70.
[24] Heidegger, p. 77.
[25] Heidegger, pp. 78–79.
[26] Heidegger, p. 71.
[27] Heidegger, p. 71.
[28] Heidegger, p. 71.

for it is proper to 'because' to mention something else which lets us understand that for which we seek reasons. Yet this 'it blossoms because it blossoms' that seemingly says nothing in fact says everything, i.e., everything that is to be said in its own manner of saying nothing."[29] What does this "because" say then? "The rose 'blossoms because it blossoms' . . . The 'because' names the reason, but a strange and presumably distinguished reason . . . The 'because' of the saying refers the blossoming simply back to itself. The blossoming is grounded in itself, has its reason in itself. The blossoming is pure emergence out of itself . . ."[30] It "blossoms because it blossoms. Its blossoming is a simple emergence out of itself."[31] What this "because" that "seemingly says nothing" would say, in its manner of saying nothing, is this: The blossoming of the rose is a "simple, pure emergence out of itself." Heidegger writes of this verse by Angelus Silesius: "The whole saying is so amazingly clear and concise that it might occur to one that extreme precision and depth are part of genuine mystical thought. And this is in fact true; Meister Eckhart is evidence."[32]

If, as Heidegger proposes, the verse of Angelus Silesius treats of a "simple, pure emergence out of itself," then we find an even more immediate expression of this in the Zen saying "[it] blossoms just as it blossoms." As opposed to this, the formulation "[it] blossoms because it blossoms" remains caught up in thought, that is, in an answer indicating sought-for reasons. The latter formula treats of something that is already an object of thought. As we have seen, Heidegger says that "The rose is without why, yet it is not without a reason . . . 'the rose blossoms, because it blossoms' "—and, he continues, "its blossoming is simple emergence out of itself."[33] Between the world of the saying, "it blossoms because it blossoms" and the "simple emergence out of itself" there is a subtle but decisive shift brought on by the "because" of thought.

In the Zen saying the flowers blossom in the space of nothingness,

[29] Heidegger, pp. 79-80.
[30] Heidegger, pp. 101-102.
[31] Heidegger, p. 73.
[32] Heidegger, p. 73.
[33] Heidegger, p. 73.

where thought has not yet begun, in a space that is infinitely disclosed through the nothingness that has been cut open. Thus the verse reads, "the flowers blossom just as they blossom." Here the flowers appear in the infinite openness of nothingness, just as they blossom, as yet without interruption by the "because" of thought. Here we are truly dealing with a simple, pure emergence out of itself.

But the point is not to eliminate thinking. The point rather is to consider just where thought begins, and just how what is to be thought is given over to thought. Essentially we are dealing with the question, just what is thinking? And we do not know whether our thought can answer this cardinal question. But we do have a hint that suggests the following. The simplicity in question here is not given over to thought, for what is simple as such is unthinkable. As the unthinkable, what is simple can perhaps only be given, originally, to un-thought. This originally given belongs, to use Heidegger's thought-provoking phrase, "not *to* thinking, but perhaps *before* thinking."[34] This unthinkable that belongs before thinking is precisely what has not been thought before [*das Un-vordenkliche*]. It is nothing other than what is to be thought in the true sense of the word. What is to be thought is different from what can be thought, for what can be thought is what has been thought before, whereas what is to be thought in the primary sense is the genuinely unthinkable, that which has not been thought before. What really is to be thought, what is worthy of thought, is given to thinking only through the experience of what has not been thought before, of what belongs before thought. Otherwise everything is absorbed into thinking without remainder, instead of the rose being "absorbed in blossoming" or, more precisely, instead of letting the rose be absorbed thus in blossoming. In this way thinking considers itself all-powerful, considers everything as thinkable and capable of being absorbed into thought without remainder. Modern nihilism is the consequence of this position. But experiencing the simple is other than this; it concerns the moment when thinking is converted to un-thinking, precisely for the sake of what really is to be thought, not in order to cancel out thought.

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[34] See Heidegger, p. 69: ". . . diese Quelle sei doch Mystik und Dichtung. Die eine wie die andere gehören gleichwenig in das Denken. Gewiß nicht *in das Denken, aber vielleicht vor* das Denken."

Heidegger's own interpretation of the phrase "without why—because" goes further to probe its source even more deeply. Heidegger makes the decisive step back by "hearing the principle of [sufficient] reason in two ways: once as the supreme principle of all beings, then again as a principle concerning Being."[35] In the second case the point is to "think ground as Being and Being as ground," that is, fundamentally, to "think Being as Being," and "no longer to clarify Being by way of some being . . . the path to such thinking, however, is nothing other than hearing the principle of the ground as a principle of Being. And we achieve this hearing only by way of a leap." "Heard in another tone," the principle of [sufficient] reason as the principle of Being now proclaims: "Being and ground: the Same."[36] Accordingly, Heidegger appeals to the older meaning of the German word for 'because'', i.e., *weil*, as an abbreviation of *dieweilen*, "while" in English. Thus it was once said, for example, that "one must forge iron while [*weil*] it is hot." Heidegger explains, "*weil* here does not mean "because" but rather *dieweilen*, "as long as" or while—the iron is warm. [The German] *weilen* means to endure, to stay still, to maintain itself, to rest . . . but *weilen* is the old sense of the word *sein*, 'to be.' The *weil* that averts all giving of reasons and every 'why', names a plain and simple 'being there' without why, upon which everything rests or depends. *Weil* names the ground or reason. But at the same time, as whiling and enduring, it names Being. *Weil* names both Being and ground . . . [which] in this *weil* [are] the Same. They belong together."[37] "*Weil* is without why, it has no reason, it is itself the reason or ground."[38] Thus in this little word *weil* Heidegger still hears the meaning "to be."

Thinking ever more simply about the plain and simple "being there" upon which everything rests, Heidegger seems to come closer and closer to the position of Zen: "the flowers blossom just as they

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[35] Heidegger, p. 118. *Der Satz vom Grund* refers to the principle of sufficient reason which, in Leibniz's formulation, tells us that everything must have a reason for being the way it is. The following passage puns upon the German *Grund* in its meanings of "ground" and "reason" as well as upon *Grundsatz*, meaning principle, and *im Grunde* meaning "fundamentally." It also assumes Heidegger's "ontological difference" between "to be" (Being) and entities (beings). *Tr.*

[36] Heidegger, p. 105.

[37] Heidegger, pp. 207–8.

[38] Heidegger, p. 207.

blossom." At one point he says,

> the great child of the world's play that Heraclitus glimpses in aiōn —why does it play? It plays because it plays.
> This "because" is immersed in play. Play is without "why".
> It plays while it plays. Only play remains: the most lofty and the deepest.
> But this "only" is everything, the one, the only one.[39]

But if this is really the case, if in truth it all depends upon this "only", then one could say, as in Zen, that "it plays just as it plays" is a more apt expression of what Heidegger points to. As we saw, Heidegger spoke of a leap from the "supreme principle of all beings" to the "principle concerning Being," from *weil* in the sense of "because" to *weil* in the sense of "while." One could likewise speak of a leap from "because" to "just as". The question remains whether Heidegger would take this leap or not, and if not, for the reason that he would want to keep together Being and ground, Being and thinking.

By appealing to Heidegger's discussion of "because" in the verse by Angelus Silesius, we have attempted to specify the sense of the Zen saying, "the flowers blossom just as they blossom." We encounter there the simplest simplicity, not based on but abyssed in nothingness, in its infinite openness where what is simple is articulated before it is taken into account by thought: "the flowers blossom just as they blossom."

Where is the human being in this event? He has become nothing, and that is crucial. But this is not to be taken in the sense that one is no longer there. Just the opposite in fact: one is really present! One is there precisely in saying, "the flowers blossom just as they blossom." The human being is there, that is, he is the "There" or disclosure, the openness endlessly opened by nothingness, wherein "the flowers blossom just as they blossom" is articulated. The blossoming of the flowers as reality becomes in the space of nothingness the words "the flowers blossom"—human words to be sure, but still without any human addition, any conceivable interference by thought, so that reality of itself has become the words. There is nothing between reality and the words. Thus we say, "the flowers blossom just as they blossom."

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[39] Heidegger, p. 188.

The double blossoming here signifies that reality is mirrored in nothingness *just as* it is. This "just as" is nothing other than the sign of the transparent overflow of Being. And that is the primal phenomenon of beauty, primal but abyssal, as we said at the beginning. A mirroring in nothingness, just as it is, but abyssed in nothingness—without ground. What is of interest here is therefore not the blossoming but the "just as." No less beauty would be articulated by the words, "The flowers wither just as they wither."

The human being is there in saying that the flowers blossom just as they blossom. But he does not insert himself into what is said or articulated. There is no trace of the speaker here in what is said. That is the supreme selflessness of one who lets the flowers blossom just as they blossom. And yet in such speaking one is really present. One does not put one's autonomy to the test by talking of himself, but rather by articulating something new, something not disclosed until he speaks. Both nothingness and what is truly simple, precisely on account of its being simple, on account of its nothingness, can be articulated inexhaustibly. What is important is that one really articulates something for himself and puts his autonomy to the test by means of his own words.[40] Hence in any given situation the Zen master challenges the disciple to "say a word!" while, in accord with infinite nothingness, he continually rejects the disciple's every word.

The saying, "the flowers blossoms just as they blossom," articulates what is simple in the infinite openness of nothingness that one has become. One is not present in what is said—no trace of the person there. But one is truly present in the saying of the words. In this kind of speaking, one's essential selflessness is realized—and one learns this from the flowers that blossom just as they blossom. Thus this saying itself is of deep existential import for the person, not by giving a directive, but by something more immediate.

To pursue this contrast we return once again to the saying of Angelus Silesius, in which the existential import is expressed as a directive. We see this unmistakably in the second verse: "To itself it pays no heed / asks not if it is seen." Only a human being pays heed to himself and asks if anyone notices him. The phrase "to itself it pays no heed"

[40] We shall return to this problem in part two, in connection with a Japanese form of poetry.

is an immediate directive for human existence, for being as one actually should be. It implies that one should pay no mind to himself to live truly and authentically. Basically, however, that is possible only if one is like the rose, without why. In this context the first verse also serves as a directive: "Be without why!" Heidegger points out the directive character of this verse when he draws upon a phrase of Goethe: "Keep to the Because and ask not why."[41] The Zen verse, on the other hand, does not have a second verse that might give a directive or imply any such instruction in saying "the flowers blossom as just as they blossom." But this lack of directive is by no means a lack of existential import. On the contrary, the Zen saying, for its lack of directive, has an existential import that is all the more immediate and forceful. In accord with what is simple, not based upon but abyssed in nothingness, Zen is concerned with letting the power of the present immediately work upon one's existence. Zen focuses on the primal power of something's blossoming just as [it is] blossoming, in order to let the presence of this blossoming break through the ego-nature of the person and to open him up to infinite openness. One and the same event can occur in two different contexts that correlate to each other in a flexible manner. Thus for example when hiking together through mountains a master answers a disciple who asks him for the truth, "Do you hear the stream there murmuring?" Or, in another case, the sight of peach flowers blossoming suddenly brings a monk to awakening.

Zen therefore is concerned not primarily with instructional directives for our existence by appealing to example of the rose, but rather with an immediate encounter with the rose. In the sight of this simple blossoming of a flower, through its sheer power of presence, one is turned into nothingness, then is resurrected by blossoming with the flower. The event of death-resurrection takes place in humans when they see in this way. Hence the master asks the disciple, "Do you see the flowers just as they blossom?" At stake here is a death-resurrection in the very moment of this seeing. Otherwise one can not truly say, I see flowers. When one sees flowers, everything that determines one's existence is already occurring. We may clarify the typical Zen Buddhist view of nature and existence by comparing the passage in the Gospel of Matthew where Jesus speaks of the lilies and the birds.

[41] Heidegger, p. 215.

> For this reason I say to you, do not be anxious for your life . . . nor for your body . . . Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them . . . Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory did not clothe himself like one of these. But if God arrays the grass of the fields . . .[42]

In this passage Jesus uses the birds of the air and lilies of the field as examples to instruct two things: not to be anxious for one's life, and to see God's providence, i.e., how God feeds the birds, arrays the grass, and takes care of our life even more. The manner of speaking is simple and vivid, and the content is decisive for the relation between humans and God. For Jesus the examples of the birds and the lilies is expressly instructional. To be sure, Zen literature also contains instructions and directives for our existence. But in concrete situations Zen is essentially expressed differently. A master would simply say to a disciple, "look at the birds of the air! See the lilies of the field!" without adding any sort of instruction. He would not say what we were to learn from the birds or the lilies. But if through his words, the presence of the flying birds or of the blossoming lilies, or simply the power of presence in this flying or blossoming, broke through our enclosure in our ego, then that could be an event in which Zen would see the decisive beginning of true life. Only then does language erupt as the self-articulation of the event and at the same time as our self-awareness. Hence, simply, "Look at the birds of the air! See the lilies of the field!" Any additional instruction would in the view of Zen weaken the power of the presence of flying birds and blossoming flowers. "The birds of the air and the lilies of the field," instead of being immediately experienced, would become mere examples of a lesson to be learned. When the presence of flying birds and blossoming flowers immediately strikes us, they are something completely different than birds and flowers as we usually see them. We can gauge just how different things can be from an experience of Rainer Maria Rilke that happened in Capri in 1913 or 14:

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[42] Matthew 6, 25–30.

> He recalled the time in that other garden in the south (Capri), when the cry of a bird resonated without and within him, not breaking at the boundary of his body, but gathering both in a seamless space in which a single speck of the purest, deepest consciousness remained, secretly sequestered. He had closed his eyes, so as not to be diverted in such a bounteous experience by the contours of his body, and the infinite passed into him from all sides so intimately that he thought he felt in his breast the light stirring of stars that had in the meantime entered.[43]

The experience of a bird cry here shatters the wall in a person between inner and outer, and discloses a seamless, pure, deep and clear space in which the infinite flows intimately. We may leave aside the question of whether this experience is Zen Buddhist or not. In any case we have here an apt example of a bird's cry being experienced completely differently than we usually hear it. Which is real, Rilke's experience or our normal hearing? Was Rilke's experience something eccentric, or is our apparently normal hearing not true hearing at all? Or perhaps our normal hearing is also such an experience, even if on a lesser scale, but one which is just as soon forgotten and replaced by reflection: "we hear birds sing, we here and birds over there." We shall leave these questions open and confine ourselves to a remark, apropos to Rilke's experience, that Meister Eckhart made about foundational experience: "To anyone who peers into this ground for but one moment, a thousand gold coins are [no more than] a counterfeit farthing."[44] Rilke's experience became decisive for his life; he now experienced himself, other people and things in general differently. When the wall between inner and outer is broken through, the difference between them is articulated in a new way. Rilke can thus say, "Everywhere a desire to relate, and yet never any craving." Rilke's concept of the "world's inner space" is especially significant in this context.

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[43] Erlebnis II, *Sämtliche Werke* 1966, volume VI, p. 1040.
[44] Q., p. 180.

> Through all beings expands one space;
> The world's inner space. Birds fly in stillness
> through us. Oh, I who would grow,
> I look outward, and *in* me grows a tree.[45]

"Birds fly in stillness *through us.* I look outward, and *in me* grows a tree"—these events take place in the world's inner space, where Rilke experiences himself and the birds and the tree all in one as truth and reality. Commenting on the "world's inner space," Otto Friedrich Bollnow writes,

> We must take this expression quite seriously, for we are not dealing with . . . an image that would help us vividly picture mental events by comparing them with the landscape. Rather we encounter here a very definite metaphysical doctrine. The world has an inner spiritual space, that is, the external world has an internal space that in a manner yet to be determined coincides with the inner realm of the human soul so that a strange communication occurs between events in one's inner life and those in the inner space of the external world.[46]

Rilke puts it simply and clearly: "Birds fly in stillness through us. I look outward, and in me grows a tree."

The crucial point here is the reality of communication of inner and outer: "I look *outward*, and *in me* grows a tree." How did this become possible? By breaking through the wall between inner and outer. And what is this wall of inner and outer? Nothing other than the I, the ego that separates the inside and outside of me. More precisely, it is the ego as a closed "I am I."[47] In Rilke's case, this I was at once broken through by the call of a bird. The ego of the poet was cut open, and he was infinitely opened to infinite openness that now rings out cosmically as the cry of a bird. And yet in this present we can no longer speak of the cry of a bird; that description appears only later, in the recollection. Present here is purely an infinite openness that resounds cosmical-

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[45] From the poem, "Es winkt zu Fühlung fast aus allen Dingen," Rainer Marie Rilke, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. II, p. 93.

[46] Otto Friedrich Bollnow, *Rilke* (Stuttgart, 1951), p. 167.

[47] On the theme of the closed ego, see my article, "Ascent and Descent," pp. 64–67.

ly, a resounding that is at once the complete and selfless fulfillment of the poet. All further experience is transformed by this event. Thus the passages reads, "Birds fly *through us* . . . I look *outward*, and *in me* grows a tree." This is not a picture of an inner landscape in the soul. The birds of the air fly through me. The tree in the garden outside grows in me. This open union of inner and outer can be realized only when the wall of the closed I is broken through. This part of Rilke's verse reminds us of the Zen saying, "the flowers blossom just as they blossom." In analogy to Rilke's verse we could say, "The birds fly just as they fly. The tree grows just as it grows."

> The birds fly in stillness through us.
> The birds fly just as they fly.

We leave these two lines beside each other without any further explanation. A Zen master would be ready to take up the line from Rilke as a kōan and challenge us: "In this line something is superfluous. Can you find what it is and delete it?" He might also be dissatisfied with the second line that we characterized as a Zen saying, and might ask, "In this line too there is still something superfluous. Can you delete it?"

It is interesting that a saying similar to our "birds fly just as they fly" occurs in the history of Zen. This saying, by the great Japanese master Dōgen (1200–1253), consists of four words, that is, four Chinese characters, in the sequence "birds—fly—as—birds." Here again the crucial point is the "as." It is exceedingly difficult to render the sense of this saying in an English sentence, because it contains a double meaning that spans extreme opposites. One could perhaps paraphrase the sense of this saying in two sentences. First, the birds fly, oh *thus* they truly are birds. This meaning derives from the "overflow of being in the background of nothingness." Secondly, birds fly *as if* it were birds, whereas it actually is nothingness. A certain transparence clear through to nothingness gives rise to the second meaning. In translation, one would have to place these two sentences side by side, whereas the original saying, by virtue of this crucial "as," fuses the meaning of both assertions together. By means of this fusion of meanings, the original saying awakens a feeling of real-unreal, of supremely real and at the same time entirely dreamlike. The beauty of this saying lies precisely in its double meaning.

The criticism is often made with regard to such assertions that Zen

Buddhism always speaks of nature, never of transcendence or of people. Not only that, but the beautiful nature of which Zen speaks when it says "flowers blossom just as they blossom," is no longer to be found in today's world. What Zen says no longer has a bearing today, so the criticism goes. In order to counteract this misunderstanding, I have often pointed out the transcendental and existential import of sentences such as "the flowers blossom just as they blossom." One must keep in mind that the word for nature in Zen is the Sino-Japanese term *shizen* or *jinen* 自然 that only partially corresponds to the English concept. The Buddhist concept means something like "being thus, as it is of itself." The referent here is not nature as an objective world of natural things, a particular region of being, but rather the truth of the Being of all beings just as they are. Nature in Zen sayings does not refer to a realm that is differentiated from God or from humans. Zen verses such as "the flowers blossom as just as they blossom," or "the birds fly just as they fly" do of course speak of natural phenomena, but the real assertion lies in the "just as." And this "just as" is concerned immediately with human beings. When someone experiences flowers in his nothingness, abyssed in infinite nothingness, rather than on the basis of his ego, the flowers are experienced as they blossom of themselves. Reciprocally, when in the nothingness of the person flowers blossom just as they blossom, the person exists, at one with this blossoming, in the truth of his own being. One's self-lessness here establishes a very specific connection between the subjective and the objective world. The Zen talk of flowers blossoming or birds flying, therefore, is of direct existential import for the person. The concept of nature in Sino-Japanese Buddhism, in the sense of "being thus as it is of itself," has in fact the same meaning as the concept of truth in Mahayana Buddhism, that is, as *tathatā* in Sanskrit. Translated literally, *tathatā* means "being thus as it is" or "such as it is," or simply "thusness" or "suchness." The Buddhist notion of truth encompasses both presence just as it is unconcealed, as when we exclaim "thus it is," as well as our original grasp of such presence, as when we assert "thus it is!" This primal concept of truth is prior to the differentiation between the truth of Being on the one hand and the truth of assertions on the other. In Chinese and Japanese Buddhism, "nature" acquired this sense of "truth" only upon the basis of nothingness. Buddhist thusness is manifest in the "just as" of "the flowers blossom just as they blossom."

In conclusion to part one, let us return to the saying of Angelus Silesius, "The rose is without why; it blossoms because it blossoms." "The rose here that with your outer eye you see, has blossomed in God since eternity." Angelus Silesius' rose in its very being is transparent all the way through to God. The rose that now blossoms "without why" in God as God is, however, exactly the same rose that one's "outer eye" as a sense organ sees. The visible reality of the rose is a concretion of God's life as this life blossoms in itself. God who blossoms in himself "without why" has become flesh and offers himself to the outer eye as "the rose here." And so "the rose here" is designated with the divine sign "without why." The event of the rose has to do with the coming into its own of human existence: "to become nothing is to become God."

In contrast, the Zen saying is much simpler: "the flowers blossom just as they blossom." The flowers are immediately transparent all the way through to nothingness; not only is a sufficient reason superfluous here, there is not even a need for stating that they are "without why." Concomitantly, nothingness as the flower here has completely become reality, likewise without any "because." Here nothingness is made concrete. Angelus Silesius sees through the rose transparently to God, so that God is concretized in the rose. Zen sees through the flowers transparently to nothingness; nothingness is concretized in the flowers and at the same time is present in detachment, that is, in the nothingness of the person. In the human person the death-resurrection of the self takes place at the moment of seeing "the flowers blossom."

There is an analogy in the western history of ideas to nothingness in the Zen context where Meister Eckhart speaks of the nothingness of the Godhead. What is important to Eckhart is the "breakthrough through God to the nothingness of the Godhead," where the soul lives freely and independently on its own ground.[48] But in Eckhart's view nature is on the sidelines, for his concern is with the immediate relation between "the soul and God." The western counterpart to the Zen saying, "the flowers blossom just as they blossom" would be this Eckhartian breakthrough to the nothingness of the Godhead accomplished in concrete nature, and the concomitant event of the death-resurrection of the self.

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[48] See Q., pp. 253–64.

Zen is concerned with the way that nothingness and what is simple interrelate and interpenetrate. "The flowers blossom just as they blossom" is the way that what is simple is articulated on the basis of, or rather abyssed in nothingness, in the infinite openness of nothingness. For its part, nothingness mirrors itself on the level of a disclosed articulation, such that "the blossoming flowers do not blossom." Nothingness is heard, beautifully, abyssally, in the resonance of these two articulations.

In this first part we have drawn upon western counterparts in poetry, theology, philosophy and religion in order to gain access to Zen. The words of Angelus Silesius, Meister Eckhart, Heidegger, Jesus, and Rilke offered various points of contact. Indeed, we need a comparison on varying levels in order to locate the sense of the Zen saying under examination here: "the flowers blossom just as they blossom." At the same time, this means that the sense of this saying may only provisionally be located in religion, theology, philosophy or poetry when these fields are differentiated from one another. In the world of Zen, this saying can be a religious pronouncement, a poetic verse, or even an epistemic proposition; indeed it is characteristic of Zen that the One be manifold. Hence the manifestations of Zen belong not only to the religious-existential realm, but essentially to the aesthetic realm as well.

II

Part I of our inquiry located the mutual interpenetration of nothingness and something simple in the "just as" of the saying we have taken as example: "the flowers blossom just as they blossom." This interpenetration is also the operative principle in various arts, or "ways" (*dō*) as they are known in Japan, e.g., the way of tea, the way of flowers, the way of writing, the way of poetry. A typical example is monochromatic ink painting.[49] But we shall confine ourselves here to the realm of language and turn to another form of art, less known in the West, that likewise developed under the influence of Zen, namely,

[49] See Toshihiko Izutsu, "The Elimination of Color in Far Eastern Art and Philosophy," in *Eranos* 41 (1972), pp. 429–463.

that particular poetic form called *renku* or linked verse, in which several poets each compose a line.

To conform to the interpenetration of nothingness and the simple, truth must be expressed in a dual articulation, and part of truth is the very movement of this expression and its retrieval back into nothingness. As we have seen, in an extreme instance this dual articulation becomes: "the flowers blossom just as they blossom" and "the blossoming flowers do not blossom." In these two lines resounds the open space wherein articulation takes place. Spoken together, these lines, articulated in contrast and asymmetrically attuned to each other, let the voice of infinite nothingness be heard. Suppose now that any possible articulation is provided by another person, another poet, so that this speaking together comes about interpersonally, in community. Here we have the foundation for the formulation of *renku* or linked verse. What is significant in this form of poetry is not so much the individual lines or particular statements of the poets, as the interplay between them. In our example of the Zen saying, this interplay occurs when the one says to the other, "the flowers blossom just as they blossom," and the other responds, "the blossoming flowers do not blossom." This interchange gives rise to a curious resonance, in which the two utterances are in complete correspondence in spite of—or rather because of—their asymmetry. On the interpersonal level, the *renku* is the place where one heart touches another.

The first part of this essay focused on *nature*, as it is expressed in the "just as" that manifests how nothingness and what is simple belong together. Part two focuses on *the human being*, as he or she realizes this same connection in the interpersonal realm. This togetherness of nothingness and the simple is the rule of nature as nature; but only the person realizes it as such. The transition from the rule of nature to realization in the interpersonal realm is a step up from *simple* to magnified togetherness. The human being in his very being is nothing other than this magnified togetherness. Seen in this way, the human being displays the ambivalence of being human:

1) Through this magnification, the human being can immerse himself more deeply in nature, so that nature displays itself as nature in him. This is what the example of the "just as" in the Zen saying showed. In nature revealed as such, the human being realizes his own selflessness and attains self-sufficiency or autonomy in the realm of the

interpersonal.

2) On the other hand, as usually is the case, through this magnification the human being can remove himself from nature, grasp himself as *the* subject of the world, and understand nature as environment accessible as a human resource. This causes a distortion of nature that continues to the point where humans by their own doing are dehumanized.

Humans must therefore pursue a Way (*dō*) in order to rectify this distorted magnification and find their way back to simple nature. Such an *imitatio naturae* will give humans in their self-lessness a new freedom with respect to the self. From an East Asian perspective, this Way *is* art. "From the pine tree / learn of the pine tree / And from the bamboo / of the bamboo. This is the way of art." These are the words of the *haiku* and *renku* master Bashō (1664–1694). This art is the Way (*dō*) that leads us back to the simplicity of nature and from there makes us free for the self, for the play of the double self that we glimpsed in the encounter of the youth and the old man, in the last ox-herding picture.

With this background in mind we can approach the linguistic form of art known as *renku*. The word itself consists of two characters: *ren* means "linking or being connected to one another"; and *ku*, as in the familiar term haiku, denotes a brief but significant utterance, and hence, a concise, aphoristic poetic form. Several poets, unusually three but sometimes four, together compose a *renku*, bound by the precise rules that govern its form. Imagine three poets who gather to compose a *renku*. One of them presents a verse consisting of five, seven, and five syllables that is designated a long line. The second composes a short line, consisting of twice seven syllables, that links to the first line. The third poet then links to these another long line of five, seven and five syllables. The process of alternating long and short lines continues until a form of 36 lines is composed.[50] The authors of the lines also alternate, most commonly in the order followed in the very first round. The point of this exercise, however, is not to compose 36 lines that form a unified poem, for its real significance lies elsewhere.

[50] The form known as *haiku*, consisting of three units of five, seven and five syllables, was originally the first verse or line of a *renku* and was called a *hokku*, i.e., opening verse.

To illustrate this poetic form, we may cite an excerpt from a *renku* of 36 lines composed by Bashō and three of his disciples:

1 The stone basin, covered with moss, beside flowers.
2 This morning's irritation evaporated of itself.
3 Eating a meal for two whole days.
4 Cold north wind on the island, it's almost snowing.
5 In the evenings the climb to the mountain temple, to light the lanterns.

This example, chosen because it is relatively easily to translate, is meant first of all to give an immediate impression of a *renku* poem. To understand the *renku*, however, it is imperative that we analyze its formal structure. This structure, moreover, will prove to be significant for treating the questions of language and the interpersonal dimension.

Let us then attempt an analysis. The first poet presents a line that in itself is already a short poem. This verse is then written down, either by a scribe or by the poet himself. Once it is recorded, it is read aloud once again. At this point the second poet steps in and attempts for his part to compose a line that corresponds to the first. Line 2 must again form an autonomous poem. This means that it will not link directly to the first in its subject matter or diction, but rather will correspond "somehow" to the first such that between the two lines a new world is opened, a world that embraces both but which the first line alone could not anticipate.

The second poet must therefore grasp the subtlest nuances of line 1 and, by adding his own line, produce a kind of semantic fusion with line 1 that gives rise to a new world which both lines have in common. It is up to the second poet to take the initiative in projecting this new world, but the first line has already established certain conditions. This situation is one in which freedom and conditionedness completely and mutually interpenetrate, so that we have a kind of "thrown project," to use Heidegger's terminology; the poet must be able to project the thrownness or state of being conditioned. It is crucial to the composition of *renku* that the succeeding poet be able to interpret the preceding line in a new way, not by commenting on it but by composing a new line of his own. He must operate on the same level, as a creative poet. His interpretation of line 1 is made visible only within the horizon opened by line 2.

The second poet's work is concluded, for the time being, when his verse is written down. The new verse, itself a one-line poem, can now stand by itself as an objective form, and for this reason is open to new interpretations independent of the original intent of the poet who uttered it. This verse committed to writing is then read aloud, as was the first, both for the enjoyment of the poets and as a sign that it is now the third poet's turn.

In the next attempt to compose and link a verse, the characteristic features of the *renku* form become manifest. The third poet composes a line corresponding to line 2, such that through his initiative a new world once again arises, this time between lines 2 and 3, a world completely different from that between lines 1 and 2. But in composing line 3, the second line in conjunction with the first stands as an ineluctable, unalterable precondition. So the third poet either remains caught in the old world, or, by way of the old, is able to disclose a new world of his own.

In composing and linking verse 3, then, the third poet must accomplish three things: a) he must understand the previous verses; b) he must interpret verse 2 so as to see the world disclosed between it and the first verse; and c) he must provide a new interpretation of verse 2 that projects a new world.

a) In linking the verses, each should be able to speak for itself as a one-line poem. Accordingly, the third poet must be able to understand what line 2 means in itself, or rather, what it can mean.

b) Pregiven line 2 is not an isolated entity; it exists in a certain world, i.e., the first world that was disclosed in its correspondence to line 1. The third poet must therefore interpret it with respect to this world so as to highlight the particular nuance or connotation that arises in the connection between lines 1 and 2. After interpreting line 2 and thus gaining access to this first world, he must immerse himself in it. By becoming completely familiar with it, visualizing it to himself as it were, he is in a position to disclose a new and different world.

c) Now comes the major task of the third poet. He must re-interpret line 2, extract a different meaning from it than it had in its correspondence with line 1. The second poet did not intentionally compose a verse with two meanings; he composed his line with a particular connotation in mind, corresponding to line 1. So the third poet must project a new and different horizon and thereby create a "new" mean-

ing for line 2. This re-interpretation is his most important task. The new meaning, however, becomes manifest only in world II that is disclosed by composing a further line. Re-reading line 2 and placing it in a new context go hand in hand. The challenge for the third poet is to offer a interpretation so novel that he can thereby completely escape the familiar world I and create a new world that gives a new sense to line 2.

The threefold task of the third poet (understanding, interpreting and re-interpreting) is accomplished subconsciously, not in deliberate steps. The only thing that the poet explicitly produces is his own line of poetry, in correspondence to the preceding line re-interpreted by him. But this activity opens a new and different world that poetically resonates between lines 2 and 3. In other words, by speaking his own one-line poem, the third poet discloses world II, which includes the new meaning of line 2. From the second poet's perspective, this process can be described in the following manner. There is a two-fold relation between the second and third poets. On the one hand, the second poet with his verse poses a question for the third poet: "How do you understand my verse? Can you re-interpret it so that you can escape my world and disclose a new world of your own? If you are not able to do so, you will remain only a part of my world; you will not be yourself." On the other hand, this means that the second poet quite selflessly places his verse at the disposal of the third poet, allowing him any interpretation he would give it, not insisting upon any original intent as a criterion. The second poet can never say, "I did not mean that; that is mistaken; that is just a misinterpretation." Rather he is prepared to accept any interpretation, even the most surprising, in the hope that in an unfamiliar reading he will discover himself anew. If the third poet is successful in composing and linking an appropriate line in the manner prescribed, line 2 is transformed, and the second poet experiences joy at the new world opened in his line. The new, third line is written down and read aloud, and then it is the first poet's turn again.

Not every poet is successful, or always successful, in composing a line that appropriately links to the preceding one. A line may be beautiful as a one-line poem; it may even correspond to the preceding line. And yet this correspondence may not disclose any new world in contrast to the former one. Instead of proffering a new interpretation,

the third poet may only move about in world I already disclosed by the second poet. He may remain caught up in this world, enclosed within its horizon. In the poetics of *renku* this kind of verse is called a *shin-ku* or "kindred line" (kindred with the pregiven world); whereas a line with the power to open a new world is called a *so-ku*, that is, a distantly related line, or sometimes a "Zen line." The poet must be able to compose a distantly related line; otherwise he has not proven himself. In composing and linking verse, both correspondence and autonomous creation are essential.

The task of each further verse is to disclose a new world. Successful continuation of linked verse therefore requires a shift of worlds. The 36 verses of a *renku* do not together form a semantic unity with some theme persisting throughout; rather they present a game of world shifts that several poets take turns playing. And it is the play between the lines that makes the difference. On the one hand, this "between" is an actual event, as we saw earlier; and on the other this "emptiness" between the lines is the free and infinitely open space, or nothingness, where a play of world shifts takes place and then fades to make room for a new event. *Renku* may thus be described as a play of world shifts in the infinitely open space of nothingness. In this play each of the participants, if he is to be himself, must be able to play the role of the "lord" of the world. This role consists in confronting the world prescribed in the previous line with a distantly related line and thereby taking the initiative to open a new world. The previous line is taken in a new sense, in a new direction, and the role of lord is passed to another. In the context of the *renku*, every participating poet is both reader and writer, recipient and creator at the same time. Only he who can truly read another can himself write the poem; only he who can himself truly poetize can read another and transmit his presence. Reading and poetizing (writing) are intertwined. Reading consists in the threefold activity of understanding, interpreting, and re-interpreting. Such reading turns the given interpretation about, and moves on to initiate a poetic creation through a shift in worlds. Poetizing here, as an autonomous opening of a world of one's own, works only when one's response is selflessly coupled with the previous world. And as soon as the new verse is composed, one's poetic activity turns into a complete self-lessness that leaves the verse completely open to a distantly related, new interpretation. Reading and poetizing thus come to be interconnected through

the worlds that arise in the nothingness of the "between."

The same holds true for the reading of a *renku* as an already completed text, a *renku* by Bashō and others that we read as a printed text in a book, for example. What significance does this reading have if we do not participate as co-authors in the formation of the *renku*? To be able to read and appreciate a *renku* text, we must read between the lines and participate in the continual creation of the particular poem. We cannot enter the world(s) of the *renku* without ourselves being active in the threefold process of understanding, interpreting and re-interpreting. We cannot content ourselves with merely reading, but must creatively reproduce the threefold activity of poetizing on our own, and in response to the lines already written. To be sure, this threefold activity engaging in the "emptiness" between the lines is not visible. But we actively participate in a *renku* by means of this creative reproduction; indeed we might speak of a kind of secondary creation here. The true reader re-creates the *renku*, just as a musical conductor interprets a piece of music in performing it. Every reader reveals and proves himself in his own specific reading. There can be no "mere reading" when it comes to *renku*.

For both the poets or primary participants as well as the readers or secondary participants, the significant factor is what lies between the lines, i.e., the realm of the "between." On the one hand this empty "between" counts as the infinitely open space of nothingness, and on the other it is the the very event of shifting worlds. For the *renku* is a play of world shifts in the open space of nothingness. Every one of its lines or verses embodies its author and lives in a *double world*, i.e., the world of the previous line and that of the following line. But dwelling in a double world is possible only on the basis of the emptiness of the "between," on the basis of nothingness. The poet actually dwells in a double world not merely horizontally, but also vertically, not only in that double world just described, but also in the all-embracing world of infinite openness based on nothingness. A line or verse discloses a world entirely on its own, self-sufficiently, and the same line belongs quite self-lessly to a distantly related world. This self-sufficiency and self-lessness are ultimately rooted in nothingness, which can be glimpsed in the emptiness of the "between." They belong together in the movement into nothingness and then back out of nothingness. It is precisely this nothingness, this emptiness of the "between," that—as the

most extreme openness possible—makes it eminently possible to re-interpret the words and to re-interpret as an interpersonal event. The crucial movement of the *renku* consists in emerging out of nothingness in a completely self-sufficient manner and re-interpreting, and then, in a completely self-less manner, proceeding into nothingness to be re-interpreted anew.

Let us cite another example of the dynamics of *renku* for which continual semantic interpretability, and re-interpretation as an interpersonal activity, are decisive. Once a disciple of Bashō, Kyorai, presented his master with this *haiku*:

> The tips of the crags—
> Here too is someone,
> Guest of the moon.[51]

Bashō read this *haiku* and asked Kyorai what he had meant by it. Kyorai answered, "One evening, when struck by a marvelous full moon, I took a walk in the moonlight and came across someone by the crags who was also inspired by the moon, a guest of the moon. In happy solidarity with him I composed this *haiku* as a greeting to him: The tips of the crags—here too is someone, guest of the moon." Bashō responded, "It would be more elegant to read this poem in the following way: Struck by the full moon, you take an evening walk in the moonlight. You're inspired to climb up on a crag and greet the moon, 'O moon, here on the crags I too am a guest, invited by you. Thanks for your invitation!' The poem, 'The tips of the crags—here too is someone, guest of the moon,' is thus a poem about yourself."

Bashō's interpretation deeply impressed his disciple. Later Kyorai told another disciple that he had not actually meant this, but through the interpretation of the teacher he was able to understand for the first time what his poem stated. "I had not understood the true sense of my poem."

We can learn much from this story about the problematics of writing, reading, text, interpretation and language. This is not the place to delve into these matters in detail, but we can bring out a few important points. The text and the author are already given. Then

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[51] Translation by Donald Keene, from *Anthology of Japanese Literature* (New York: Grove Press, Evergreen Edition, 1960), p. 380.

a distantly related interpretation is offered, one that unexpectedly reveals a meaning unintended by the author. This new meaning can even be perceived as more true, more beautiful, by the author himself. How is this possible? What are the conditions that allow this to happen? What a text as such says and what possibilities of meaning it holds can be different from, and more than, what the author wanted to say. It is precisely the fixed quality of the text that makes it open to new interpretations. The possible statements a text can make, come to be expressed in language only by way of interpretations. Now the interpretive horizon is not entirely arbitrary, but it is in principle almost infinitely variable; in different ages a text will be interpreted differently. To read a text basically means to understand something understood, to understand anew what the author understood in writing. Reading thus entails a double horizon of understanding, a situation in which the possible shift between the horizon of the author and that of the reader creates room for re-interpretation. In contrast to a reading that would stick as closely as possible to the intention of the author, reading a *renku* requires an imaginative shift or expansion of horizons that allows a re-interpretation of the text. In reading a *renku* what counts is not the lines of the text as such, as we said before, but rather a kind of mutual echo or mirroring of horizons, a play that can be taken quite seriously by the players. When a *renku* poet enters into the game with his life, play becomes a serious game of life. Part of life, however, is learning to live, learning by living, not by remaining in a closed off ego within a very confined horizon. The shift of horizon can therefore mean being freed to live life, and *renku* can become a way of practicing this liberation. For this reason *renku* is also called a Way (*dō*).

But how is it possible for an author to find a distantly related interpretation not only different, but even more elegant, beautiful, and true? Only because what is at stake, for both the author and the interpreter, is the truly beautiful, something that is required for language to be articulated. What is truly beautiful in the author's mind can be surpassed by something truly beautiful that is made visible by a distantly related interpretation of the same poem. In its overflow of being transparent all the way through to nothingness, what is truly beautiful in itself is unbounded and unmeasurable. A text that in some way expresses the truly beautiful can be experienced as even more beautiful and true in the immeasurable space of true beauty.

Now that we have analyzed the formal structure of *renku* poetry, we may listen again to the five-line excerpt cited above:

1 The stone basin, covered with moss, beside flowers.
World I
2 This morning's irritation evaporated of itself.
World II
3 Eating a meal for two whole days.
World III
4 Cold north wind on the island, it's almost snowing.
World IV
5 In the evenings the climb to the mountain temple, to light the lanterns.

We shall attempt to comprehend each additional line and the corresponding shift of worlds.

1 The stone basin, covered with moss, beside flowers.

Let us imagine a small garden, tastefully laid out, quiet and peaceful, a bit brightened by the contrast between stone and moss, the green of the moss and the red of the flowers. Line 2 is then added:

1 The stone basin, covered with moss, beside flowers.
2 This morning's irritation evaporated of itself.

World I: Here we might imagine the man of the house, an aesthete who is irksome and morose, already mad at his wife early in the morning. Working in the garden, his favorite pastime, he forgets his irritation; it evaporates of itself in the atmosphere of the garden. He is now a kind old fellow, suddenly pleasant to his wife. In the tone of the poem thus read, we can already detect something comical about his change of moods. Then line 3 is added:

2 This morning's irritation evaporated of itself.
3 Eating a meal for two whole days.

World II: We now imagine a man who is terribly moody. No sooner has some irritation evaporated of itself than another mood replaces it, one rather crude and impulsive, but still comical. He has been eating for two days straight. This behavior is absurd, but such absurdities

sometimes occur in our lives; indeed they are a part of everyday life, and we must not only accept them but be able to enjoy them as well. Out of the atmosphere of the garden, between lines 1 and 2, the first world arises; whereas the moods of a man constitute the second world. Now add line 4:

> 3 Eating a meal for two whole days.
> 4 Cold north wind on the island, it's almost snowing.

World III: Here we might picture a desolate landscape and a demanding life on an island. The atmosphere is completely different from that of the previous world. Someone has been eating for two whole days to prepare himself for hard work in the mounting snow. Line 5 is then added:

> 4 Cold north wind on the island, it's almost snowing.
> 5 In the evenings the climb to the mountain temple, to light the lanterns.

World IV: Let us picture here a remote island, a cold, lonely place where deep silence reigns. This scene might allude to the tragic life of an ex-emperor in Japanese history who was exiled to an island. The atmosphere is one of melancholy.

In conclusion, we cite a *mondō* between two monks in order to elucidate the origins of *renku*.[52] This exchange of question and answer took place between Kyōzan Ejaku and Sanshō Enen, who knew each other well and hence, of course, knew each other's names (Kyōzan and Sanshō are the names they received as monks; Ejaku and Enen are their personal names). Once Kyōzan encountered Sanshō and asked him,[53]

> What is your name?

Now what is the source of this unexpected question, since Kyōzan very

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[52] On the theme of *mondō* or question-answer exchange, see Ueda Shizuteru, "Ascent and Descent, pp. 69–73.

[53] This *mondō* is recorded in case 68 of the *Hekiganroku*. See *The Blue Cliff Record*, translated from the Chinese *Pi Yen Lu* by Thomas and J. C. Cleary. Boulder: Prajña Press, 1978, p. 429.

well knows what Sanshō's name is? What kind of question is this, really?
Sanshō answered,

Ejaku.

Sanshō answers here with the name of Kyōzan, the one who is asking the question. Kyōzan then says,

Ejaku, that's me!

Sanshō retorts,

My name is Enen.

And Kyōzan bursts into laughter.

The point here is not the topic of the conversation. For Zen Buddhism and for the mentality nurtured by Zen, the religious dimension lies not so much in *what* is spoken about as in *how* it is uttered. In this respect, *renku*, which occurs in the emptiness "between the lines," is not merely a poetic event, but precisely as a poetic event is also a religious one. In reality, something is "beautiful" when in truth it is more than beautiful.

Translated by John C. Maraldo