A Phenomenological Approach to Comparison: The Non-Metaphorical Poetics of Paul Celan and Wáng Wéi

by

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the grounds of comparison, and what makes comparison meaningful, through an encounter between Paul Celan (1920-1970), the pre-eminent post-war poet of the German language, and Wáng Wéi (701-761), one of the master poets of the Táng Dynasty when classical Chinese poetry was at its peak.

A traditional approach to comparison would seek to establish certain "common denominators" by applying pre-given historical, cultural or linguistic influences as commensurable categories of analysis. However, the aesthetic qualities of both Celan's and Wáng Wéi's poems resist reduction to categories in common and thus defies the very notion of commensurability. I have

instead employed insights from the phenomenological tradition – ranging from Husserl to Heidegger, Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty – to illuminate the complexity of the poets' similar positions, specifically their non-metaphorical poetics, resulting in contrapuntal dialogues between different ideas and expressions that are grounded in their respective cultural background. Developing from Husserl's "transcendental inter-subjectivity", my approach in particular applies Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of body to comparison.

I, therefore, pursue three phenomenological concepts derived from Celan's poetics: *Begegnung* (Encounter), *Ort* (Site), and *Licht* (Light). *Begegnung* calls for an immanent alterity that formulates the condition of comparison; *Ort* indicates the site of *Begegnung* i.e. its context and circumstances, and *Licht* illuminates the consequences. Establishing counterparts from Chinese literary aesthetics in a dialogical analysis, I examine the poets' deep affinities in their poetic landscapes. Despite the separation of these literary works across epochs, continents and cultures, comparison in a phenomenological paradigm allows us to see more about these works than if they were regarded in isolation. As comparison and translation are intricately related, I include multiple translations and conclude with a discussion of how my phenomenological approach to comparison can be applied to the practice of translation as well.

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Introduction
U-topia: Seeking a Phenomenological Approach to Comparison[1]

1   Comparative Literature: going beyond influence studies

Is there thought without comparison? When we turn thought into language through literature,

should not the notion of Comparative Literature – transcending the boundaries between global

cultures – be the most natural approach, the basis of discourse? And yet, not only is the

discipline of Comparative Literature young, even in its early stages, more than half a century

ago, it was perceived to be in crisis. As René Wellek pointedly stated: "The most serious sign of

the precarious state of our study is the fact that it has not been able to establish a distinct subject

matter and a specific methodology" (Wellek 1959: 149). It was not for lack of interest and

activity though: this was a time when internationalism was seen as a way out of the hegemonies

that had led the world into two devastating wars, and technical advances in communication and

travel moved nations ever closer together despite of political divisions. But contact in and of

itself does not guarantee that the resulting exchange is enlightening or even meaningful and

Wellek specifically criticized the narrow "study of the 'foreign trade' of literature" in the field of

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[1] Unless otherwise credited, the English translations in this study are mine. I gratefully acknowledge discussions with Dr. Boris Steipe, to whom I am indebted for his advice on the sense of poetry and on the subtleties of the German original.

Comparative Literature, which simply focuses on tracing literary sources, borrowings, and foreign influences (150).

Now, fifty years on, can we say that this issue has been resolved, the discipline has matured and subject matter and methodology are secure? Yes and no perhaps.[2] In a recent forum on "What Does the Comparative Do?" published in the 2013 May issue of *PMLA*, the questioning on "subject matter" still persists when contemporary comparatists such as David Damrosch inquired how to set national literatures "in a glittering international frame" (Damrosch 2013: 623), and the foundations still merit discussion, as when Natalie Melas and Ming Xie,[3] from different perspectives, explore the "meta" questions of comparison: what is comparison and how is comparison possible?

According to Susan Bassnett's *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* (1993), the discipline was initially developed in a Eurocentric, indeed imperial perspective,[4] dominated by "the study of influence" (Bassnett 1993: 13).[5] As postcolonial studies have pointed out, although the "comparative method" employed under the ideology of progress and development in the 19th century had accumulated vast amounts of knowledge, such cultural products were nevertheless organized hierarchically according to Western imperial values, reflected in the works such as

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[2] Ming Xie summarizes the situation as: "As Haun Saussy puts it, comparative literature has won its battles but lost its identity" (Xie 2011: 35).

[3] See Xie (2013) and Melas (2013). For a more substantial examination of the methodology of comparison, see Melas (2007) and Xie (2011).

[4] See "Culture and Nationalism" and "The Imperial Perspective" in Bassnett 1993: 13-15; 17-20.

[5] Bassnett argues: "a key word in that text [Philaréte Chasles's inaugural lecture at the Athénée in 1835] is 'influence', and indeed the study of influence has always occupied an importance place in Comparative Literature" (Bassnett 1993: 13).

Hutcheon Posnett's *Comparative Literature* (1886) and Charles Gayley's *Methods and Materials of Literary Criticism: Lyric, Epic, and Applied Forms of Poetry* (1920) (Melas 2007).[6] However, even as this colonial perspective has been replaced by the post-colonial studies of recent decades, the dichotomies such as "East" and "West", "North" and "South", "Old" and "New" have been subtly transformed and still uphold claims of an absolute "difference", even "incommensurability" between cultures.

That the idea of incommensurability between cultures is problematic however is a topic of the newly developed East-West studies.[7] Although Zhāng Lóng Xī calls on Rudyard Kipling's: "Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet" in "The Ballad of East and West" (Zhāng 2007: 3), as a paragon of the colonial notion of "cultural incommensurability", in fact Kipling takes the dichotomy as merely geometrical, when he continues: "But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth / When two strong men stand face to face, tho' they come from the ends of the earth!" (Stedman (ed.) 1896: 596). Rightly though, the whole notion of cultural incommensurability – founded on such dichotomies – is criticized by Zhāng as having quite the opposite effect of what is nominally intended: the post-colonial approach is shown to be an internal revision of the "Western" perspective, which in fact reinforces the artificial division between the East and West and thus neglects the common ground upon which comparison has the potential to join texts and readings across cultures.[8] Following Claudio Guillén's model of

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[6] For a detailed analysis on the colonial features of these works, see Melas 2007: 20-24.

[7] See Zhāng Lóng Xī 1998: 24 for his response to the "theories of Orientalism and post-colonialism" regarding the problem of "ahistoricity" in the East-West studies.

[8] For Zhāng's criticism of the concept of "cultural incommensurability", see "Chapter One" of Zhāng 2007: "The Fallacy of Cultural Incommensurability"; for the criticism of post-colonialism, see Zhāng 1998: 24.

"supranationality" that proposes theoretical connections between literatures that transcend geographical, social or cultural influence,[9] Zhāng proposes thematic and theoretical affinities between literary works across cultures, especially associations that are not based upon any influence, that join the Chinese and Western canons, explored in multiple dimensions[10] showing that "humanity shares a common ground" (Zhāng 1998: 27).

However, exposing the fallacy of the dichotomy of East and West, and proposing what Comparative Literature should not be, does not yet guide us how to proceed, nor can an abstract universality of human nature be considered as a secured ground of comparison. The very nature of comparison has become uncertain.

Melas returns to the original sense of "co-appearance" (*com-paraison*),[11] through positing the co-existence of the incommensurables. Comparison, according to Melas, does not have to depend upon recognizing the sameness, but may simply acknowledge the incommensurable without imposing any artificial "unification" (Melas 1995, 2007). This methodological approach of "equivalence without unity", in opposition to the traditional "comparative method", which is considered to be contaminated by colonial imperialism during the establishment of the discipline of comparative literature,[12] intends to "[...] imagine a comparison or a setting into relation that is

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[9] See Guillén 1993: 69-71 for the three models that he proposes for "supranational" relations.

[10] See Zhāng 1992; 2005; 2007.

[11] Jean-Luc Nancy's concept, quoted in Melas 2007: xiii. For an etymological study of "comparison" in Western rhetorical tradition, see Melas 1995: 275-276.

[12] For example, according to Melas: "Comparison as it has come down to us from the 'comparative method' developed across so many emergent fields in the nineteenth century is a highly normative procedure" (Melas 1995: 275); "Comparison is indistinguishable from imperial progress" (Melas 2007: 21).

not normative or assimilatory [...]" and prevents it from being utilized and normalized for establishing an imperialist hierarchy (Melas 1995: 276).

Thus the intrinsic complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty of the notion of commensurability encourages comparatists to focus on comparative activities,[13] engendering a concept of comparison that is "merely comparative", as Melas explains: "imagining yourself, really letting yourself be imagined (experience that impossibility) without guarantees, by and in another culture, perhaps" (Melas 2013: 654). However, this does not automatically resolve Wellek's criticism of literary communication as a mere "foreign trade": True comparison must result in more insight than consideration of either text individually could achieve. The question at hand is more along the lines of Ming Xie's ideas, who proposes "comparativity" as a focus:

> Comparison in the usual sense is generally interested in the practical results of its operation – that is, similarities or differences – often conceived from an implicitly self-centered or superior viewpoint, whereas comparativity, or the activity of comparing or thinking about how (not) to compare, is more concerned with how similarities and differences come about in the first place. (Xie 2013: 676)[14]

Xie returns all the way to Kant's concept of knowledge that reveals both active and passive aspects of representation, to distinguish his new concept of "comparativity" from the traditional "comparison". Transcending the very notion of dichotomy, Xie develops an idea of seeing oneself as "double", i.e. "to see oneself while seeing oneself as other" (Xie 2011: 38). Thus

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[13] See, for example, Bassnett 2006, Saussy 2011 and Palumbo-Liu 2011.

[14] For a more detailed account on this notion of "comparativity", see Xie 2011: 35-51.

"comparativity" arises from a conviction of the Other as an immanent "alterity", thus indeed creating the potential to guide comparison beyond studies of "foreign trade".

2   Commensurability: the question of a common denominator

Since comparison is to discover similarity and difference, this leads to the seemingly inescapable conclusion that comparison must be based on some set of attributes that are commensurable, and, as a consequence, the definition of such shared attributes or common categories is a precondition for comparison. This is evident even in the etymological roots of the word: the concept *comparatio* carries the root *par-*, and thus extends "equal" attributes between entities through rhetorical tropes such as simile and metaphor. As Quintilian explains in his *Institutio Oratoria* (*Institutes of Oratory*):

> In general, however, metaphor is shorter than simile, and the latter is different from the former in that in simile this thing is compared to that thing that we wish to formulate; in metaphor this thing is spoken out in the place of that thing. It is a comparison when I say that a man acted "like a lion"; it is a metaphor when I say about the man he "is a lion".[15] (*Inst*. VIII.6.8-9)

The concept of comparison, however, needs to be further clarified: following Michel Le Guern's notes on the ambiguity of the concept of comparison,[16] Paul Ricour expresses his disagreement

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[15] "*In totum autem metaphora brevior est similitudo, eoque distat quod illa comparatur rei quam volumus exprimere, haec pro ipsa re dicitur. Comparatio est cum dico fecisse quid hominem 'ut leonem', translatio cum dico de homine 'leo est'.*" (Note that Quintilian translates μεταφερειν from its literal Greek meaning to a literal Latin *translatio*, thus establishing the two words as synonyms.)

[16] Le Guern noticed that in classical works, *comparatio* is used to distinguish and judge a group of objects through the categories such as "superior, inferior or equal"; whereas *similitudo* is a kind of "qualitative judgment", through which one particular striking feature or character of an object is brought to judge the quality of another object, of its

with Quintilian by arguing that "metaphor is not an abbreviated simile", since there is an immanent distinction between *comparatio* and *similitudo*: "The specificity of semantic analogy [...] is clarified once more by another distinction, between metaphor and comparison, where the latter is taken in the qualitative sense of *similitudo* or simile (like...) and not as the quantitative *comparatio* (more, less, as much...) [...]" (Ricour 2003: 219).

Nevertheless, the concept is established upon a certain notion of "similarity" as the "ground" of comparison, which Haun Saussy recently called a "common denominator" (Saussy 2011: 60). According to Saussy, "common denominator" means "something like the satisfaction of resolving incompatible fractions into a single expression [...]" (61). Saussy derives his common denominator from the classical usage of "*tertium comparationis*" as "the third part of comparison" by means of which two objects can be compared (ibid.).[17] For Saussy, "common denominator" has become the most ambiguous and intangible, but necessary foundation of comparison, as he quotes Charles Olson, an imaginative figure created by Saussy himself who wants to compare "Mayan hieroglyphics and the fish market of Gloucester, Massachusetts":

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being or action. (*Sous le nom de* comparatio *sont groupés tous les moyens qui servent à exprimer les notions de comparatif de supériorité, d'infériorité et d'égalité. La* comparatio *est donc caractérisée par le fait qu'elle fait intervenir un élément d'appréciation quantitative. La* similitudo*, au contraire, sert à exprimer un jugement qualitatif, en faisant intervenir dans le déroulement de lénoncé l'être, l'objet, l'action ou l'état qui comporte à un degré éminent ou tout au mois remarquable la qualité ou la caractéristique qu'il importe de mettre en valeur.* Le Guern 1973: 52).

[17] In his discussion of the concept of *comparatio* in Vergil's *Aeneid*, William Joseph O'Neal points out, classical authors in general divided the concept of comparison into four parts: "...the subject of comparison, the object of comparison or vehicle, the tertium comparationis or way in which the objects are compared, and the linking word between the vehicle and the subject". O'Neal also provides an example from Vergil's *Aeneid* 12.260-263, where Aeneid's soldiers are compared with frightened birds, the subject is the relative pronoun *quos* (which refers to the soldiers), the vehicle is *avis* (birds), the linking adverb is *ut* (as), and the "*tertium comparationis*" (the third part of comparison) is indicated in the verb *territat* (that they both are frightened) (O'Neal 2005: 9).

"They don't have anything to do with each other – yet. What they have in common is me, or my attention" (62).

David Palumbo-Liu, on the other hand, rightly considers the concept of "common denominator" to be equivalent to "commensurateness", which refers to some "common ground" or "common humanity" as the basis of comparison – and just as problematic. Shifting his position toward the questions of "stance" instead of "objects" of comparison, Palumbo-Liu argues for the notion of "congruity",[18] a concept that he tends to use to replace the focus on "commensurateness" and through which he encourages to explore both the structural and historical dimensions of literary works (Palumbo-Liu 2011: 56). In fact, through seeking "congruity" instead of "commensurability", Palumbo-Liu, like Melas, emphasizes the pre-condition, the ground clearing process of comparison, as he explicitly states: "the focus will shift from the possibility of making comparisons to the conditions of possibility—how do we make our judgments, our evaluations about cultures, and peoples, unlike our own, unlike ourselves?" (58).

Simply stated, the problem is thus: comparison requires commensurability, commensurability requires categorization and a focus on discrete attributes, but such categorization leads to an implicit claim that the "common denominator" is in fact a universal. Though "comparativity" and "congruity" have been proposed to replace such a problematic notion of commensurability, they still need to be further theorized and actualized through concrete studies of literary texts.

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[18] For more detailed explanations of the concept, the intention and its variant associations, see Palumbo-Liu in Behdad and Thomas 2011: 47-50.

Moreover, engaging in comparison does not necessarily mean following the "entrepreneurial" path of so-called "World Literature" and overlooking the significance of "untranslatability", as Emily Apter keenly criticizes in the "Introduction" of her recent publication *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (2013: 3). According to Apter, the richness of Walter Benjamin's concept of "translation failure" has not yet been fully appreciated and explored in the current debates on World Literature and Translation Studies (9). I could not agree more. However, the "failure" of translation, as Benjamin argued in his famous essay "The Task of the Translator" (*Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*, 1923) evokes an approach of translation through revival and re-creation, which Benjamin names the "after life" (*Überleben*) of the original,[19] i.e. translation is called upon to bring fresh meaning, rather than simply a lexical transposition of the text. As we will experience in the following chapters, a phenomenological approach to comparison can be based upon seeing the poem itself rather than its association with the author— in this sense, every translated poem has its own life that is accessible to a meaningful comparison with the original. In fact, comparing multiple possibilities of translation enables us to transform linguistic barriers into opportunities of perceiving and reflecting more levels of the original through translation, without resorting to a fallacious, because arbitrary, "poetic license". This particular insight about translation stemming from the practice of comparison throughout this thesis is made explicit in the Conclusion.

3   A Non-metaphorical approach to comparison: *bǐ* and *xīng*

One might want to ask, is the discussion on "comparison" a solely "Western" phenomenon? How is this seen in Eastern literary theory and practice, particularly in the Chinese? The

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[19] For Benjamin's discussion on the fidelity and freedom of translation, see Benjamin 1969: 79.

translation of "comparison" in Chinese is *bǐ* 比, and – remarkably – the Chinese word does not imply the same kind of imposed similarity that is inherent in *comparatio*. For example, in the ancient oracle bones writing (~1,200 BCE), as well as in its successor, bronze script, the character *bǐ*, 比 represents an image of two people walking in harmony, shoulder by shoulder, as the oldest dictionary *Origin of Chinese Characters* 《說文解字》 (121 CE) explains: "比 means dense. Two people is *cóng* 从, the reverse of 从 is 比 ... 夶 is the ancient character of 比."[20] In classical Chinese, 比 normally is translated as "being close", "matching", "dense", "similar" etc., and can be used as both adjective and verb, with an emphasis on natural, spiritual or moral coherence. For example, according to the *Analects*, Confucius once said: "A gentleman's place under the heaven, aims not to be intimate, not to be distant (in kinship), virtue alone attracts him close (比)".[21]

It is arguable whether one could equate *bǐ* 比 with simile or metaphor, as it is also sometimes translated,[22] implying a "*tertium comparationis*" albeit with reduced emphasis on commensurability. Of particular interest for our discussion however is the complement of *bǐ* 比 in classical Chinese literary criticism: *xīng* 興 "association or motif".[23] *Bǐ* and *xīng* are two of the three devices (*fù-bǐ-xīng*) that are mentioned in the canonical "Preface" of one of the Confucian

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[20] "比，密也。二人為比，反从為比。夶，古文比。"

[21] "君子之於天下也，無適也，無莫也，義之與比。"（《論語·里仁》）

[22] E.g. "comparison or simile" by Pauline Yu, see Yu 1981: 214.

[23] Ibid.

canons: *Shī Jīng*《詩經》(*The Book of Poetry*).[24] It is the Liáng 梁 dynasty critic Liú Xié 劉勰 (465-520) who selected *bǐ* and *xīng* as counterparts and discussed in his well known book 《文心雕龍》(*The Literary Mind: Dragon-Carvings*[25]):

> 故比者，附也；興者，起也。附理者切類以指事，起情者依微以擬議。起情故興體以立，附理故比例以生。比則畜憤以斥言，興則環譬以記諷。
>
> (《文心雕龍．比興篇》)

> Therefore, *bi* means to adhere, and *xing* means to arouse. What adheres to meaning uses close categorical analogy in order to point to a situation. What arouses emotions relies on the subtle to formulate conceptions. Arouse emotions, and forms of *xing* will be established; adhere to meaning, and examples of *bi* will be produced. *Bi* stores up indignation to castigate with words; *xing* links analogies to record criticisms.
>
> (Yu 1981: 25)

This interpretation is inherited from Confucius' famous remark on the function of *xīng*:

> 子曰：〝小子何莫學夫《詩》？《詩》可以興，可以觀，可以群，可以怨?；邇 之事父，遠之事君；多識于鳥獸草木之名。〞（《論語．陽貨》）

> Disciples, why don't you just learn from *Poetry*?[26] Poetry can be used to evoke emotions, to perceive nature and customs, to discuss questions and to satirize politics. Closely, one

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[24] The third, *fù* 賦, is "exposition".

[25] Here, I adopted Pauline Yu's translation of the book title, see Yu 1981: 214.

can learn how to serve parents; remotely, how to assist the kingdom. One can also

frequently be aware of the names of birds, beasts, grasses and trees.

(*Analects*, "Yáng Huò")

Liú Xié's interpretation of *bǐ* and *xīng* speaks for this Confucian spirit, emphasizing their social-rhetorical function and especially, the subtlety that *xīng* carries in terms of a "proper" critical attitude that the well-educated gentleman should cultivate within himself.

Scholars in general loosely translate *bǐ* as "metaphor", although with much reservation,[27] but the definition of *xīng* has become quite a controversial issue; it is generally agreed that *xīng* cannot be pinned down by any equivalent "Western" rhetorical category, rather it functions by way of mutual evocation which carries the intriguing potential of an entirely non-metaphorical mode of comparison.

The most well known example of *xīng* is the first song of *Shī Jīng*, "Guān Jū" 《關雎》 ("Fishhawk"):

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[26] Here, Confucius uses the general term "poetry" to specifically refer to the *Book of Poetry*.

[27] For example, Pauline Yu argues that traditional Chinese poetry is essentially "non-metaphorical", because "metaphor" is established upon the Platonic theory of mimesis that presumes a certain "universal truth": "a metaphor ... connects two phenomena which are different in kind but which can be linked because of the assumption of essences as universal truth" (Yu 1981: 212).

關雎	Fishhawk[28]
關關雎鳩，在河之洲。	The fishhawks sing *gwan gwan* on sandbars of the stream.
窈窕淑女，君子好逑。	Gentle maiden, pure and fair, fit pair for a prince.
參差荇菜，左右流之。	Watercress grows here and there, right and left we gather it.
窈窕淑女，寤寐求之。	Gentle maiden, pure and fair, wanted waking and asleep.
求之不得，寤寐思服。	Wanting, sought her, had her not, waking, sleeping, thought of her,
悠哉悠哉，輾轉反側。	On and on he thought of her he tossed from one side to another.
參差荇菜，左右采之。	Watercress grows here and there, right and left we pull it.
窈窕淑女，琴瑟友之。	Gentle maiden, pure and fair, with harps we bring her company.
參差荇菜，左右芼之。	Watercress grows here and there, right and left we pick it out.
窈窕淑女，鐘鼓樂之。	Gentle maiden, pure and fair, with bells and drums do her delight.

Reading this poem, one might wonder about the relationship between the fishhawk's singing at the water margins and a young gentleman's longing for an elegant maiden. One might want to explain that these birds are traditionally considered to often sing in pairs, but such connection based upon comparison is not "imperative", as Dai Wei-qun points out, not a necessary

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[28] This translation is taken from Owen 1996: 30- 31.

characteristic of *xīng*.[29] In other words, instead of a fixed metaphor that imposes the similarities of two concepts, the poem rather presents a certain non-relational relationship, an affinity with the gaps between the two phenomena that invite interpretations, and the ground of such connection-comparison is not pre-given, but to be sought between the poet and the reader.

As implied in Liú Xié's definition, *xīng* is perceived as complementary, rather than oppositional, to *bǐ*. The distinction of the two lies in the unique "subtlety", or "indirectness" of *xīng*, which, in modern times, has often been misunderstood as "obscurity". Such "obscurity" is intensified if one considers *qì* 氣–an intangible material force that endows the living with life, a *vis vitalis* – as the natural vitality that evokes human emotions expressed through poetry, which the Southern dynasty literary critic Zhōng Róng 鍾嶸 (468 －518) identifies as the "origin" of artistic creation:

氣之動物，物之感人，故搖蕩性情，形諸舞詠。（鐘嶸，《詩品》）

Qì animates things, matter moves people, and, human dispositions and emotions are stimulated, and then articulated in dances and songs. (Zhōng Róng *Poetic Characters*)

The emphasis on the "moving" (*gǎn* 感) power of *qì* in Zhōng Róng's account can be perceived as the ground of *xīng*, which is based upon a vision that Nature and human beings are

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[29] Dai describes the connection of *xīng* as non-predicative, as opposed to *bǐ* (metaphor): "But it is not imperative that the reader make such comparisons. For no prediction occurs between them, indicating the author's intention to 'make similar'" (Dai 1991: 7).

immanently associated, and poetry, as a form of art, is a human expression of the natural vitality, thus the universe is intrinsically poetic.[30]

It is interesting, also, to notice that *qì*, as a "ground" is not anything like the "idea" in the Platonic sense, but is closely associated with "breath",[31] a material, though maybe intangible omnipresence, located in "no-where". In this sense, *xīng* is not "anti-metaphorical", but "non-metaphorical", precisely because *qì* is not equivalent to the "essence" of Being from which the idea of "metaphor" is originally derived.[32] The subtlety of *xīng* is due to the relationships between the phenomena, which, as they spontaneously happen before, beneath, and beyond any rational categories, are not to be reduced to any single perspective, but arouse a particular emotion, or a specific feeling through such complexity.

4   Paul Celan: the critical tendency of biographical reading and its problems

Overcoming the limitations of comparison that are inherent in a reliance on commensurability and influence studies becomes necessary if we are to realize the potential of comparison to yield insights that go beyond what an analysis of texts individually could achieve, making the method suitable to apply it even to texts that are among the most challenging that their respective epochs have produced.

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[30] This is also applicable to how "literature" (*wén* 文) is understood in classical Chinese, as Stephen Owen interprets Liú Xié's account of "literature" in *The Literary Mind: Dragon-Carvings*: " [...] literature is granted a special privilege over the visual arts [...] Insofar as the visual arts merely imitate nature's wen, they are subject to the Platonic critique of art as a secondary (or tertiary) phenomenon. But in this formulation literature is not truly mimetic: rather it is the final stage in a process of manifestation; and the writer, instead of 're-present-ing' the outer world, is in fact only the medium for this last phase of the world's coming-to-be" (Owen 1985: 20).

[31] For the concept of "breath" in Jewish tradition, and its association with *anima*, see Salminen 2014.

[32] For the ontological premise of "metaphor" and how it is associated with Plato's theory of "mimesis", see Yu 1981 and Sun (2006).

Below, I will compare works of the poets Paul Celan (1920-1970) and Wáng Wéi 王維 (701-761) and show how these poets from entirely different historical, cultural, linguistic, geographical backgrounds, in fact have remarkable affinities; their poetic language, especially in their later works, is neither literal nor metaphorical (or allegorical), and their poems seem to radically defy understanding or translation. In particular, I will show that the difficulties to "understand" their poems can not be resolved through special knowledge that might decode hidden meanings behind their linguistic signs, but questions our common idea of language itself. We encounter a poetic language that does not function through signs that signify referents, but opens a special horizon that shows itself in the process of making and performing. By comparing Paul Celan's and Wáng Wéi's approach to create such language, and pursuing their different appearances, we may appreciate how the different features of their poems converge to similar existential questions. Above all, we consider how such exploration can contribute to our understanding of the very notion of comparison, especially in the field of Comparative Literature.

Paul Celan is widely considered to be the quintessential post-war poet of the German language. Born into a Jewish community in Czernowitz of the Bukovina in former Romania, Paul Antschel (the name he later changed into Celan) was taught German by his mother who adored German literature. In 1942, Celan's parents both died in a concentration camp in Ukraine, and Celan himself was imprisoned in a Romanian forced labour camp until 1944. After 1945, Celan left Romania and lived in Bucharest, Vienna, and eventually moved to Paris in 1948 where

he lived until he drowned himself in the Seine in 1970. Writing in German, which is both his mother tongue and his mother's murderers' tongue, Celan, in fact, never lived in Germany.[33]

For many critics, Celan's poems are "hermetic": non-understandable and non-translatable.[34] Despite of, or because of such difficulty, the interest in Celan's poetry has increased in recent decades.[35] However, the difficulty of Celan's poetry is not due to any specific allegory or secret ideal, like those for example that we might need to identify to understand the poems of Stephan George[36], nor to a poetics that confines itself to be a purely aesthetic domain (art for art's sake) such as what we might find in the poetic ideology of Stéphane Mallarmé.[37] It also does not relate to the original definition of "hermeticism" that was generated through the critical attention to the "hermetic poetry" of the Italian anti-fascist poetic movement, representing a type of "sealed" character of poetry: complex in composition and difficult to understand, in order to oppose the propaganda of fascist oppression[38].

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[33] For Celan's standard biography in English language, see Glenn 1973; Felstiner 1995 and 2000 (in German).

[34] Numerous books and articles mention the "hermetic" nature of Celan's poetics. For example, Jerry Glenn repeatedly states in his essays: "his [Celan's] work is certainly hermetic" (Glenn 1972: 25), "[...] Celan is notoriously difficult to read, and difficult to translate" (Glenn 2002: 122).

[35] According to Pierre Joris, the flow of articles, books, and commentaries on Paul Celan has rapidly increased after his death in 1970. By 1995, it had already reached "more than 6000 items" (Celan and Joris (trans.) 2006: 13).

[36] For the "secret" circle in Stephan George's life and poetics, see the "Introduction" of Norton 2002. As the first full biography of George, Norton traces George's life and the development of his poetry. Gadamer was also known to be associated with the members of the "Stephan George circle", and he argues for the spiritual affinities between George and Hölderlin's poetry not only through religious significance, but also from their roots in Pindar's hymns: in "an inner community" of "That you do not know", see Gadamer 1992: 108; Krajewski : 235; Fuyarchuk: 23.

[37] In his *Meridian* speech, Celan himself openly states the difference between his poetics and Mallarmé's: for a detailed analysis, see Meyerhofer 1981: 75-76. For an illuminating analysis on the similarities and distinctions between Celan and Mallarmé's poetics, see Felstiner 1999; for Mallarmé's "self-reflexive ideology", see Wolosky 2001: 653.

[38] For a detailed historical account on the "hermetic style", "hermetic literature", see Ebeling 2007: 136.

Surprisingly, Celan had great impact in the poetry of North America ever since the 1950s and 1960s, as Matthew Hofer in his well-informed essay "'Between Worlds': W.S. Merwin and Paul Celan" quotes Donald Hall's words of the early 1970s "*every* American poet knew Celan", and he states: "If *every* American poet knew Celan's work in the 1960s, that is because Jerome Rothenberg's City Lights Pocket Poets anthology, *New Young German Poets*, had effectively inaugurated Celan as the Poet of the Holocaust in 1959" (Hofer 2004: 102). Robert von Hallberg also observes: "Celan's poems are closely tied to recent political history. At every moment in his English-language reception he has been identified directly with the Shoah. That reception began in 1955 in the political press, rather than in poetry magazines, with a translation of 'Todesfuge' by Clement Greenberg" (Hallberg 2006: 348). In recent decades, numerous articles, books, book reviews, dissertations, biographies, translations, correspondences have emerged, taking Celan's authentic personal experiences in the Shoah as the basis of understanding his life and poetry, in particular focusing on his most well known and anthologized poem "TODESFUGE".[39] For many critics, Celan's Jewish background has been seriously presented as the most important, if not the only important feature that determines his poetics, and Celan has been undoubtedly regarded as the quintessential Holocaust poet.[40]

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[39] "TODESFUGE" is Celan's best-known poem, and "obviously the finest and most authentic encounter with the experience of Nazified Europe" (Hofer 2004: 102), which has been seen as a "poetic testimony to the Holocaust" (Baer 2000:7). It was selected into the standard German high school textbook, officially taken as a gesture of the German repentance for the Holocaust.

[40] For recent publications that take Celan as a quintessential Holocaust poet, see articles such as Murdoch 1974; Weimer 1974; Samuels 1995; Bridget 1995; Suied 1999; Hawkins 2002; Kligerman 2005; Rockem 2010; Franke 2013 etc.; Books such as Colin 1991; Samuels 1993; Koelle 1997; Baer 2000; Kligerman 2007, Hofmann 2011 etc.; Reviews such as Neufeldt 1992; 1996; Foti 1995; Todd 2001; Taylor 2001; Brasfield 2003; Rosenthal 2012 etc.; Dissertations such as Lejtenyi 2004; Gary 2006; Barzilai 2009; Renker 2011 etc.; Biographies such as Felstiner 1995; 2000; Selg 2008 etc. And apart from the standard translations of Celan's poems by Michael Hamburger, John Felstiner, and Pierre Joris, see also the articles that discuss how translating Celan's poetics is specifically related to understanding his experience in the Holocaust such as Joris 1999, Boase-Beier 2011. Among other published

Indeed, no one can deny Celan's life experience in the Shoah and his Jewish heritage. But, as we discuss in more detail below, taking this as the yardstick for Celan studies may be a predominantly North American paradigm, whereas European criticism has asked to what degree such information could contribute in principle to understand Celan's poetry.

In fact, how the "TODESFUGE" is associated with the Holocaust is a controversial issue that has attracted a great deal of debate. For some scholars, Celan composed "an extremely bitter poem" (Glenn 1972: 25), "quintessentially a cry of pain and suffering, a choral lamentation" (Weimar 1974: 87); for others, the poem implies a possible reconciliation between the German and the Jewish nation (Duroche 1967). The complexity of Celan's poetic voice, its well-developed poetic/musical form, evokes the debates on whether the poem is a sort of euphony for the horror.[41] Before Celan's death, critics such as Johannes Bobrowski and Günter Blöcker even questioned Celan's authenticity as a witness of the atrocious reality of the Holocaust and its aftermath.[42] The subsequent debates on the oxymoron[43] of Celan's "Black Milk" (*Schwarze Milch*),[44] the controversial juxtaposition of the German female figure "Margarete" and the

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correspondence, there is the correspondence between Celan and the Jewish companion of his later years, Ilana Shmueli, edited by Thomas Sparr, published in 2004, reviewed by Steven Cerf in 2005, translated into English by Susan H. Gillespie in 2010, reviewed by Felstiner in 2011.

[41] See Kaplan 2001for an interpretation based upon a theory of "bittersweet melancholic sexual energy".

[42] Bobrowski belittled Celan's poem "TODESFUGE" as "at best a perfume factory", and Blöcker also states harshly: "Without exception, Celan's store of metaphors is not won from reality nor serves it", see Kaplan 2001: 315.

[43] See, for example, Ionita 2013.

[44] The composition *Schwarze Milch* is actually due to Rose Ausländer and appears in her poem "*Ins Leben",* published in 1939 (Müller-Richter 2007: 228).

Jewish "Sulamith" virtually indicates that Celan's language breaks down the certainty that historical analysis anticipates.[45] In fact, as Jerry Glenn pointed out, apart from the fact that both his parents died in Concentration Camp and the recurrent Jewish themes in his poetry, everything else is still open to disputes (Glenn 2002: 122).[46]

One of the leading scholars in the field of Celan Studies, John Felstiner states a paradoxical situation in the "Preface" of his translation *The Poetry and Prose of Paul Celan* (2001) through a little anecdote:

> In August 1984 at Cerisy-la-Salle near the Norman coast, shortly after coming to know
> Gisèle Celan-Lestrange, I asked her (in tentative French): "Is it not that many of your
> husband's poems arise from his own experience?" *Cent pour cent*, she replied instantly:
> "One hundred percent." And yet at the same time, if I asked her about Paul Celan's life,
> Gisèle would urge me to concentrate strictly on his works. (Felsinter 2001: xxiv)

Felstiner, the author who wrote a successful literary biography for Paul Celan and essays on his Jewish heritage[47] states such paradox as "an ambiguity—not ambivalence—"[48] in his own approach, through which he emphasizes a "double focus" or "a fusing of two lenses" that "forms

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[45] See Roos 2006 for detailed analysis.

[46] For the discussions on specific issues in the poetics after Holocaust, see Hofmann (eds.) 2011. Especially for the dilemma facing poets after the Holocaust, as Elaine Martin states: "...the absolute necessity of giving voice to the suffering and the impossibility of doing so adequately", see Martin 2011, in Hofmann, Gert, Rachel MagShamhráin, Marko Pajević, and Michael Shields (eds.): 19.

[47] See Felstiner's well known and much acclaimed biography on Paul Celan: *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (1995) and articles published before and after this biography: Felstiner 1994; 1996; 2000 (2); 2009; 2010.

[48] Felstiner in a more recent article states that the Jewish identity and heritage in Celan's life and poetry "involve a challenging ambiguity—not ambivalence—fiercely inflected by 'that which happened,' as he called it, or Holocaust, as it's said [...] " (Felstiner 2010: 198-199).

the challenge of approaching Celan and of making his life's work and his work's life accessible" (ibid). This is not only a literary anecdote that hints at a fundamental issue of literal studies in general and Celan studies in particular, but more specifically, it evokes an important methodological consideration on how to approach Celan's unique non-metaphorical language and his seemingly idiosyncratic literalism: could Celan's biography decipher the meaning of his words? And if that were the case, does the poem *speak* itself all the more authentically through such aids?

5   Peter Szondi and "Eden": an example of biographical reading

In his unfinished essay "Eden", published posthumously, Peter Szondi seriously raises this hermeneutic question through a detailed report of the genesis of Celan's poem "Du Liegst". And yet he asks: what could such biographical information and historical framework contribute to understand the poem itself?

DU LIEGST im großen Gelausche,	YOU LIE[49] in the weighty mellow[50]
umbuscht, umflockt.	'round shrub, 'round flake.
Geh du zur Spree, geh zur Havel,	Go down to the *Spree*, the *Havel,*
geh zu den Fleischerhaken,	go to the meathooks,
zu den roten Äppelstaken	to the red applecrates
aus Schweden –	from Sweden –
Es kommt der Tisch mit den Gaben,	The table of gifts arrives,
er biegt um ein Eden –	it bends 'round an Eden –
Der Mann ward zum Sieb, die Frau	The man, made a sieve, the woman
mußte schwimmen, die Sau,	was floated, the sow,
für sich, für keinen, für jeden–	for herself, for no one, for all –
Der Landwehrkanal wird nicht rauschen.	The *Landwehr* Canal won't gush
Nichts	Nothing
stockt.	clots.

(GWII: 334)

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[49] I have stayed closer to the source than a real "translation" into English would require: there is a striking use of

Reading Szondi's essay "*Eden*" one experiences the close friendship between the poet and the critic. And indeed, Szondi brings valuable and privileged knowledge about almost every single word of the poem.

The external place and time of the poem is clear: it is in Berlin (through the names such as *Spree*, *Havel*, and *Landwehrkanal*), and it was written, according to Szondi, shortly before Christmas, as Celan himself dated it Dec. 22/23 1967 before it was published.[51] According to Szondi, Celan was invited by the Studio of the *Akademie der Künste* (Academy of Arts) to give a reading, and he also read his newly published poems from *Atemwende* at the Department of Comparative Literature at the *Freie Universität Berlin*. Szondi also reports, the windows of Celan's bedroom at the Akademie faced towards the *Tiergarten*, and Celan was accompanied by his friend to visit the city before Christmas, including Plötzensee, where the conspirators of July 20th, the failed attempt to assassinate Adolf Hitler in 1944, were executed, and also including the Christmas market with an exhibition of Swedish apples in red crates. In particular, Szondi lent Celan the newly published book *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, Documentation of a Political Crime* (*Der Mord an Rosa Luxemburg und Karl Liebknecht: Dokumentation eines politischen Verbrechens*), which contained the assassins' statements before

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rhyme in "*DU LIEGST*" – haken/-staken, Frau/Sau, Schweden/Eden/jeden – which ties the poem together, and to the strongest expressions of atrocities alluded to, consistent with Celan's suspicion of German rhyme: for Celan's special use of German rhyme, see Zilcosky 2005: 673-677, especially 677. But recreating the rhyme in the translation would require a much freer use of vocabulary.

[50] "Mellow" is used here for its phonetic relationship to "pillow", to reflect the relationship of the neologism "*Gelausche*" to the German "*bauschig*".

[51] According to Szondi's report, Celan intentionally removed the date when the poem was published (Szondi 2003: 85).

the court that are quoted in the poem. Szondi also showed Celan the apartment building named "Eden" where Luxemburg and Liebknecht spent the last hours of their life.

Obtaining such detailed biographical information one can assume to be able to decode any secret behind the words. Szondi nevertheless points out the deficiency of such an approach, asking in particular whether such information in fact blocks access to the poem itself. He insists that one must read the poem beyond its "empirical premises" and seek "a reality that cannot be reduced to subjective happenstance" (90). In his analysis, Szondi examines the contrasts and contradictions manifested in the poem such as the juxtaposition between the festival table and the human corpses, the meathooks (*Fleischerhaken*) and the apple crates (*Äppelstaken*), as well as the pleasurable paradise and the horrible purgatory combined in the word "Eden". These intentional juxtapositions, as Szondi points out, formulate the core of Celan's poem, as "an *in-difference*" (91),[52] which goes beyond the biographical details.

6　Hans-Georg Gadamer: the priority of intellectual intuition

Confronting, or rather respecting the "non-understandable" nature of Celan's poetics, Szondi's position was taken over by Hans-Georg Gadamer in his exegesis of Celan's poems based upon an attitude of "attentive listening".[53] For Gadamer, as he states clearly in the "Preface" of his commentary on Celan's poetic collection *Atemkristall* (*Breath Crystal*), *Wer bin Ich und Wer bist Du* (1973) (*Who am I and Who are you?*), the reader of Celan's "hermetic"

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[52] In his recent study of the poem, Pajari Räsänen proposes that: "A non-indifference towards indifference would perhaps be considered as a more accurate motivation for this poem. But the poem doesn't *state* this non-indifference, it is not a statement, nor is its mode of speaking essentially that of a constatation [sic.]" (Räsänen 2007: 323). But note Szondi's use of hyphen for his concept "In-difference", which suggests an internal negation of a mere "indifference".

[53] See Gadamer's commentary on Celan's poetic cycle *Atemkristall*.

poetry should not be "hasty"; he does not need to be erudite or specially instructed, but he "must be a reader, who always seeks to hear again".[54] This position is also reinforced in the "epilogue" where Gadamer states:

> [...] does whoever "knows" what the poet thought, therefore already know what the poem says? He might perceive it as an advantage that his thoughts were only about the 'correct' matters and nothing else – I am convinced that he would be trapped in a grotesque misunderstanding, which above all Celan himself would certainly have rejected. Celan insisted that a poem should be placed into its own existence and detached from its creator".[55]

Gadamer develops his idea of hermeneutics through exploring the limit and boundary of understanding. Taking up Szondi's daring question on the proper use of biographical and historical information, Gadamer proposes that a reader's direct encounter with the poem's internal structure ought to be prior to any special knowledge about the author.[56]

The idea of intuition in Gadamer's exegesis of Celan's poems has its conceptual root in Kantian critical philosophy. Such intuitive comprehension is the basis of "Understanding", in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 1781), functioning as the

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[54] "*Gewiß darf es kein eiliger Leser sein, der hermetische Lyrik verstehen und entschlüsseln will. Aber es muß keineswegs ein gelehrter oder besonders belehrter Leser sein – es muß ein Leser sein, der immer wieder zu hören versucht*" (Gadamer 1973: 9).

[55] "[...] *Auch wer 'weiß', woran der Dichter gedacht hat, weiß er dadurch schon, was das Gedicht sagt? Mag er es vielleicht gar als einen Vorzug empfinden, daß er nur an das 'Richtige' denkt und an nichts anderes – er wäre nach meiner Überzeugung in einem schrecklichen Irrtum befangen, den am allerwenigsten Celan selbst unterstützt hätte. Er hat darauf bestanden, daß ein Gedicht in sein eigenes Dasein gestellt und von seinem Schöpfer abgelöst ist* " (Gadamer 1973: 119-120).

[56] See the "Epilogue" of Gadamer's Commentary on Celan's *Atemkristall*.

conjunction between "sense" and "intellect".[57] Intuition signifies the concrete and immediate

relation to the object, from which knowledge is formulated. However, intuition is not simply

sensation, for "sensation always expresses the *empirical* moment of sensibility while intuition

can be either *empirical* or *pure*" (Nuzzo 2004: 30). The pure structure of intuition, for Kant, is

the concept of space and time, from which arises sensibility first, and then, from understanding,

arise concepts: "Kant maintained that spatial and temporal relations are not features of things as

they are in themselves [...]. The spatial temporal features of intuition are instead grounded in the

constitution of the subject (B40-41)" (Falkenstein 1995:3). Accordingly, intuition, in Kant as

well as in Gadamer's philosophy, is not simply some arbitrary, mysterious thinking that

facilitates the license of "anything goes", but a certain presumption that rational investigations

can be based upon. Celan's poetry, as it pioneers non-representative albeit realistic poetics,

challenges the artificial barriers between intuition and understanding, a challenge which was a

common theme of the phenomenological movement of the twentieth century.

Gadamer's exploration of the nature of understanding through Celan's "hermeticism" and

his questioning the use of biographical information is precisely in the spirit of the fundamental

challenge that Kant's critical philosophy issues to the foundations of traditional metaphysics.

Celan intuitively senses this fundamental change in the literary world and articulated it as:

"*Wirklichkeit ist nicht, Wirklichkeit will gesucht und gewonnen sein*" (GWIII: 168).[58]

Interpreting such reality only under the categories that have been well established in the field −

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[57] For a detailed commentary on this distinction, see Falkenstein 1995 Part I.

[58] "Reality is not simply there, it must be sought and won."

and thereby familiarized, if not domesticated – such as "poetry after Auschwitz"[59] would have

left, as Aris Fioretos observes, "an understanding whose possibility remains unscrutinized"

(Fioretos 1990: 158).

7   Werner Hamacher and "TODTNAUBERG": *Wasen* and *U-topia*

Does this however mean that literary studies should avoid using biographical and historical

information for poetic exegesis? Obviously this is not the case, and Gadamer himself relates how

knowledge of Jewish culture and tradition assisted him to appreciate specific details in Celan's

poems (Gadamer 1997: 149). For Werner Hamacher, however, Celan's poem itself is a fruitful

site, a *U-topia* that transforms the biographically speaking impossible relationship into a

potentially productive dialogue. Such transformative power of *U-topia*, etymologically "out-of-

place" or "non-where", is presented in Hamacher's recent article on Celan's poem

"TODTNAUBERG":

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[59] For Theordore Adorno's famous claim about poetry after Auschwitz, see below.

TODTNAUBERG

Arnika, Augentrost, der
Trunk aus dem Brunnen mit dem
Sternwürfel drauf,

in der
Hütte,

die in das Buch
– wessen Namen nahms auf
vor dem meinen? –,
die in dies Buch
geschriebene Zeile von
einer Hoffnung, heute,
auf eines Denkenden
kommendes
Wort
im Herzen,

Waldwasen, uneingeebnet,
Orchis und Orchis, einzeln,

Krudes, später, im Fahren,
deutlich,

der uns fährt, der Mensch,
der's mit anhört,

die halb–
beschrittenen Knüppel–
pfade im Hochmoor,

Feuchtes,
viel.

(GWII: 255-256)

TODTNAUBERG

Arnica, Eyebright, the
drink from the fountain with the
stellated die[60] on top,

in the
hut,

into the book
– whose name did it hold
before mine? –,
into this book,
a line written of
hope, today
on a thinker's
arriving
word
in the heart,

woodmarsh, ungraded
orchis and orchis, by one,

raw, later evident
while driving,

our driver, the man,
who hears it as well,

the half-
trodden log walk,
in the upland peat bog,

Damp,
much.

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[60] Pierre Joris translated *Sternwürfel* as "star-die", which alludes to Celan's relations to Mallarmé as well as "six-pointed Jewish star" etc. see Joris 1999: 158. I prefer the adjecvtive "stellated" which is closer to the actual name of the geometrical figure found adorning a fountain close to Heidegger's hut at Todtnauberg: a *Sternwürfel*, a stellated octahedron.

The poem "TODTNAUBERG", as Hamacher informs us, is Celan's response to his "epochal" visit of Heidegger's hut in the *Schwarzwald* on July 25th, 1967. However, as Hamacher also points out, the real "epochal" encounter between the poet and the philosopher did not occur in Todtnauberg, the place where Celan personally met Heidegger and they shared the same car, but in the poem "TODTNAUBERG". In other words, Celan's poem transforms the political and personal fissure[61] between the two into a poetic exploration of the problem that questions the grounds of Being, which Heidegger took as the quintessential philosophical undertaking.

In *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger states the basic human condition as "Being-in-the Wold": "Being-in is, therefore, the formal existential expression of the Being of *Dasein*, which has the essential condition of being-in-the-world" (Heidegger 2006: 54),[62] and this "in", relating to "I am" ("*ich bin*"), as Heidegger points out, derives from "*innan-, wohnen, habitare, sich aufhalten*", in the sense of "being-at-home". In particular, as Heidegger also states in *Letter on Humanism* (1947), "language is the house of Being".[63] However, in Celan's poem "TODTNAUBERG", we encounter the lines:

in der   in the

Hütte,   hut,

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[61] Scholars in general agree that their conflicts are due to Heidegger's silence on his past in the Nazi regime.

[62] "*In-Sein ist demnach der formale existenziale Ausdruck des Seins, das die wesenhafte Verfassung des In-der-Welt-seins hat.*"

[63] In *Über den Humanismus*, Heidegger wrote: " Language is the house of Being. Men dwell in its abode. Those who think and write poems are the guardians of this house" (*Die Sprache ist das Haus des Seins. In ihrer Behausung wohnt der Mensch. Die Denkenden und Dichtenden sind die Wächter dieser Behausung*, Heidegger 1968: 5). For an analysis of this idea, see Kockelmans 1985: 198.

The line break of the stanza, according to Hamacher, indicates Celan's fundamental questioning of Heidegger's statement about language and "being in the world":[64]

> ...Here *in* certainly signals an inner space, delayed, however, in its semantic movement by the line-break, which also suspends the prepositional intention before it reaches the noun position, in which it would first find its meaning *as* a preposition. Due to the break, the *in der* remains outside, in fact outside the *Hütte*, faltering 'in' an unoccupied in-between zone without the character of a physical space, at least not of an interior space, any "being-in" starkly prohibited and turned into a "being-outside".... The *intrinsic* [essence-or human-connoting] makeup of the *In-Sein* is thus fissured in Celan's poetic language, so that the *in* is exposed to something besides itself, with its implied *Sein* and '[human] being': an exteriority that is no longer the outside of an "in," but is rather an outside of any verbally fixable existential-topographical correlation between interiority and exteriority. (24)

In other words, Celan's poetics of "In-Sein" suggests a space that is not based upon a division of interior and exterior, a place that both denotes everywhere and no-where, a *U-topia*, an "out-of-place", which, rather than Heidegger's "Being-in-the-world", is the groundless ground of Being, the site of encounter, and the pre-condition of meaningful comparison.

If "TODTNAUBERG" is not a metaphor of Utopia, it is the *U-topia*, as Hamacher points out in his analysis of the "book" mentioned in the poem: "The poem writes itself in this 'line' in this 'book' as a difference in place and therefore as a place-designation that itself contains no previously given place, as suspension and therefore also as a time-designation referring to no as-

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[64] For a detailed account about the "spatiality" in Heidegger's *Being and Time*, see Vallega 2003: 65.

yet-measured time, and as a language-designation, from which the differences between languages first yield up their congruences and divergences" (27).

Moreover, Hamacher observes that the nature of such "place" is expressed through Celan's use of *"wasen"* in *"Waldwasen"*. This *"Wasen"*, according to Hamacher, is Celan's counter word against Heidegger's *"Wesen"*. Besides its connotations, *"Wasen"* is not an abstract concept here, but evokes "a field of words" such as *"Wasen"*, *"Rasen"*, *"Feuchtwiesen"*, *"Auen"*, *"Anger"*, which expand the meanings to "peat", "swampy ground," "mire," 'silt', and "manure" etc. (33-34), which also shows "the closest phonetic relationship to Heidegger's *Wesen*" (34). In this sense, as Hamacher keenly points out: "Heidegger's *Wesen* marks the point in the history of philosophy at which the essentialization of Being seeks one last indication that something remains of this essence. It is this residue of Being from which Celan's *Wasen* is unbound" (21). Celan in particular makes his point through the verse *"Orchis und Orchis, einzeln"*, where he expresses the differences in the "sameness": indeed, every "Orchis" is different, and by juxtaposing "Orchis" with "Orchis", Celan exposes the nature of human condition, as Hamacher observes and interprets: "What is 'single' signifies not only through its differences from everything else but also through its difference from its own kind: it is what stands aside from itself and from its Being, and, doubled, standing outside its Being, is at the same time less and more than itself, less and more than its Being" (35). Such intensive philological as well as philosophical reading of Celan's "TODTNAUBERG" shows how Hamacher responds to Szondi's questioning of the biographical approach to Celan's poem: "Just as *Waldwasen* is a word of the epoché of the being of Being, 'Todtnauberg' is, as a poem of the epoché of the 'being of poetry', 'epochal' in a much broader sense than the mere biographical" (42).

Hamacher's "epochal" reading of Celan's "TODTNAUBERG" illuminates a place of *U-topia*, the groundless ground of poetry and thinking, which also indicates a potential site for comparison, as he states in a sense of returning and rediscovering:

> Yet over and beyond the horizon of presence and its modifications stands exactly what stands beside itself in 'Orchid and orchid, single,' just as correspondence, measurement, and commensurability are at the same time turned back from this horizon, themselves in the time of Being, and yet in state of a difference between their and any Being. (35)

From this, the crucial question becomes how comparison could be established, not on a ground of universal "Being", or an abstract notion of "common human nature", but on a *Wasen*, where each individual, like the orchis, is juxtaposed in *in-difference*? And above all, how it were possible to see such *in-difference* not as a random gathering as Michel Foucault expresses through the notion of *heterotopia*,[65] but in a realm of *U-topia* that things are seen in differences, but not differences for their own sake, but in a special complexity of the same? This question indeed – and through it, the condition of comparison – leads us to the core of phenomenology.

8   "Phenomenon" in Phenomenology: Husserl's "Intentionality"

In his 1960 radio essay on the poems of the Russian poet Ossip Mandelstamm (1891-1938), Paul Celan points out that poetry is not "art", but "phenomenon": "They [the poems] are not 'word-music', they are not woven together out of 'sound fibres', not impressionistic 'mood-poetry'; they are not the 'second' reality that is symbolically protected by the real. Their images

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[65] One of the famous examples of such gathering is listed at the beginning of Foucault's *The Order of Things*, as he quoted Jorge Borges's famous "Chinese encyclopaedia", see Foucault 1970: xv.

stand against the concept of metaphor and emblem; they have *phenomenal* character [...]".[66]

Celan's idea of "phenomenon" is intrinsically associated with the philosophical movement initiated by Edmund Husserl, developed by Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in general subsumed as "Phenomenology", despite the disparaties between these thinkers.

Phenomenon, according to its traditional definition, is equivalent to appearance, as an immediate giveness that conceals some reality behind it: "a fact of occurrence, the cause or explanation of which is in question" (*OED*). Phenomenology, as a philosophical effort to overcome the dualist foundation of traditional metaphysics, was initially established upon Husserl's key concept of "intentionality". Intentionality denotes the nature of consciousness as a "transcendental subjectivity", which is indispensably associated with "intentional objects", without presuming any metaphysical demarcation between subject and object. Phenomenon, therefore, is a "presentation" of a given object rather than a representation of some hidden truth, as Husserl states:

> That a presentation relates to a certain object and in a certain manner, does not owe to some "activity" it applies to an external object existing in and of itself: as if it, in any reasonable sense would direct itself to the object, or were to change or meddle with it, something like the writing hand with the pen; the presentation in no way owes this

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[66] *"Sie sind keine "Wortmusik", keine aus "Klangfarben" zusammengewobene, impressionistische "Stimmungspoesie", keine das Wirkliche sinnbildlich überhohende "zweite" Wirklichkeit. Ihre Bilder widerstehen dem Begriff der Metapher und des Emblems; sie haben phänomenalen Charakter [...]"*(Celan 1999: 215).

reference to anything that in whatever way remains external to it, but solely to its "own" peculiarity.[67]

Dan Zahavi interprets such "peculiarity" as a certain phenomenological "directness": "we are 'zunächst und zumeist' directed at real objects in the world. This directness is direct, that is, unmediated by any mental representations" (Zahavi 2003: 19). According to this phenomenological approach, the relationship between one and the other is not the problem of the subject to reach the object, "since the subject is *per se* self-transcending, *per se* directed toward something different from itself" (ibid: 21). On the other hand, as Husserl also emphasizes in his *Logische Untersuchungen*, the object itself always transcends the phenomenon: object only appears through a certain perspective, and not through a totality. Besides, there are "*absent* objects, *impossible* objects, *nonexisting* objects, *future* objects, or *ideal* objects" (14), which does not prevent them from being intentionalized: intentionality is not governed by strict causality, it is, rather an "intuition".[68]

Husserl's reconstruction of the traditional concept of phenomenon opens up a new horizon for the subsequent development of the notion of "phenomenon" through Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Although Husserl's phenomenology is based upon his notion of "transcendental subjectivity", which, as Theodor Adorno and other critics pointed out, is

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[67] *Daß sich eine Vorstellung auf einen gewissen Gegenstand und in gewisser Weise bezieht, das verdankt sie ja nicht einem "sichbetätigen" an dem außer ihr, an und für sich seienden Gegenstande: als ob sie sich auf ihn in ernst zu nehmendem Sinne "richtete" oder sich sonst mit ihm oder an ihm zu schaffen machte, etwa wie die schreibende Hand mit der Feder; sie verdankt dies überhaupt nicht irgendeinem, ihr gleichwie äußerlich Bleibenden, sondern auschließlich ihrer "eigenen" Besonderheit* (Husserl 1984 vol.19: 451).

[68] For a detailed philosophical study on Husserl's concept of "intuition", see Levinas 1973.

inevitably associated with traditional metaphysics and idealism,[69] the potential of his later philosophy of "life world" (*Lebenswelt*) has been deeply and productively developed through Merleau-Ponty's concepts of perception and body.[70] How is this concept of phenomenon associated with Celan's non-metaphorical approach of poetic language?

9   Celan *wörtlich*: a non-metaphorical poetics

Umberto Eco in his famous essay "The Scandal of Metaphor: Metaphorology and Semiotics" states: metaphor is "a genus of which all the other tropes are species" (Eco 1983: 217), and ironically points out: "[...] of the thousands and thousands of pages written about metaphor, few add anything of substance to the first two or three fundamental concepts stated by Aristotle" (Eco 1983: 217-218). Aristotle defines metaphor in both *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*, and for him metaphor is "a trope of resemblance" based upon "a theory of substitution" (Ricoeur 1979: 3), as he defined in *Poetics* 21, 1457b6-7: "Metaphor is the application of a strange term either transferred from the genus and applied to the species or from the species and applied to the genus, or from one species to another or else by analogy" (Aristotle 1927: 81).

At the core of Aristotle's definition lies the Geek etymology of metaphor (*μεταφορά*), which is derived from the verbal form: "*μεταφερειν*", rooted in the meaning of *pher–/phor–* "carry" and *meta-* "across", which literally means "carrying across", or "transfer" (Kirby 1997: 532). Plato uses a verbal form "*μεταφερειν*" (*μετενηνοχότας*) to indicate a process of translating from one language to another (Plato. *Critias* 113a), or transporting (*μετενεγκόντες*) fables and

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[69] For Adorno's criticism of Husserl notion of intentionality based upon "transcendental subjectivity", see Adorno 1982: 161. For a critical account, see Sherman 2007: 65.

[70] For philosophical connections between Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, see Zahavi 2002.

fictions to concrete reality (Plato. *Timaeus* 26c). Aristotle also emphasizes the "likeness" created

through metaphor by "impossible combinations" (αδύνατα συναψαι) based upon the discerning

intelligence, which increases the rhetorical effect of being impressive (Aristotle. *Poetics* 1458a

26.5). The rhetoric effect of metaphor is further emphasized in Aristotle's *Rethoric* 3.2.7

(1405a3-6), where he suggests the function of metaphor in strengthening speech with the quality

of "clarity", "sweetness" and "unfamiliarity".[71]

Eco also states: "to speak of metaphor, therefore, means to speak of rhetorical activity in

all its complexity" (Eco: 217). Other than this Aristotelian tradition, modern linguistic, speech-

act, and cognitive theories developed different modes and theories of metaphor.[72] One of the

most influential contributions of this subject is by the French philosopher Paul Ricouer (1913-

2005) in his renowned book *La métaphore vive* (*The Rule of Metaphor*), where he, based upon a

vast survey of both semantic and semiotic studies, reaches a hermeneutic level of interpreting

metaphor not simply as a rhetorical trope, but as a means of creating new meanings, and reaching

certain "metaphorical truth" (Ricoeur 1979: 247ff).

Somewhat predictably however, due to its reliance on the external "*tertium*

comparationis", Celan, openly renounces the use of metaphor in his Georg Büchner Prize speech

Der Meridian: "[...] The poem thus were the site, where all tropes and metaphors are led to

contradict themselves".[73] Isn't it so, ever since Aristotle, that metaphor is quintessential for both

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[71] Translations of these terms are taken from Kirby 1997: 541.

[72] For a brief review on the modern theories of metaphor, see ibid: 519.

[73] "[...] *das Gedicht wäre somit der Ort, wo alle Tropen und Metaphern ad absurdum geführt werden wollen*"
(GWIII: 199).

poetics and rhetoric? Is it simply Celan's idiosyncrasy to emphasize his own poems as non-metaphorical? Above all, is "metaphor" an ambiguous, indefinable term, as Dennis Sobolev in a more recent article points out: "Metaphor, even though it is formally identifiable, is not a single unified structure, but rather a field of heterogeneous possibilities, which is organized along several independent axes and is limited by border parameters" (Sobolev 2008: 903)?

Metaphor, *Übertragung* in German, as Martin Heidegger interprets it, is rooted in the tradition of Western metaphysics, indeed: "Metaphor only exists within metaphysics" (Heidegger 1957: 89),[74] which presumes a dualistic distinction between the perceived world of sensations, and the Platonic idea of its underlying reality. Such distinction is fundamentally based upon the Platonic theory of mimesis, which presumes phenomenon/appearance to be an imitative copy of an idea. Metaphor thus is presented as a force ($\delta\acute{\upsilon}\nu\alpha\mu\iota\varsigma$) of language that transfers subjective feelings to objects (Heidegger 1995: 53), denoting certain transference towards the completion of the ultimate end ($\tau\acute{\epsilon}\lambda o\varsigma$).[75] In particular, metaphor is fundamentally a rhetorical device that transports readers' imagination to a "safety zone" of meanings by domesticating the unfamiliar, the strange, and the impossible otherness of the text, which allures the poem to be "captured by familiarity and connoiseurship", a kind of "art machine" (*Kunstbetrieb*)[76] (Heidegger 1960: 77).

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[74] "*Das metaphorische gibt es nur innerhalb der Metaphysik* [...]"

[75] See Heidegger's 2009, section 11.

[76] "As soon as that thrust into the uncanny has been absorbed into familiarity and connoiseurship, the work has already been encircled by the art machine." (*Sobald jener Stoß ins Ungeheure im Geläufigen und Kennerischen abgefangen wird, hat um die Werke schon der Kunstbetrieb begonnen.*) "*Kunstbetrieb*" translated here as "art machine" to distinguish from the "art world" which also includes the artists, as well as the "art trade" which is too narrowly focus on the economical and would not include curators and critics who are certainly meant by Heidegger in this case.

For Celan, to transcend this duality, indeed to arrive at a wholly anti-metaphorical position is in particular based upon his distinction between "art" (*Kunst*) and "poetry" (*Dichtung*), which he articulates in the *Meridian*. For him, poetry is not the art of words, or anything related to "art": "Art, is the artificial, the artsy, the synthetic, the constructed: it is the creaking automaton, alien to man and creature: it is, already here, cybernetic, a puppet switched to receive [...]"[77] On the other hand, Celan's unique "literalism" shows a process of constantly re-discovering and re-inventing the poetic language. This is also true in his most well-known and anthologized poem "TODESFUGE", seen as a "poetic testimony to the Holocaust" (Baer 2000:7), which is "obviously the finest and most authentic encounter with the experience of Nazified Europe" (Hofer 2004: 102).

The central image of "TODESFUGE" is "Black Milk" (*Schwarze Milch*), which, however, rejects to be considered as a metaphor for Nazi atrocities:

Schwarze Milch der Frühe	Black milk of daybreak
wir trinken sie abends	we drink in the evening
wir trinken sie mittags und morgens	we drink it at noon and at dawn
wir trinken sie nachts	we drink it at night
wir trinken und trinken	we drink and we're drinking

 (GWI: 41)

In reading and translating this poem, John Felstiner points out: "'TODESFUGE' has startled its listeners, shocking some and convincing others by its metaphors: milk that is black, graves dug

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[77] "*Kunst, das ist das Künstliche, Erkünstelte, Synthetische, Hergestellte: es ist das menschen- und kreaturferne Knarren der Automaten: es ist, schon hier, Kybernetik, auf Empfang eingestellte Marionette* [...]" (Celan 1999: 124).

in air, hair of ash, dances fiddled for gravediggers. These embellish the raw matter of Auschwitz, reviewers complained. But they aren't metaphors at all, they're plain fact, survivors claim" (Felstiner 1995: 27). In a more recent article, Puiu Ionita considers "black milk" as an oxymoron "that comprises within itself two icons: [...] Beyond the Holocaust black and white smoke rising as a witness of the mass killing of Hebrews, one can interpret, though, the 'black milk' as an allusion to Shekinah, the flow of life that nourishes all living creatures" (Ionita 2013: 99). Celan himself affirms that "black milk" is neither "metaphor" nor "oxymoron": it is simply a "reality":

> Black milk of the morning, these is not one of those metaphoric genitives, that {like them} are ladled on our plates {by} our so-called critics, so that we cease to go to the poem; this is no longer figure of speech and no oxymoron any more, this is reality.
>
> Metaphoric genitive = No, rather words, born towards each other, in agony.[78]

Schwarze Milch is a phenomenon that comes directly from the heart's despair – "*Herzensnot*" is Celan's wording here. *Schwarze Milch* expresses a certain meaning that is triggered by a special event or the unique experience of the author, but what constitutes a meaningful reading is not dependent upon decoding any hidden referent for *Schwarze Milch.* Although no lexical or technical definition could justify the combination of *Schwarze* and *Milch*, it is certainly not meaningless.

This phenomenon tremendously puzzles scholarship. Indeed, some scholars do not take Celan's claim seriously, and intend to take his verbal constructions such as "*Schwarze Milch der*

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[78] "*Schwarze Milch der Frühe: Das ist keine jener Genitivmetaphern, die {wie sie} uns{von} unseren sogenannten Kritikern vorgesetzt bekommen, damit wir nicht mehr zum Gedicht gehen; das ist keine Redefigur und kein Oxymoron mehr, das ist Wirklichkeit.*

Genitivmetapher = Nein, ein unter Herzensnot Zueinander-Geboren-Werden der Worte" (Celan 1999: 158).

Frühe" (GW I: 41) and "*das Stundenholz*" (GW I: 181) as "paradigms of metaphor" (*Musterfälle*

für Metaphern).[79] Others consider them to be specific types of metaphor and attempt to relabel

them accordingly: Gehard Neumann calls Celan's inventions "absolute Metaphorik" (absolute

metaphor) in analogy to Mallarmé [80] (Neumann 1970: 210). Beda Allemann calls them

"abbreviated metaphor" (*verkürzter Metapher*, Allemann 1968: 159-160[81]) in "Nachwort" of

Ausgewählte Gedichte. Zwei Reden. Without claiming any such constructions in Celan's works

as "metaphorical", Peter Szondi applies the critical terms such as "paronomasia",[82] "ambiguity"

and "polysemy" in his *Celan Studies* (Szondi 2003), instead.

   Werner Hamacher, on the other hand, in his acclaimed essay "The Second Inversion:

Movements of a Figure through Celan's Poetry" (1985) cites Celan's poetic image of kingfisher

(*Eisvogel*) in the poem "Stimmen" ("Voices"): "*Stimmen, ins Grün/ der Wasserfläche geritzt./*

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[79] Hendrik Birus in his article "Celan-wörtlich" (1991) asks such a rhetoric question: "However, if one takes seriously Celan's rejection of a metaphorical interpretation for example of the *particles' swirl* (in 'Engführung', GWI 200 u. 201), does it remain self evident that *black milk of morning* (GW III 63f./ I.41f.) and the *wood of hours* (GWI 181) are to be understood as the paradigms of metaphor?" ("*Nimmt man aber Celans Zurückweisung einer metaphorischen Interpretation beispielsweise von Partikelgestöber (in der 'Engführung', GW I 200 u. 201) ernst, versteht es sich dann wirklich von selbst, daß die Schwarze Milch der Frühe (GW III 63f./I.41f.) und das Stundenholz (GWI 181) als Musterfälle für Metaphern zu verstehen sind?*" Birus 1991: 129).

[80] "Whereas Mallarmé's absolute metaphors are the final products of an actualization of the unreal, therefore pure language without reference to reality, Celan's metaphors appear as unreal expressions of a reality that language fails to express, they indicate something, paradoxically, by missing it. " (*Während Mallarmés 'absolute' Metaphern Endprodukte einer Vereigentlichung des Uneigentlichen sind, also reine Sprache ohne Wirklichkeitsbezug, erscheinen Celans Metaphern als uneigentlicher Ausdruck eines sprachlich nicht zu benennenden Wirklichen, sie deuten auf etwas, indem sie es – paradoxerweise – verfehlen.*)

[81] "Since metaphor is traditionally defined as abbreviated comparison, here one could also speak of an abbreviated metaphor" (*Wenn man die Metapher traditionellerweise als verkürzten Vergleich definiert, so könnte man hier von einer verkürzten Metapher sprechen.*)

[82] Szondi explains: "In other words, the opposition is expressed by its own antithesis, paronomasia. This device [...] enables the poem's language to go beyond the dimension of meaning and *speak* the opposition, instead of expressing it (which would represent a recourse to the literal sense)..." (Szondi 2003: 8).

Wenn der Eisvogel taucht,/ sirrt die Sekunde:..." (GW I: 147) [83] to interpret Celan's use of metaphor as certain primordial trope: "they are not metaphors for representations but metaphors for metaphorization, not images of a world but images of the generation of images, not the transcription of voices but the production of the etched voices of the poem itself" (Hamacher 1996: 359-360).

To the degree that Celan's poetic approach is "literal" rather than metaphorical, literal meaning is not the final meaning, nor the only correct interpretation, but a significant intuitive comprehension that Hendrik Birus points out in his well informed essay "Celan–wörtlich" by quoting Goethe's words from *Maximen und Reflexionen* (*Maxims and Reflections*): "Whoever misses the first button hole, cannot button up" (Birus 1991: 166).[84] Again this refers to a certain intellectual intuition that comes prior to any structural and formal analysis of the poem. Without the guidance of such intuition, the biographical and historical information about the author, and even the linguistic analysis of the poem would remain an external reality that stands in the way of seeing the poem as a "phenomenon".

Exploring this alternative interpretative possibility evoked by Celan's radical non-metaphorical approach, which resonates with the discovery of the phenomenon through phenomenology, intrinsically opens up a new horizon for comparison in a non-dichotomous framework thus avoiding the problems posed by questions of (in)-commensurability. Such non-dichotomous approach also does not assume any artificial division between the Western and the Eastern (Chinese): the effect of applying phenomenological categories to the Chinese context

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[83] "voices, scribed into/the green waterplane/ when the kingfisher dives/the second shivers."

[84] "*Wer das erste Knopfloch verfehlt, kommt mit dem Zuknöpfen nicht zu Rande.*"

improves rather than denies the historicity of the originality of these concepts, since such application is never simply an identification, but an evocation of productive dialogue. This in turn resonates with the classical Chinese tradition, which I have briefly covered in my exposition of *bǐ* and *xīng*. And among the master poets writing in this tradition, Wáng Wéi stands out as perhaps the most significant of all.

10   Wáng Wéi: the simplicity of poetry

Wáng Wéi 王維 (701-761), the eighth century Chinese all around artist, a painter, musician and above all, a poet, is best known for his artistic mastery of pentasyllabic quatrains and his nature poems. One of the three greatest poets of the Táng 唐 dynasty (the other two are Lǐ Bái 李 白 and Dù Fǔ 杜甫)，his poems have been frequently anthologized and translated into Western languages. His non-metaphorical poetic language has a unique stylistic simplicity, so "simple" that his works are found in any Chinese primary school curriculum.

However, no classical poet in Chinese history questions the boundary of poetic experience with such bold but subtle and plain language like Wáng Wéi. For example, in terms of difficult poetry that challenges understanding, among the Táng poets[85] we might want to consider Lǐ Hè 李賀（790－816） or Lǐ Shāng Yǐng 李商隱 (813-858). Lǐ Hè was by many described as possessing "demonic talent" (*guǐ cái* 鬼才), and his poems are acclaimed for their craftsmanship and "remarkable spirit of poetic daring and inventiveness" (Owen 2006: 156) to the degree of

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[85] The Táng dynasty is considered as the peak of classical Chinese poetry.

"taking pains" (*kŭ yín* 苦吟) in both composition and appreciation.[86] Lǐ Shāng Yǐng, however, has been traditionally regarded as a "hermetic poet" who "has amassed more commentaries than any individual poet except Du Fu" (ibid: 335). Reading and understanding both Lǐ Hè and Lǐ Shāng Yǐng's poems heavily depends upon decoding the poetic allusions and allegories, and a literal millennium of scholarship has focussed on this endeavour. But the notion of allegory in fact stands in contrast to Celan's poetics of the non-metaphorical. As to the other two greatest Táng poets, Lǐ Bái 李白 (701-762) and Dù Fǔ 杜甫 (712-770), both of their works are at the peak of a matured poetic form: the ancient style (*gŭ fēng* 古風) of Lǐ Bái 李白, and the regulated verse (*gé lǜ shī* 格律詩) of Dù Fǔ; their works, in general, express a certain personal passion or social responsibility, which conform more to Confucian aesthetics, rather than intentionally breaking down or renovating existing form, let alone reimagining the essence of language. In both respects, Wáng Wéi stands out and as we will see in many examples below, it is there we find deep affinities to Celan's work and thereby may appreciate these aspects of both poets' poetic language more deeply.

The greatest difficulty for interpreting and translating Wáng Wéi's nature poems is in fact their apparent, stylistic non-metaphorical simplicity and blandness, which, according to his renowned English translator Burton Watson, "... is actually plain to a degree that is the despair of translators" (Watson 1971: 173). Wáng Wéi's simple language, paradoxically, has been

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[86] Pauline Yu once compared Lǐ Hè's poems with that of the German poet Georg Trakl (1887-1914) under the title "The Poetics of Discontinuity: East-West Correspondences in Lyric Poetry" (1977).

considered as conveying the most profound aesthetic, philosophical and religious implications in both classic and modern scholarship.

His poems have been called "Chán poetry",[87] as the Qīng 清 dynasty poet and scholar Shěn Dé Qiǎn 沈德潛 (1673-1769) remarked: "poetry is precious for its Chán methods and Chán delights, not for its Chán words" (詩貴有禪理禪趣，不貴有禪語).[88]

11   Poet Buddha: the Chán interpretation

Scholarship that emphasized the role of Chán Buddhism in Wáng Wéi's poetics–even labeling him the "Poet Buddha" (*shī fó* 詩佛) – has been published literally for more than a thousand years. For example, the Míng 明 dynasty scholar Lǐ Mèng Yáng 李夢陽(1473-1530) commented: "The poems of Wáng Wéi, at its higher achievement are similar to Chán; at its lower expression they look like a monk. His poetry is the echo of him serving the Buddha. Yet its attachment to the human mind is hard to deny."[89]

In fact, Wáng Wéi not only writes poems that "look like a monk", i.e. poems that explicitly proclaim Buddhist doctrines, such as "Being Ill with Kulapati Hú, Sending These Two Poems and Presenting to the Learning Companions" (《與胡居士皆病寄此詩兼示學人二首》Zhào 1972 vol.1: 31-33), which describes Buddhist doctrines in Buddhist terms, but also Daoist poems,

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[87] The Chinese word Chán 禪 is well known in the West in its Japanese pronunciation "Zen", which is derived from a particular school of the Buddhist tradition that emphasizes sudden enlightenment in everyday life, rather than mere reclusive meditation.

[88] This widely quoted remark is from Shěn Dé Qiǎn's preface to Shì Lǜ Rán 釋律然 's book *Poetry Manuscripts of Xī Yǐng Zhāi* 《息影齋詩抄》, see Qián Zhōng Shū 錢鐘書 1990, Vol 3 ："全晉文卷六一"條.

[89] 王維詩，高者似禪，卑者似僧，奉佛之應哉，人心繫則難脫。*Lǐ Mèng Yáng* 李夢陽 *Kōng Tóng Zǐ*《空同子》in Zhào 1972: 511.

such as "To Lǐ Qí" (《贈李頎》, Zhào 1972 vol.1: 21), which discloses his youthful interests in the alchemy of Daoist religion (*dào jiào* 道教).[90] Pauline Yu, in discussing the common ground of Chinese Daoist and Buddhist philosophy, points out the synthesis of both schools in formulating the unique concept of "Chán" (Yu 1980: 119):

> Those similarities between the two strains of thought which are most frequently noted include: the mystic appreciation of nature: and emphasis on spontaneity and naturalness; an iconoclastic deemphasis on scriptures, rituals, metaphysical speculation, and scholarship; and a preference for a pedagogical method which involves colloquial language, surprise, irrationality, enigma and silence. Indeed, Chan has been accused of not being Buddhism at all, but rather a Chinese-Taoist reaction to the foreign religion; it has no Indian counterpart.

It is no exaggeration that this synthetic notion of "Chán", in the "higher achievement" of Wáng Wéi's quatrains, has become one of the most significant influences on Chinese aesthetics overall.

For example, the 12th century Southern Sòng (*nán sòng* 南宋) literary scholar Yán Yǔ 嚴羽 in his *Cāng Làng Remarks on Poetry* (*Cāng Làng Shī Huà* 《滄浪詩話》) believes that similar to the goal of Chán practise, the poet should attain an empty, tranquil, contemplative state of mind which would allow him to "enter the sprit" (*rù shén* 入神): "Perhaps the Way of Chán is the exquisite enlightenment, and that is also true of the Way of Poetry",[91] which he further elaborates through elusive images of silence:

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[90] Daoist religion is China's "native religion", however, its animistic and shamanistic expression is significantly different from Daoist philosophy.

[91] 大抵禪道惟在妙悟，詩道亦在妙悟。

...[these] are [like] antelopes who hung by their horns[92] leave no trace by which they could be found. Their marvelousness lies in being as transparent as crystal, effortlessly perfect. Like a sound in the void, color in appearance, like the moon reflected in water or an image in a mirror, their words have an end, but their meanings are limitless.[93]

The late Míng 明 scholar Wáng Shì Zhēn 王士禎 (1634—1711) follows Yán Yǔ, particularly pointing out that Wáng Wéi's poems in the *Wǎng River Cycle* (*Wǎng Chuān Jí* 《輞川集》), which we will discuss below, manifests the inexpressible wisdom of Buddhist enlightenment:

Yán Cāng Làng[94] applies the Chán metaphor to poetry, I deeply agree with him. The poetic form particularly close to his theory is pentasyllabic verse, such as the poems of Wáng Wéi and Péi Dí in the *Wǎng River Cycle*, every single word is Chán ... Such miraculous truth in [such] few words, equals exactly [the moment] when Śākyamuni picked up a flower and Mahākāśyapa smiled.[95]

In the same sense, Wáng Shì Zhēn saw no distinction between poetry and Chán: "Discarding the raft and climbing ashore is what practitioners of Chán consider to be the state of awakening and

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[92] The antelope (羚羊) was said to hang itself from branches by its horns at night to conceal its traces from hunters.

[93] 羚羊掛角，無跡可求。故其妙處透徹玲瓏，不可湊泊，如空中之音，相中之色，水中之月，鏡中之像，言有盡而意無窮。（《滄浪詩話，詩辯》）

[94] Yán Yǔ here is referred by Cāng Làng, a reference to his "asumed name" (*hào* 號): *Cāng Làng Bū Kè* 滄浪逋客.

[95] 嚴滄浪以禪喻詩，余深契其說，而五言尤為近之。如王，裴輞川絕句，字字入禪。。。妙諦微言，與世尊拈花，迦葉微笑，等無差別。（《帶經堂詩話》卷三）

what poets consider to be the state of transformation. Poetry and Chan reach the same level and there is no distinction between them (Yu 1980: 18).[96]

Contemporary scholars such as Chén Tiě Mín 陳鐵民 and Yang Jingqing remind us that there is no sufficient historical evidence to demonstrate that Wáng Wéi wrote his "nature poems" under the "influence" of Chán Buddhism. In fact, during his lifetime Wáng Wéi was interested and engaged in various schools of Buddhism, and Daoism as well. Particularly, the subtle differences between Buddhist concepts such as the "true nature" (*zhēn rú běn xìng* 真如本性) and Wáng Wéi's aesthetic articulations of nature must not be blurred (Chen 2006: 245). Since the "Chán poems" comprise a relatively minor part of Wáng Wéi's entire oeuvre, why can other poems written at the same time not be considered to be part of the same category? According to Yang Jingqing, the Chán implications of Wáng Wéi's quatrains are simply "read into his nature poems by later critics" (Yang 2007: 214).

However, this voice cannot change the major interpretative perspective ever since the classical period. Indeed, we can find many traces of encounters with Chán masters in Wáng Wéi's biography, and he even donated his renowned estate at the Wǎng River (輞川別業) to a Buddhist temple for the purpose of establishing a monastery, in order to allow common people to benefit from the Buddhist influence.[97] Some scholars were even able to trace literal connections

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[96] 舍筏登岸，禪家以為悟境，詩家以為化境，詩禪一致，等無差別 《帶經堂詩話》卷三.

[97] See Wáng Wéi's formal letter to the Emperor: "A Pleading for Donating a Property" 《請施莊為寺表》 in Zhào 1972 vol.2: 320.

between Wáng Wéi's poems and the Buddhist sutras.[98] However, such interpretations, similar to the classical criticism, cannot avoid an obvious metaphorical approach to Wáng Wéi's poetics, which his poems are in fact opposed to.

12   Wáng Wéi's non-metaphorical taste: a symbiotic interpretation

Let us take a look at one of Wáng Wéi's most well known poems:

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[98] See Chén Yǔn Jí 陳允吉 1980 for the connections between the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* 《大般涅磐經》 and Wáng Wéi's nature poems.

終南別業	Zhong Nan Retreat[99]
中歲頗好道	In middle years I am rather fond of the Tao
晚家南山陲	My late home is at the foot of Southern Mountain
興來每獨往	When the feeling comes, each time I go there alone
勝事空自知	That splendid things are empty, of course, I know
行到水窮處	I walk to the place where the water ends
坐看雲起時	And sit and watch the time when clouds rise
偶然值林叟	Meeting by chance an old man of the forest
談笑無還期	I chat and laugh without a date to return
(Zhào 1972 vol. 1: 35)	.

The couplet in this poem 行到水窮處/坐看雲起時 (I walk to the place where the water ends, and sit and watch the time when clouds rise) has become Wáng Wéi's most frequently quoted verse. Commenting on Chinese aesthetics in general, Gù Suí 顧隨 (1897—1960), a poet and scholar of classical poetry in the twentieth century cites this verse as a typical example:

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[99] Translated by Pauline Yu, see Yu 1981: 171.

Literature does not merely have literal meanings; there must be something else beyond.

One couplet in Wáng Wéi's "Zhōng Nán Villa' reads: 'When I reach the origin of water, I

sit down to watch the clouds rise.' It tells many more meanings beyond the words: it has

yùn, *yùn* means flavor (taste). Poetry that is simply fit to measurements of voice does not

necessarily mean it has flavor, flavor does not depend upon the pitch, and flavor goes

beyond the big or small of the size, high or low of the sound [...] People from the *Sòng*

dynasty comment on poetic composition: 'Words have their limits, but meanings are

boundless'—which is in fact not true: is there any boundless meaning? Even profound

meaning has a limit—the only endlessly lasting thing is *yùn*. So the best way to say is:

'Words have their limits, but *yùn* is boundless'. What the heart retains is not 'meaning', but

yùn.[100]

In contrast to Yán Yǔ's well-known statement about the highest quality of poetry: "words have

an end, but their meanings are limitless" (言有盡而意無窮), Gù Suí proposes *yùn*, as a semantic

combination of rhyme and charm that emphasizes the lasting effect of the poem's unique

musicality. Although disagreeing on the specific application of the categories, both Yán Yǔ and

Gù Suí attempted to grapple with Wáng Wéi's poetics, as exemplified in this poem, which

cannot be explained through an analysis of the "art" of words or any information about the

author or the contingencies of the creation. Yán Yǔ presents an intuitive comprehension through

his metaphor of the traceless antelope to present the "meaning" of poetry; Gù Suí, on the other

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[100] 讀文學作品不能只是字句內有東西，須字句外有東西。王維《終南別業》：‘行到水窮處，坐看雲起時。’有字外之意，有韻，韻即味。合尺寸板眼不見得就有味，味不在嗓子，味於尺寸板眼聲之大小高低之外 [...] 宋人說作詩‘言有盡而意無窮’，此語實不甚對，意還有無窮的？無論意多高深亦有盡，不盡者乃是韻味。最好改為‘言有盡而韻無窮’。在心上不走，不是意，是韻。（顧隨《駝庵詩話》：14）

hand, attempts a synaesthetic approach through combining the literary with tangible taste and acoustic function through an innovative notion of *yùn*. Although both share an appeal to the strong participatory commitment of a reader, calling for an attentiveness that is as concentrating as any Chán meditation, Gù Suí's perspective, denotes a new interpretative dimension that in particular resonates with Maurice Merleau-Ponty's development of phenomenology, which emphasizes the symbiosis of living body and the world.

Going beyond Husserl's notion of "intentionality" that signifies an intrinsic integration of subject and object, Merleau-Ponty explores the "depth" of phenomenon, which he names the "thickness" of body, or flesh,[101] in contrast to an abstract concept. Flesh – the term that Merleau-Ponty uses in preference to "body" – characterizes a multitude of reversible manifestations of our presence in the world, such as touch, and being touched, perceiving and being perceived, a unity of opposites rather than a dualistic opposition that is constructed through rational abstraction. At the core of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of body[102] is his conviction that "flesh" is not a substance or "matter", nor is corporeality an abstraction that resists spirituality. Rather, it is an intrinsic intertwining of "subject" and "object", "body" and "soul" *etc*.[103] Merleau-Ponty in particular emphasizes the "thickness" of flesh, as the "primordial depth", which indicates an opening to the "world", a world of intrinsic ambiguities and hues as the *potentia* that are invisible to the dualistic perspectives, as he states: "Between the alleged colors and visibles, we

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[101] See Merleau-Ponty 1968: 135.

[102] Merleau-Ponty phenomenology is centered on the notion of "body", which is distinct from Husserl's "consciousness" and Heidegger's "Being".

[103] For Merleau-Ponty's famous chapter "The Intertwining – The Chiasm" in *The Visible and the Invisible*, see Merleau-Ponty 1968: 130-155.

would find anew the tissue that lines them, sustains them, nourishes them, and which for its part is not a thing, but a possibility, a latency, and a *flesh* of things" (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 132-133). And he further qualifies such "thickness" as: "It is that the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeality; it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication" (135).

This symbiotic dimension, or the thickness of the flesh, the depth of phenomenon, is, in fact, the pivot to distinguish Wáng Wéi's nature poems from other poems influenced by Buddhism. In contrast to specific references to Buddhist doctrines, as for example in poems by the Táng poet-monk Wáng Fán Zhì 王梵志 or Hán Shān 寒山, Wáng Wéi's poems are rooted in the soil of ordinary life experience lived through a poetic language that is not achieved by means of any artistic device such as metaphor or allegory, but through a direct touch, a taste of the "thickness" of body, i.e. a symbiotic experience of the phenomenon that reveals the utmost "taste" of poetry.[104]

This approach is more evident when compared with the "Palace Style" (*gōng tǐ shī* 宮體詩) poem, which flourished in the 6th to 7th century shortly before Wáng Wéi's time, under the direct influence of Buddhism and was practiced mostly by members of the royal family. One couplet from a fragmentary poem "Autumn Evening" 《秋晚》 by the Liáng 梁 Emperor poet Xiāo Gāng 簫綱 (503-551) reads:

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[104] Wáng Wéi's "taste" also distinguishes him from the late Táng poet Bái Jū Yì 白居易 (772-846), whose poems are considered as understandable even by "old women" (老嫗能解).

亂霞圓綠水	Tangled clouds, glowing red, are made circular by the clear water.;
細葉影飛缸	tiny leaves outlined by a lamp in the air[105]

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(Tian 2007: 236)

Xiaofei Tian points out the peculiarity of this verse is the poet's intentional use of the adjective *yuán* 圓 as a verb here: "made circular", a metaphor for the Buddhist teaching of enlightenment (Tian 2007: 236).

Compared with Wáng Wéi's most well known verse mentioned above: 行到水窮處/坐看雲起時 (I walk to the place where the water ends, and sit and watch the time when clouds rise), Xiāo Gāng's poetic taste is revealed in his deliberate misuse of adjectives as verbs, and his intentionally crafted parallelism that depicts the colorful shadows and delicate leaves in a most subtle and imaginative fashion. However, although both poets are considered to have been influenced by Buddhism, Wáng Wéi transcends such "meaning", but speaks an original mindful experience through his most plain, non-metaphorical language.

To interpret Wáng Wéi's poetics, the classical Chinese critics, however, have used plenty of metaphors, such as "[these] are [like] antelopes who hung by their horns[106] leave no trace by

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[105] Translated by Xiaofei Tian. See Tian 2007: 236.

[106] The antelope (*líng yáng* 羚羊) was said to hang itself from branches by its horns at night to conceal its traces from hunters.

which they could be found" (Yán Yǔ), or "Discarding the raft and climbing ashore is what

practitioners of Chán consider to be the state of awakening and what poets consider to be the

state of transformation" (Wáng Shì Zhēn) *etc.*, as we have mentioned above. On the other hand,

are we really allowed to apply the term "metaphor" to the Chinese aesthetic tradition at all? This

has been an important issue that has attracted a great deal of scholarly debates.

Pauline Yu, in her renowned essay "Metaphor and Chinese Poetry" (1981), theorizes from

the philosophical rather than the rhetoric foundation of metaphor, interpreting metaphor, based

upon Aristotle's definition in the *Rhetoric*, as a means of generating new meanings rather than

simply functioning as resemblance and substitution (Yu 1981: 207). Such essence of metaphor,

according to Yu, is recapitulated in the Judeo-Christian tradition and elevated towards "a

timeless, universal realm" (210), towards the goal of "turning away from sensory reality" (213).

The Chinese culture, according to Yu, is not established upon such metaphysical assumptions,

and for the Chinese poets, this "motive for metaphor" simply does not exist, and what stands for

the Chinese rhetoric is not metaphor, but *xīng* 興.[107]

Zhāng Lóng Xī, though assuming the root of metaphor to be metaphysical, argues that both

Chinese and Western metaphysics are based upon a certain pattern of thinking, which he calls

"logocentrism". For him, such "metaphysical hierarchy of thinking, speech, and writing", does

not only exist in the West, but in the East as well, and it simply "constitutes the very way of

thinking itself" (Zhāng 1992: 30). Based upon this assumption, Zhāng traces both Chinese and

Western philosophical traditions to the roots of language, observing that words and signs are in

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[107] Xīng sometimes is translated as "association" or "motif" (Yu 1981: 214), sometimes as "evocation" (Dai 1991:1).

fact developed into transferred and figurative uses out of their original denotation of "something

sensuous, especially the human body" (42).[108]

In more recent scholarship, the essence and qualification of the traditional Chinese critical

concept *xīng* has attracted much more attention than other aesthetic or rhetoric concept. For most

scholars, *xīng* represents the Chinese mind that tends to esteem spontaneity and genuineness

rather than the rational, analytic, conceptual approach that is inherent in the Western

metaphysical tradition. However, it does not hinder them to apply the Western categories to

interpret this Chinese phenomenon. For example, Dai Wei-qun associates *xīng* with Charles

Sanders Peirce's (1839-1914) distinction between "sign" and "icon", as well as that of

"Firstness", "Secondness", and "Thirdness",[109] arguing for the iconicity and the firstness of

xīng.[110]

Whether Chinese and Western traditions share a common ground of thinking or rather are

established upon two completely incompatible philosophical foundations might remain a puzzle,

which once again reveals that the division of East (China) and West is questionable in the first

place, as well as the multivalent nature of metaphor, if seen as a phenomenon, not simply as an

abstract concept. But here these questions have a bearing upon the very issue of comparison: on

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[108] Earlier, Tsu-lin Mei and Yu-kung Kao conducted a series of studies on applying formalist and structrualist theories to analyze Táng poetry, especially on "Regulated Verse" (*gé lù shī* 格律詩) (Tsu-lin Mei and Yu-Kung Kao 1968; 1971; and 1978). In particular, their essay "Meaning, Metaphor, and Allusion in T'ang Poetry" (1978) applies Roman Jakobson's theory of "equivalence" as an organizing principle to interpret metaphorical relationship in lyric poetry.

[109] "First is the conception of being or existing independent of anything else; Second is the conception of being related to, the conception of relation with, something else; Third is the concept of mediation whereby a first and a second are brought into a relation" (Peirce 1960 vol. 5-6: 23).

[110] See Dai 1991: 10-11 for a detailed account for Peirce's theory and the application to *xīng*.

what basis could we affirm that Celan and Wáng Wéi share a common, *i.e.* non-metaphorical approach to poetry? More precisely, how could we demonstrate "the same", except by showing the "thickness" of their commonality, in particular through transforming the seemingly incommensurable cultural, historical and linguistic differences into a dialogue between epochs?

13   The thickness of "the same": a phenomenological approach of comparison

Comparison, in this study, is, first of all, an inquiry on the phenomena of a non-metaphorical approach to poetic language. Thus, at the core of this study is what I call a "phenomenological-comparative" perspective, or a phenomenological approach to comparison.

The symbiotic vision of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of body emphasizes an immanent openness[111] to the Other of a living body, which reveals that "comparison" is an important function that is intrinsically characteristic of a living being, such as in formulating a symbiotic "binocular" vision with perceptual depth from both eyes: "The binocular perception is not made up of two monocular perceptions surmounted; it is of another order. The monocular images *are* not in the same sense that the thing perceived with both eyes is [...]" (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 7).[112]

It is this "phenomenological depth" rooted in the "binocular" perception of the living body that I pursue through my comparative study of Celan and Wáng Wéi's poems. In other words, the very process of comparing their poetics and poems can show that whatever specific

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[111] Merleau-Ponty uses a special term *Écart* (dehiscence) for this philosophical idea: for a detailed, illuminating analysis of this concept, see Hass 2008: 129-130.

[112] For a more detailed account on Merleau-Ponty's "synergy": see Hass 2008: 48ff.

"sameness" we intuitively come up with is not simply an abstraction of conceptual qualities. Through analysis, such convergence shows its complexity as a gathering of differences, woven in a contrapuntal [113] dialogical manner. The thickness of "the same" thus denotes the complexity of a living phenomenon that reveals how meaning is created, enriched and expanded, and meaningful comparison is to practise comparison as a living experience that cannot be simply defined by cognitive features— as the "comparative method" previously was employed to achieve hierarchical unity. Comparison must include within itself all ontological, ethical and epistemological dimensions, as each phenomenon does.

The goal of such comparison is, therefore, not to discover and study any pre-given influences between the authors or the poems, but to realize their potential affinities through concrete dialogues. The similarities and differences of these poetic phenomena discussed in each chapter are not taken as pre-given historical facts, nor are they simply established upon the formal metrics of poetic prosodies; rather the comparing process weaves these poetic phenomena into a complementary tapestry that reveals the complexity of the very notion of "sameness". Such comparison, as both Celan and Wáng Wéi's poems themselves suggest, does not take understanding of the poem for granted, but explores the ontological basis of understanding itself.

Poems, to borrow Celan's words, should be able to find their own way and to live their own lives. By saying this, Celan emphasizes that the poems must be detached from their author(s)'s biography, since the biographical information cannot truly capture the very "moment" (*Augenblick*) when the poem is created (re-created). However, since each poem, as a

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[113] In his *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Saïd developed the method of "contrapuntal" reading, a metaphor borrowed from Western classical music, emphasizing on "disjunctions, not to overlook or play them down", see Saïd 1994:146.

phenomenon, cannot avoid to reflect the internalized biography of the author, as well as the world that is experienced, it is inevitable and certainly legitimate to take such information into account. Indeed, a phenomenological comparison is to facilitate an emancipating path away from taking biographical and historical information as a necessary condition of understanding. However, emphasizing such an intuitive comprehension of the internal logic of the poem, how could comparison be prevented from being an arbitrary reading?

Indeed, this seemingly "ahistorical" feature of comparison has been criticized as an inherent weakness. Susan Bassnett even claims that "Comparative Literature as a discipline has had its day. [...] We should look upon translation studies as the principal discipline from now on, with comparative literature as a valued but subsidiary subject area" (Bassnett 1993: 161). In his 2013 article "What Does the Comparative Do for Literary History?" Djelal Kadir addresses the presupposed contradiction between "the comparative" and "the historical", arguing that comparative discernment had already been inherent in the very first historiographies, for example Herodotus' *History*, and "persistently troubles the structural coherence of these historiographical master plots and their self-validating systematicity" (Kadir 2013: 644). Kadir sees both the comparative and the historical to be an inevitable human impulse and proposes a "juncture where historicization and comparison intersect [...] a dialectical site where contrapuntal elements encounter each other and recognize themselves in the other" (648).

Our phenomenological approach to comparison is not simply to reconcile "the comparative" with "the historical", but to redefine the function of the historical and formal approach in terms of how to interpret the poem as a phenomenon that has its inherent historicity and formal features but is not confined by their historical and linguistic contingencies. This approach establishes the formal analysis based upon an *a priori* intuition of the poetic logic of

the poem, and therefore, the structural analysis of rhyme, meter and syntax is not supposed to establish qualitative metrics for stabilized similarities and differences, but to manifest the internal logic of the poem, especially the perspective that determines how the poem is perceived as a unique phenomenon at a momentary site.

Above all, the phenomenological approach of comparison considers an intuition of the internal logic of the poems *a priori* to any cultural or linguistic influence among the authors. Seeing each poem as a specific phenomenon that manifests the poet's unique non-metaphorical approach to poetic language, which is not solely determined by his or her biographical background and cultural heritage, enables us to facilitate meaningful comparison between poems that originate from entirely different linguistic and cultural milieus, but converge on common themes explored in the subsequent chapters such as *Begegnung*, *Ort* and *Licht*. On the other hand, both historical and formal analyses are useful means for us to present the phenomena of the poems, although such devices are not applied to discover any hidden truth(s) about the poem, in a much more narrow sense of "understanding", but are necessary means to reveal the multivalent meanings that weave the complexity of phenomenon, and prevent us from arbitrary determinations.

Neither historical nor formal analysis is able to provide any "correct" reading for the poem itself, the poem itself is beyond any of such interpretation, but realizing our own interpretative perspective and especially, through discovering that dialogical counterpart that appears as the uncanny Other enables us to see more of, and to look differently at the phenomenon. Technically speaking, the most challenging question is how to balance the formal and the historical approaches, in order to jointly present the poetic phenomena and whether they could be properly used in the process of interpretation and how.

In the following chapters I explore such conditions of comparison through comparing Celan and Wáng Wéi's later poems. This choice is based upon their affinities regarding both formal and poetic merits: the selected poems from both poets show a non-metaphorical approach through a condensed, renovated form that challenges the boundary of poetic language, and even language itself; and the poems can be read in a contrapuntal dialogue through their complementary elements that converge around the themes *Begegnung*, *Ort* and *Licht*. *Begegnung* indicates the condition of comparison, which is not based upon cognitive selections but on an awareness of the immanent alterity that opens towards the uncanny. *Ort* reveals the site of such encounter, its temporal-spatial condition, and *Licht* illuminates the consequence of it, seeing the source of light from the perspective of *Gegenlicht* (backlight). The ultimate goal of this project is to show the complexity of "the same", i.e. the condition of a comparison that is not derived from cognitive selections, a method that is applied as a means to serve some goal outside itself, but as a living phenomenon that acquires tangible substance, indeed "thickness". This is what I call a phenomenological-comparative perspective, which determines that all the biographical, historical, formal or structural analyses of the poems are guided by an intuitive grasp of the internal logic of the poems rather than being taken as their overriding realitiy. The poem is seen as a phenomenon, and my analysis is to reveal the multivalent nature of such phenomenon, and comparison is to allow us to see more, and to see differently, to see an "other side" of the phenomenon.

Chapter 1
An Ontological Basis of Comparison – *Begegnung*:
Paul Celan's "Du Darfst" and Wáng Wéi's "Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn"[114]

14   "Encounter": an immanent alterity

Das Gedicht ist einsam. Es ist einsam und unterwegs. Wer es schreibt, bleibt ihm mitgegeben.

Aber steht das Gedicht nicht gerade dadurch, also schon hier, in der Begegnung – im *Geheimnis der Begegnung*?

Das Gedicht will zu einem Anderen, es braucht dieses Andere, es braucht ein Gegenüber. Es sucht es auf, es spricht sich ihm zu. Jedes Ding, jeder Mensch ist dem Gedicht, das auf das Andere zuhält, eine Gestalt dieses Andern.

The poem is lonely. It is lonely and on its way. Whoever writes it remains consigned.

But is this not the very reason why, even already here, the poem stands in the encounter – in the *secret of encounter*?[115]

The poem wants to an Other, it needs this Other, it needs a counterpart. It seeks it out, it grants itself. For the poem, bearing down on the Other, every thing, every human is a form of the Other.

(GWIII: 198)

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[114] A part of this chapter has been published as "Semiosis of Translation in Wang Wei's and Paul Celan's Hermetic Poetry" in *Cultura: International Journal of Philosophy of Culture and Axiology* IX (2), December 2012: 87-102.

[115] Celan's emphasis.

This is the pivot of Paul Celan's poetics, as expressed in his *Meridian* speech (1960).[116] Despite often having been characterized as inaccessible, even hermetic, he makes it absolutely clear that the core of (his) poetry is constituted by an immanent alterity, which Celan expresses as "the secret of encounter" (*Geheimnis der Begegnung*): poetry requires "the Other", and ultimately requires not only to see oneself as an Other, but to embrace that each one is in fact a form of the Other.

More than anything else, this passage sets the stage to explore an apparent contradiction. What does it mean to deal with such hermetic poetry that defies metaphor but does not make sense in any lexically-directed, literal reading either[117] when encounter – and one must postulate an essentially dialogical encounter because we are after all dealing with an encounter mediated through language – is in fact the core of the poem's *raison d'être*. Hans Georg Gadamer, in his exegesis of Celan's poetic cycle *Breathcrystal* (*Atemkristall*), articulates Celan's notion of encounter to be an attitude of willing acceptance of the Other, no matter how strange, exotic or impossible it might be, as a general precondition of dialogue.

It is this intrinsic alterity – not abstract equality – that provides the key to re-evaluate the boundaries of the self and thus to enable immanent changes of perspectives, which are the only possible "grounds" of creating new meanings. A comparison that is established upon such

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[116] "The Meridian" is the speech Celan gave on October 22, 1960 in Darmstadt, Germany, on the occasion of his receiving the Georg Büchner Prize. Otto Pöggeler calls this speech Celan's "phenomenology of poetry", quoted by James Lyon. See Lyon 2006: 105.

[117] Nor does it entail allegorical reading, there is in fact no referent at all or even if there were, the referent may not be used for "decoding".

conviction of encounter facilitates an unconditional engagement and "attentive listening" to the Other.

Based on the efforts of post-colonial and gender studies, Comparative Literature recently has been paving the way to become "a discipline of tolerance", as Rey Chow calls it, a certain "democratic thinking", which she discovers through a special trajectory manifested in Erich Auerbach's efforts of desacralizing the Judeo-Christian tradition:

> Central to this democratic thinking is a benevolent gaze, one that includes everybody, especially the lower classes and common folk whose varied and impure languages / voices, as Auerbach's various chapters demonstrate, have helped (authors) transform the stylistic genealogy of the Western canon. (Chow 2011: 19)

As Chow further analyses, Auerbach intends to reconstruct the reception of literature on the basis of "a common humanity" (ibid.), to substitute the imperial hierarchy that had dominated the early stage of the disciplinary development[118] with such "a benevolent gaze". Though this post-colonial attitude may indeed be anti-imperialistic and anti-Eurocentric, the "benevolent" is as much a condescending gesture, as the presumption of an abstract equality contradicts lived and living experience, where we see instead various concrete types of encounter: meetings of adversaries. Celan's poetics, which he names "the secret of encounter" uncompromisingly presents the adversaries of the Other, not so much as a gesture of tolerance, but as a necessary precondition of genuine encounter that stimulates what he calls "poetry" (*Dichtung*), and more frequently, "the poem" (*Das Gedicht*).

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[118] For a critical account of the early development of Comparative Literature, see Melas 2007, Chapter One "Grounds for Comparison".

Encounter (*Begegnung*), which, according to its etymological definition indicates "a meeting (of adversaries or opposing forces) in conflict" (*OED*), is manifested in Celan's poetic language that evokes immanent dialogue, paradoxically, through an apparent resistance to being understood. The challenge of Celan's poetry thus inspires philosophers such as Gadamer to re-examine what "understanding" even means, and especially, how to perceive the poem as a "phenomenon". More significantly, Celan's poetics of encounter is not simply his idiosyncratic approach to poetry, but reveals, with concrete manifestations, an ontological basis for the activity of comparison.

Take, for example, a poetic encounter between Celan's poem "DU DARFST" (FEEL FREE) and Wáng Wéi's quatrain "Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn" 鳥鳴澗 (Bird Song Dale). Despite the seemingly incommensurable historic, social, and biographic contexts and linguistic forms, an open reading uncovers deep affinities, such as a "common" theme of encounter, manifested in different forms of engagement with the Other; the use of language that captures the uncanny reality of existence in a strictly non-metaphoric fashion, and the construction of an open, shared poetic space that is structured beyond the historical linearity and geographical divisions. Such insights illuminate the subsequent textual analysis and show how different linguistic functions may converge for a common poetic purpose.

Indeed, seeing the poem as a phenomenon that intrinsically embraces the Other despite the poet's social, historical, or linguistic contingencies, encourages us to explore the poems and poetics of Paul Celan and Wáng Wéi side by side, whose poems are widely considered as non-understandable or non-translatable.

15   Who is the Other? — a phenomenological approach to Not-knowing

To avoid speculation, let us return to the passage quoted above in Celan's *Meridian*

Speech, and to confront the seemingly enigmatic question: Who is "the Other" and how does it

function in the "secret of encounter"?

John Felstiner translated *mitgegeben* as "mated",[119] transforming the relationship between

one and the Other into certain mysterious intimacy. In fact, scholars attempted to decipher

Celan's "secret of encounter" through the influence of Jewish mysticism that may be influenced

by Martin Buber as James Lyon states: " [...] the poem leads to the encounter with another reality

embodied in the Thou, a goal the philosophy of Martin Buber also strives to achieve" (Lyon

1971: 111). Amir Eshel, on the other hand, explores this significant Other through "the

intersection of aesthetics and ethics" (Eshel 2004: 58), and insists that Celan's poetry is not "a

source of artistic delight", but "capable of propelling and allowing action" (58). This Other,

according to Eshel, points to a "decisively ethical horizon" (59).

Such religious and ethical dimensions of Celan's poetry are part of the complexity of

poetic phenomenon that calls for an utmost "attentiveness" (*Aufmerksamkeit*) that Celan

expresses in the *Meridian*:

> [...] The attentiveness, which the poem searches to dedicate to all that is encountering it, its
>
> keener sense for the detail, the contour, the structure, the colour, but also for the
>
> "convulsion" and the "allusion", which every thing is, I believe, not the achievement of the

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[119] See Felstiner's translation for *Wer es schreibt, bleibt ihm mitgegeben* "Whoever writes one stays mated with it" (Felstiner 2001: 409).

eye that is competing with the daily perfected instruments, it is more a mindful-remaining

concentration to all our facts.[120]

Seeing "the poem" as a unique phenomenon requires boundless "attentiveness" and also implies

that although the poem can be perceived through infinitely possible angles and perspectives,

nevertheless, the poem itself, as a totality can not be truly attained. The poem points to a realm of

"Not-knowing", and Celan's poem explicitly and radically presents such an ontological basis of

phenomenon through a non-metaphorical approach that defies understanding.

"Not-knowing" here, however, does not simply indicate ignorance, but illumination as

well.

Martin Heidegger defines the term "phenomenon" through the Greek word "φαινω" (to

show itself) and "φως" (light), as *das Sich-an-ihm-selbst-zeigende*" (what shows itself in itself,

Heidegger 2006: 28) and the leitmotif of "phenomenology", as Heidegger emphasizes, is to

recognize that phenomenon, as the thing itself being illuminated, which cannot be known

through a process of pure mental abstraction, a "Cartesian theatre"[121] as one might call it.

This "thing itself", as phenomenon, should not be confused with the "thing" in

Dinggedicht, represented by Ezra Pound and Rainer Maria Rilke in twentieth century modernist

poetry. The "thing" in *Dinggedicht*, first of all, as Rilke defines in his essay "Auguste Rodin

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[120] "*Die Aufmerksamkeit, die das Gedicht allem ihm Begegnenden zu widmen versucht, sein schärferer Sinn für das Detail, für Umriß, für Struktur, für Farbe, aber auch für die 'Zuckungen' und die 'Andeutungen', das alles ist, glaube ich, keine Errungenschaft des mit den täglich perfekteren Apparaten wetteifernden (oder miteifernden) Auges, es ist vielmehr eine aller unserer Daten eingedenk bleibende Konzentration*" (GW III: 198).

[121] For a detailed interpretation of the "Cartesian theatre" and the phenomenological transcendence of abstract Cartesian concepts, see Hass 2008:11-25.

(Zweiter Teil)", is "an artistic thing" (*das Kunst-Ding*), which is "an island, everywhere separated from the continent of the uncertain" ("*eine Insel, überall abgelöst von dem Kontinent des Ungewissen*" Rilke 1926: 217). Such "thing" (*Ding*) is the result of an artistic isolation from its surrounding circumstances. Analysing Pound's poem "In a Station of the Metro" and Rilke's poem "Dame auf Einem Balkon" ("Lady on a Balcony"), Wolfgang Müller points out "the transcending epiphanic leap" that is achieved through "a transmutation of the real object into art object" (Müller 1997: 79). Celan's poem does not search any epiphany through revealing the phenomenon. On the contrary, such isolated artistic object is what he calls as "Medusa's Head" in the *Meridian*, referring to a notion of art (*Kunst*) that is opposite to his idea of "poem" (*Gedicht*). Celan's poem does not speak about or isolate itself from the reality, it *speaks* the reality and it is the reality. Such truth is not to be known or understood, but to be lived.

In *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* (*The Origin of the Work of Art*), Heidegger inquires a "simple" question: can we know the "heaviness" of a rock?

> The rock weights and proclaims its weight. While this [weight] weights towards us, at the same time it denies any access into itself. If we try, by smashing the rock, its pieces still never show any inwardness, or openness. Instantly the rock again withdraws into the very same dullness of its weight and of the mass of its fragments.[122]

Obviously, as Heidegger shows, we could weigh the stone and perhaps thus obtain precise data of its calculable weight; but this is not the "heaviness" itself; we could also measure the

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[122] "*Der Stein lastet und bekundet seine Schwere. Aber wärend diese uns entgegenlastet, versagt sie sich zugleich jedem Eindringen in sie. Versuchen wir solches, indem wir den Fels zerschlagen, dann zeigt er in seinen Stücken doch nie ein Inneres und Geöffnetes. Sogleich hat sich der Stein wieder in das selbe Dumpfe des Lastens und des Massigen seiner Stücke zurückgezogen*" (Heidegger 1960: 47-48).

color of the stone by analyzing its oscillations, but the shining color itself also escapes us (Ibid: 48). All these sensational attributes such as weight, colour, and shape can be measured through certain categories. However, the rock– as the thing itself – is never the accumulation of these attributes. Any attempt to penetrate the rock through the "knowledge" of its qualitative measurements is in vain.

Heidegger thus, in his development of phenomenology from epistemology to ontology, questions the meaning of "knowing" and "knowledge" in terms of the very "thingliness" of the thing. Although we cannot know, i.e. through measurement and calculations of its attributes, the thing itself in fact is already much closer to us than those sensational qualities that are formulated through concepts such as weight, colour or shape; as he points out: "We hear the door bang in the house and never hear the acoustic sensations or only a raw noise. In order to hear a pure noise, we must turn away from the things, to pull our ear away from them, i.e. hear abstractly".[123] In other words, the thing itself escapes our notice simply because we assume that it can be perceived "as identical with one already perceived or considered" (*OED*) – the way that we normally produce knowledge: seeking the link to the familiar, and such familiarity is in fact established upon illusive abstractions of our sensations.

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[123] "*Wir hören im Haus die Tür schlagen und hören niemals akustische Empfindungen oder auch nur bloße Geräusche. Um ein reines Geräusch zu hören, müssen wir von den Dingen weghören, unser Ohr davon abziehen, d.h. abstrakt hören*" (Heidegger 1960: 19).

16   *Das Unheimliche* (The uncanny)

Heidegger's keen sensibility towards the "thingliness" of the thing, is not to deny knowledge in general, but to step out of such knowledge acquired through a process of familiarization, in order to encounter the impenetrable, i.e. the "unkown" Other. This Other, as Celan presents for poetry, is "something uncanny" (*etwas Unheimliches*, GWIII: 192) and "dark": "...nowadays it has become fashionable to accuse poetry of "darkness" (*Dunkelheit*) – that is, [...] if not the inherent, then that darkness associated with poetry for the sake of an encounter, in the face of – perhaps self-inflicted – distance or unfamiliarity".[124]

Sigmund Freud's 1919 article "Das Unheimliche" (The Uncanny) traces its etymological meanings in different European languages, supporting the connection between "uncanny" and "unknown", revealed in the German word *Unheimlich*, opposite to *heim* (native), as Freud states: "*Unheimlich* is clearly the opposite of *heimlich*, *heimisch*, *vertraut*, and it seems obvious that something should be frightening precisely because it is unknown and unfamiliar" (Freud 2003: 124-125). According to Freud, unlike the traditional aesthetic categories such as the beautiful and the sublime, the uncanny feelings that are presented in literary works such as Hoffmann's tale of "The Sandman" has a negative connotation that can be revealed through psychoanalysis.

For Heidegger, human nature itself is uncanny, but in a more positive sense. In his interpretation of Sophocles' tragedy *Antigone*, Heidegger brings out an etymological connection between the German "*Unheimliches*" and the Greek "δεινον", through which he states: "man is, in one word το δεινοτατον, the most uncanny. Saying this of man grasps him from the most

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[124] "*...es ist heute gang und gäbe, der Dichtung ihre "Dunkelheit" vorzuwerfen–Das ist [...] wenn nicht die kongenitale, so doch wohl die der Dichtung um einer Begegnung willen aus einer – vielleicht selbstentworfenen – Ferne oder Fremde zugeordnete Dunkelheit*" (GWIII: 192).

extreme limits and the abrupt abysses of his Being."[125] According to Heidegger, it is this nature that casts man out of his familiar, comfortable, and "homely" (*heimlich*) limits (*Grenze*) of security, and stimulates an internal urge to exceed "the proper", and to surpass the limit (115).[126]

Celan's reception of Heidegger's philosophy can be demonstrated by the recent publication on the personal remarks on his copies of Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* in Celan's Paris library, from which James Lyon[127] describes some significant traces of Celan's reading. For example, Heidegger states that the primordial sound is never the "noise and sound-complex" (*Geräusche und Lautkomplexe*), but "the marching column, the north wind, the drumming woodpecker, the rustling fire" (*die Kolonne auf dem Marsch, den Nordwind, den klopfenden Specht, das knisternde Feuer.* Heidegger 2006: 163). Celan responded at the margin of the same page: "phenomenology" (*Phenomenologie*). In addition, Celan also marked as: "important for poetry" (*wichtig für die Dichtung*) to Heidegger's statement on the nature of phenomenon: "In 'natural' hearing about the speech, we could certainly hear at the same time the manner of the spoken words, the 'diction', but also only in a prior co-understanding of the things said, because only thus there is the possibility to estimate how the spoken is appropriate to the thematic relevance to the speech".[128]

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[125] "*Der Mensch ist mit einem Wort* το δεινοτατον*, das Unheimlichste. Dieses Sagen vom Menschen faßt ihn von den äußersten Grenzen und den jähen Abgründen seines Seins*" (Heidegger 1966: 114).

[126] For more detailed analysis on Heidegger's interpretation of the Greek word "δεινον" and its ethical implications, see Swazo 2006: 446-448; Jaque Derrida also cites Heidegger's definition of "δεινον" in his famous essay on Celan's concept of "Majesty" in the *Meridian*, see Derrida 2005: 127.

[127] For a detailed description, see Lyon 2006: 12-14. In addition, Lyon also describes his witness of Celan's marking on his copy of Heidegger's *Der Satz vom Grund* (*The Principle of Reason*) in a personal correspondence that Lyon responded to Pajari Räsänen's request concerning the issues of "metaphor" (Räsänen 2007: 129-130).

[128] *Im 'natürlichen' Hören des Worüber der Rede können wir allerdings zugleich auf die Weise des Gesagten, die 'Diktion' hören, aber auch das nur in einem vorgängigen Mitverstehen des Geredeten; denn nur so besteht die*

But the spiritual affinity between Celan and Heidegger is most pointedly and intrinsically manifested in this turning towards the *un-heimliche* Other, and for Celan, it is as significant as a "breath turn" (*Atemwende*)[129] that evokes true poetry. Through such an encounter with "the Other", the "poem" emerges as a "phenomenon", which refuses to be an "art"-work, since a true poem cannot be made through any artistic-rhetorical device.

17　"Not-knowing is the most intimate"

Such existential significance of "not-knowing" and its manifestation through the spoken or written word, however, is not really "new", especially for those acquainted with the Chán Buddhist tradition and koan literature[130] of medieval China. For example, the 12th century koan collection *Cóng Róng Lù* 《從容錄》 (*The Book of Equanimity*) by Hóng Zhì Zhèng Jué 宏智正覺 (1091-1157) provides an example that in particular addresses the reality of our "closeness" to those "unknown": "Not-knowing is the most intimate" (無知最親切):

Möglichkeit, das Wie des Gesagtseins abzuschätzen in seiner Angemessenheit an das thematische Worüber der Rede (Heidegger 2006: 164).

[129] Celan relates poetry to "breath" and "breath turn" in both the *Meridian* and in his notes for the *Meridian*. For example, in contrast to the notion of "art", "with its connotation of being occidental, feature-length", Celan defines "poetry" in his notes for the speech as "grey-by-heart, turbid-by-breath, breath-intermingled language in time" (*Artistik und Wortkunst, – das mag etwas Abendländisch-Abendfüllendes für sich haben. Dichtung ist herzgraue, atemgetrübte, atemdurchwachsene Sprache in der Zeit.* Celan 1999: 110). In the *Meridian* speech, Celan also refers to poetry simply as "breath-turn": "Poetry: this can mean a breath-turn."[129] (*Dichtung: das kann eine Atemwende bedeuten.* GWIII: 195).

[130] Koan, literally means "public case" (*gōng àn* 公案); it normally takes a form of conversation in short phrases, sentences, anecdotes that capture the enlightenment of the Chán masters. For a detailed study of the development of Koan literature, see Foulk 2000.

Attention! Master Jizo asked Hogen, "Where have you come from?" "I pilgrimage aimlessly," replied Hogen. "What is the matter of your pilgrimage?" asked Jizo. "I don't know," replied Hogen. "Not knowing is the most intimate," remarked Jizo. At that, Hogen experienced great enlightenment (*Cóng Róng Lù*, Case 13[131]; Wick 2005: 63).

The Chán master obviously does not intend to promote any kind of ignorance. In fact, as the commentator of the koan points out, here "not-knowing" is meant to eliminate the dichotomy between "knowing" and "not-knowing": "This 'not knowing is most intimate' contains knowing and not knowing. It contains both and neither, all together. So when you affirm, totally affirm, but don't settle down in affirmation. When you deny, totally deny, but don't settle down in denial" (Wick 2005: 65). What the koan emphasizes is a certain attainment of "intimacy", *qīnqiè* 親切 in Chinese, which does not only expand the sense of "closeness" from people to spaces and affairs, but intensifies the interwoven meanings between "proper", "true" and even "precise", which suggests a spectrum of "relationships" that could possibly be inherent in a true encounter. By stating "not-knowing is the most intimate", the Chán master encourages each one of us to look for the emergence of primal experiences that are not trapped in our habitual manner of routines, but to break down the security and leap out of the comfort zone, in order to establish an attentive awareness of life itself. This way of life, according to Chán, is not "mysterious", not even "religious", but an enlightenment that can be attained by each one of us in every moment.

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[131] 地藏問法眼：“上座何往？”眼云：“迤邐行腳。”藏云：“行腳事作麼生？”眼云：“不知。” 藏云：“不知最親切。”眼豁然大悟。《從容錄》（Dǒng Qún 董群 1997:134）。

The crucial step, as the phenomenological discovery of the *unheimliche* shows, is to embrace the "not-knowing" instead of avoiding it.[132]

On the other hand, koan is a certain form of literature that inquires profound meaning through "simple words" and expands the power of language by violating "common sense". According to recent scholarship, these features are in fact due to the development of the traditional Chinese literary genres.[133] No wonder, along with the flourishing of koan literature around the 10th to 12th century,[134] Chinese scholars also paid more attention to the intrinsic connection between Chán and poetry, which is most significantly manifested in the reception of Wáng Wéi, who has been regarded as the "Poet Buddha" (*shī fó* 詩佛) for more than a thousand years.

Earlier on, Heidegger's East Asian connections are manifested in the works of Japanese scholars, who studied with Heidegger in 1920s and 1930s, such as Tanabe Hajime's essay "The New Turn in Phenomenology: Heidegger's phenomenology of life" (1924) and Kuki Shūzō's monograph *The Philosophy of Heidegger* (1933). From the 1970s, more scholarly attention has been paid to Heidegger's affinity with Daoism[135] and Buddhism.[136] Among these contributions,

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[132] For an illuminating exegesis of this particular koan, see Wick 2005: 64-65.

[133] T. Griffith Foulk refers to koan as "a literary genre with a distinct set of structures and rules, and furthermore that it is a product of the poetic and philosophical imagination, not simply a historical record of the utterances of awakened people" (Foulk 2000: 41). G. Victor Sōgen Hori also associates the koan genre with a Chinese literary game called "capping phrases" or "capping verses" that plays with the kind of parallelism that is especially characteristic of classical Chinese language and poetry (Hori 2005: 195). For a detailed explanation of the connections and differences between these literary games and the perplexing koan language, see Hori 2006: 194-207.

[134] The Sòng dynasty in Chinese history (960–1279 CE).

[135] For a detailed account on the connections between Heidegger and traditional Daoism discussed in recent scholarship, see Ma 2008: 15-19. For earlier contributions, see Hirsch 1970.

the most frequently discussed topic is from Heidegger's essay "A Dialogue on Language:

Between a Japanese and an Inquirer" in his 1959 volume titled *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (*On the

Way to Language*), where Heidegger states through the voice of the Inquirer: "Some time ago I

called language, clumsily enough, the house of Being. If man by virtue of his language dwells

within the claim of Being, then we Europeans presumably dwell in an entirely different house

than East Asian man" (Heidegger 1982: 5).[137] As Lin Ma points out in her recent study,

Heidegger's "deep-seated" conviction that "overcoming metaphysics can only be achieved from

within the Western philosophical tradition itself; a genuine questioning of a tradition can only

come from within" (Ma 2008: 160), essentially leads to reducing the idea of cross-cultural

communication in Heidegger's philosophy to a certain kind of monologue.

However, despite his obvious reservations towards the possibility of intercultural dialogue,

Heidegger's spiritual connections with Eastern thought attracted more scholarly attention in

recent years.[138] Steven Burik explored the concept of "translatability" through Heidegger's

encounter with the "foreign" such as the ancient Greek texts and points out that even in his early

works such as *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger already reveals a positive attitude towards the

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[136] For a relatively early but detailed account, see Umebara 1970.

[137] "Vor einiger Zeit nannte ich, unbeholfen genug, die Sprache das Haus des Seins. Wenn der Mensch durch seines Sprache im Anspruch des Seins wohnt, dann wohnen wir Europäer vermutlich in einem ganz anderen Haus als der ostasiatische Mensch" (Heidegger 1959: 90).

[138] For a summary of scholarly interests on Heidegger's connections with Asia, in India, Japan and China, see Ma 2008: 216. For a detailed account on the connections between Heidegger and Chinese Daoism discussed in recent scholarship, see Zhang 2009; Burik 2010; and Loughnane 2012, and especially for the Daoist reading of "the Thing", see Chai 2014, for an earlier contributions, see Hirsch 1970. For a relatively early but detailed account on Heidegger and Buddhism, see Umebara 1970.

"primitive" cultures – though the term "primitive" might carry a derogatory tone (Burik 2009: 37). According to Burik, at the core of Heidegger's potential contribution to intercultural dialogue is his concern and curiosity for the "other way of thinking" (40), including the thinking that is expressed through poetry, for example through the poetry of Hölderlin, Trakl and George.

Among other contributions, David Chai in a more recent article explores the origin of the "Thing" in canonical Daoist texts, and finds that Heidegger's phenomenological description of "the thing", which resists being objectified, is also expressed by *Zhuāng Zǐ*, one of the most important Daoist canons. "Given that the Thing's pre-phenomenological disposition stands in contrast to the concretized things it propagates, making it knowable only through its trace, Daoism views the Thing as remaining an inherent part of said things while maintaining its own aloofness" (Chai 2014: 305). Rolf Elberfeld, on the other hand, compares the Buddhist and the Western concepts of time, especially focusing on the affinity between the Japanese Chán master Dōgen's concept of time and the thoughts of later Heidegger, focusing on their common emphasis on the openness and subjectivity of time.

My own focus on the affinity between Heidegger's thinking on "thingliness" and the Chán wisdom of "Not-knowing" suggests a shift from the current scholarly concentration on the general comparability between Eastern and Western thoughts to the more specific inquiry on the ontological basis of the non-metaphorical approach of poetic language, shared by both Paul Celan and Wáng Wéi. The complexity of this same approach will be exposed through their different poetic forms and structures, which facilitates a comprehension of the phenomenological depth of "the same" through a dialogical exploration of the poems, perceived as textual phenomena.

18   Wáng Wéi's "Tiān Jī" ("Heavenly Secret")

Wáng Wéi's contributions to Chinese culture are unique in their breadth of expression. Not only was he the master poet of the Táng 唐 dynasty when classical Chinese poetry reached its peak in terms of both quantity and quality, as I have introduced him, he was also a legendary musician[139] and one of the founding fathers of the Southern school of Chinese landscape painting, and a perspective from painting provides a productive approach to his poetics as well. The notion of "*tiān jī*" 天機 (heavenly secrets) frequently occurs in the traditional commentaries on Wáng Wéi's artistic merits. For example, in the catalogue of the paintings in possession of the royal family of Emperor Huī Zōng of the Sòng Dynasty (*sòng huī zōng* 宋徽宗 1082-1135) – *Xuān Hé Huà Pǔ* 《宣和畫譜》–Wáng Wéi is listed as a master of the landscape genre, or "hills and streams" (*shān shuǐ* 山水): "Wéi is good at painting, particularly masterful of the "mountain-water". His contemporary painters regarded his paintings to be the arrival of "*tiān jī*", an achievement that is not reachable by those who want to learn from him, but deeply appreciated by later generations" (Zhào 1972 Vol.2: 518-519).[140] The Chinese characters for "*tiān jī*", 天機, indicate an artistic participation in the creation of "Nature", *zào huà* 造化, which is derived from a combination of two characters: *zào* 造 (to create) and *huà* 化 (change). To relate Wáng Wéi's art with "*tiān jī*" is to emphasize the "naturalness" of his creation: "It is

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[139] According to *Tài Píng Guǎng Jì* 《太平廣記》 (The 10th century Chinese Encyclopedia edited in the time period of Emperor Tài Zōng of Sòng dynasty 宋太宗): Wáng Wéi was an excellent musician (性閑音律), and he was introduced to the princess as "a person who knows music" ("知音者也", Zhào 1972 vol.2: 499).

[140] "維擅畫，尤精山水。當時之畫家者流，以謂天機所到，而所學者皆不及。後世稱重。"

crucial to know that Mó Jié[141]'s clouds, peaks, rocks and traces entirely come out of "*tiān jī*", his brush willingly participates in Nature's creation" (521).[142] Moreover, other commentary associates "*tiān jī*" with the traditional concept of natural spirit, *qì* 氣 (natural vitality): "Among the ancients who wanted to be renowned in the world through a type of art, he must think so keenly as if entering the divine spirit, he would not stop without examining all the changes of past and present. In this way, he was able to discern "*tiān jī*", so that his *qì* [143] accompanies the thing" (520).[144]

These classical commentaries on Wáng Wéi's artistic creation express a certain mysticism, enhanced by a number of legendary stories that portrayed him as an Orpheus-like figure whose artworks possess supernatural power.[145] The real "mystery", however, lies in the paradoxical fact that Wáng Wéi achieved his "miraculous" poetic effect through an utmost simplicity, indeed

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[141] Wáng Wéi's *zì* 字 (a name one adopts for oneself) is Mó Jié 摩詰. This shows his chosen spiritual relationship to the enlightened buddhist lay scholar Vimalakirti (*wéi mó jié* / 維摩詰 in Chinese), since *wéi mó jié* is a combination of his given first name (*wéi* / 维) with his *zì*.

[142] 要之摩詰所謂雲峰石迹，迴出天機，筆意縱橫，參乎造化者。

[143] *Qì* is also a crucial concept in the formulation of the traditional Chinese poetics, as the Southern Dynasty critic Zhōng Róng 鐘嶸 (468-518) states at the beginning of his *Shī Pǐn* 《詩品》 (*Poetic Characters*): "*Qì* animates matters, matter awakens souls, and human dispositions and emotions are stimulated, and articulated in dances and songs." (氣之動物，物之感人，故搖蕩性情，形諸舞詠。): Also mentioned in Introduction.

[144] 古人欲以一藝名世者，必精思入神，極古今之變而後已。故能洞達天機，氣隨物在。

[145] A famous story tells how one of Wáng Wéi's paintings about a rock was carried away by a strange wind and re-appeared on the peak of a Korean mountain, see Zhào 1972 vol 2: 503.

austerity of expression,[146] and through this creating such an impression of pure simplicity that even more than a thousand years later it frustrates his Western translators.[147]

How is this achieved? The traditional appeal to an account of "*tiān jī*" seems to suggest that it is a "secret" that cannot be known, much as we have experienced in Celan's "secret of encounter". On the other hand, albeit without claiming to know the secret and without offering interpretative devices to understand a poem, the Chinese critical tradition has developed a range of expressions that seemingly allude to the secret and thus call for a reader's engagement with the poem with utmost attentiveness.

Compared with Celan's poetics of encounter, Wáng Wéi's "secret" lies in his profound stylistic simplicity. Such poetic simplicity shows a particular non-metaphorical tendency, which however follows naturally from its principles, and is free of any theory, or internal resistance towards a metaphorical-metaphysical tradition, an effort reflected in Celan's phenomenological approach.

Unlike Celan's intentional resistance to the metaphoric tradition in artistic creations, Wáng Wéi's non-metaphorical poetics seems to be rather natural. The research in China-West comparative poetics and "literary hermeneutics" eloquently explored the theme of inadequacy and insufficiency of language through both Chinese and Western texts. For example, James Liu,

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[146] For example, Stephen Owen interprets Wáng Wéi's "austere simplicity" of his later quatrains to deceptively bear "a mask of naiveté and understatement" (Owen 1981: 32).

[147] See Burton Watson's comments: "Wang Wei's poetry, in fact, is almost totally free of overt philosophizing, and, far from containing any element of the consciously picturesque or quaint, as descriptions of it sometimes suggest, it is actually plain to a degree that is the despair of translators. Yet it is this very plainness, which in the end is a kind of purity, that gives it true value" (Watson 1971: 172-173), also mentioned in Introduction.

in his posthumously published study *Language-Paradox-Poetics* (1988), considers the paradox

of "the less is said, the more is meant" as a prevailing phenomenon in traditional Chinese texts,

which is distinguished from "the language of paradox" that has been explored in the twentieth-

century Western linguistic and philosophical tradition, especially within the Analytical

Philosophy developed in the twentieth century.[148] Zhāng Lóng Xī, however, from a hermeneutic

perspective that focuses on literary texts,[149] presents the topic from several paralleled themes[150]

that address the aspect of silence in both Chinese and Western canons.

Whether the praise of silence belongs to Eastern or Western or both traditions is beside the

point, for what connects Celan's "secret of encounter" and Wáng Wéi's "*tiān jī*" is an immanent

"alterity" that appears as different cultural phenomenon through these two poets, who do not

share any common cultural heritage. In addition to the theoretical assumptions "Dao or logos",

"allegory" and various common themes between Chinese and Western literary works that Zhāng

Lóng Xī has established in his works,[151] the convergence between Celan and Wáng Wéi's

poetics intensifies our experience of alterity, and verifies a principle of cross-cultural comparison

that is inherent in Heidegger's statement about "the same", also quoted by Zhāng Lóng Xī: "The

equal or identical always moves toward the absence of difference, so that everything may be

reduced to a common denominator. The same, by contrast, is the belonging together of what

differs, through a gathering by way of difference" (Zhāng 1992: xv). The real issue of

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[148] See, for example, W.V. Quine's essay "The Ways of Paradox" (1961), where he analyses "paradox" from logical, linguistic and mathematical perspectives.

[149] See Zhāng 1992: x for his definition of "literary hermeneutics".

[150] For such convergent themes such as "The Debasement of Writing", "Philosopher, Mystic, Poet" and "The Use of Silence", see Zhāng 1992.

[151] See, for example, Zhāng Lóng Xī 1992; 2005; 2007 etc.

comparison thus becomes an art of "gathering", which should not become a chaotic misplacement like the "Chinese encyclopedia" invented by Borges and quoted by Michel Foucault at the beginning of *The Order of Things*.[152] For this reason, we insist on a contrapuntal reading, a form of dialogue based upon complementary differences, as the basic pattern of comparison.

19 *Das Unheimliche* in Wáng Wéi's "Tiān Jī"

Here, investigating the immanent alterity in Wáng Wéi's poetics, i.e. in his "*tiān jī*", is a crucial step for this comparison.

For many ancient Chinese critics, Wáng Wéi's "*tiān jī*" is most tellingly revealed in one of his paintings "Yuán Ān[153] lying in the Snow" 《袁安臥雪圖》, which is recorded by Shěn Kuò 沈括 (1031－1095), an eleventh-century Chinese scholar, who is celebrated for his wide interest and scientific mind, in his well known book *Conversations with a Writing Brush at Dream Creek* (*mèng xī bǐ tán* 《夢溪筆談》):

The marvellous essence of calligraphy and painting must be encountered through spirit, which is difficult to achieve through material means...For example, in Yàn Yuǎn's commentary on painting, it says: "Wáng Wéi paints regardless of seasons, if he paints flowers, usually he paints peach flower, apricot flower, hibiscus, and lotus flower all together in one picture." My private collection of Mó Jié's painting 'Yuán Ān lying in the

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[152] See reference in *Introduction*, section VII, P.31.

[153] Yuán Ān 袁安 was a legendary official in Hàn 漢 dynasty, who was praised for his self-sacrificial virtue for the benefits of his people, since after a snow storm when everyone went out of the village to look for food, he was the only one remaining in his cold hut and did not want to bother other people, to struggle for the food which was already insufficient.

Snow' has banana trees in snow. This is the result of high mastery, the outcome is from the

internal intention, and that is why he creates principles and encounters the spirit, he

realizes the heavenly intention, and this is difficult to be understood by the common

mind.[154]

This legendary painting, albeit lost, has attracted scholarly attention ever since Shěn Kuò's

account was circulated. Traditional scholars in general argue from a similar conviction with Shěn

Kuò that the inconsistency between the season and the object in the painting reflects Wáng Wéi's

supernatural mastery of artistic expression, which, again, shows the impact of Chán

Buddhism.[155]

It is, however, important to realize how the strange and uncanny combination of a green

banana and the white snow is presented through a harmonious and non-confrontational setting,

not even so much for describing a wonder but for the warmth and peace inherent in this

extraordinary setting as an allegorical reference to Yuán Ān's virtue. Nature, as the Other, is

strange, uncanny, threatening, terrifying or dark; it is nevertheless portrayed not so much as an

opponent, but as a "natural" companion that one can "en-counter". "Counter" in Chinese is *duì*,

對 (face to face), an attitude that is also reflected in the contrapuntal norm of poetic composition

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[154] 書畫之妙，當以神會，難可以形器求也。世之觀畫者，多能指摘其間形象、位置、彩色瑕疵而已，
至於奧理冥造者，罕見其人。如彥遠《畫評》言：王維畫物，多不問四時，如畫花往往以桃、杏、芙蓉、
蓮花同畫一景。余家所藏摩詰畫《袁安臥雪圖》，有雪中芭蕉，此乃得心應手，意到便成，故其理入神，
迥得天意，此難可與俗人論也。(沈括《夢溪筆談》卷十七)

[155] See, for example, the Sòng dynasty monk-scholar Shì Huì Hóng 釋惠洪 comments on this painting in his *Night
Remarks in a Cold Study* (*lěng zhāi yè huà*《冷齋夜話》): "Wáng Wéi painted 'Banana Tree in the Snow', if one
perceives from an enlightened eye, one would realize that his emotions are transformed into the objects, the
mediocres would blame him not realizing winter and summer." (王維作畫《雪中芭蕉》，法眼觀之，知其神情
寄寓于物，俗論則譏以爲不知寒暑。《冷齋夜話》卷四).

of "regulated verse" (*gé lǜ shī* 格律詩), which formerly requires the two lines within a couplet must share the same number of syllables, similar rhythmic and syntactic function, but sometimes oppositional semantics. It is a complementary antithesis that some scholars describe as "parallelism".[156]

20   "*Duì* 對": complementarity vs. alterity

Indeed, encountering nature for Wáng Wéi is such an activity of *duì*, an acceptance of the Other as a dialogical counterpart, but not necessarily as an opponent. Similarly, encountering an extraordinary phenomenon such as a banana tree on the snow painted by Wáng Wéi, therefore, one may not feel offended by such an abnormaliy, as "*etwas Unheimliches*" would evoke, but experience certain harmony that is derived from differences, even from opposed forces and tensions. This transformative power of encounter is evidently manifest in Wáng Wéi's personal account, seen through a correspondence with his close friend Péi Dí 裴迪[157] sent from the Mt. Zhōng Nán 終南山 ("Letter to Xiù Cái Péi from the Mountains" 《山中與裴秀才迪書》Zhào 1972 vol.2: 332):

[...] At night I climbed up the Hill Huá Zǐ (*huá zǐ gǎng* 華子岡), the water of Wǎng (輞) river ripples, flowing up and down with the moon. Cold mountains and remote fire, illuminates the forest and fades in the distance. Cold dogs in dark alleys are barking like

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[156] For the application of "parallelism" in Chinese poetry, seen also as a metaphor for the idea of comparison, see Zhāng Lóng Xī 1998: 34: "Parallelism of course provides an appropriate metaphor for comparative literature itself, because what we do in comparing works and concepts in different literary and cultural tradition is to line them up in two or more series and to work out their connections, similarities, contrasts, and patterns in mutual illumination, just as we read a parallelistic couplet in a Chinese poem" (Zhang 1998: 34).

[157] With whom he co-authored the well known poetic cycle of Wǎng River (*wǎng chuān jí* 《輞川集》).

leopards. The sound of pestles from the night village alternated with the scarce chimes (struck) of the bell. At this time, I sat alone, and the serving boys and other servants were all silent.[158]

This cold, unfriendly, even frightening winter night, however, opens Wáng Wéi's warm memory on his poetic encounter with his friend, as he kept writing:

I thought about our past, when we together composed poetry, while walking along the winding routes, facing the clean brooks. When spring comes, grasses and woods grow abundantly; when spring mountains can be gazed at, light fishes jump out of the water, white gulls extend their wings, the dew drops on the green marshland [...] If you did not have marvellous talents of heavenly gifts, how could I invite you with such a "non-urgent task" (不急之務). However, there is "deep flavour" (*shēn qù* 深趣) in it [...].[159]

Face to face with a cold winter night, with the dogs' fierce barking forming the backdrop of a decidedly unromantic encounter with nature, Wáng Wéi is able to transform the uncanny present into a warm anticipation through the concept of poetry. In this letter, Wáng Wéi in fact presents two types of "encounter". In the first part, when he was being "alone" with nature, he experienced a sense of the uncanny Other as an "opposing force" – just in the way it is manifested in Celan's poetics – as a crucial phase of "encounter". However, such uncanny

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[158] 夜登華子岡，輞水淪漣。與月上下。寒山遠火，明滅林外。深巷寒犬，吠聲如豹。村墟夜春，復 與疏鐘相間。此時獨坐，僮僕靜默。

[159] 多思曩昔。攜手賦詩。步仄逕。臨清流也。當待春中，草木蔓發，春山可望，輕鯈出水，白鷗矯翼，露濕青皋，麥隴朝雊。斯之不遠。倘能從我遊乎。非子天機清妙者，豈能以此不急之務相邀。然是中有深趣矣。

existence, through Wáng Wéi's sensibility towards "*shēn qù*", subsequently is transformed into a warm welcoming gesture of acceptance and anticipation. The juxtaposition of the dogs' barking in a bitterly cold winter night and the birds' singing in the verdant light of spring is, in this case, quite analogous to the vision of a green banana tree in the white snow.

The poetics of encounter discussed in this chapter, though initiated from Celan's *Meridian* speech, is not limited to his Jewish heritage and personal trauma, but resonates with Wáng Wéi's poetics, not in a similar but in a complementary manner.

21   The encounter between Celan and Wáng Wéi: the "hermetic" and "Not-knowing"

For both Paul Celan and Wáng Wéi, encounter means an acquaintance with the Other, the Other as an interior alterity that evokes utmost "attentiveness" through its uncanny (*unheimliche*) nature, which is, in fact, the crucial phase of reading poetry that is not meant to be "known" or "understood" simply through a process of familiarizing oneself through special knowledge about the author or his language, but is more dependent upon the reader's willing engagement in a persistent participation, which cautiously takes the historical and biographical information as one of the informing hypotheses, but not the external truth that the poem is supposed to articulate. Therefore, "understanding" Celan's poem does not mean to discover some pre-given meanings concealed in the poem, but to participate in the actualization of this very poem–as a phenomenon, in and through one's own life experience, which is also reflected in Gadamer's remark: "He who thinks that he has already understood Celan's poetry, does not know what understanding is" (7).[160]

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[160] "*Wer meint, er 'verstünde' Celan's Gedichte bereits...Er weiß nicht, was hier Verstehen ist.*"

Gadamer's approach to Celan's poetry is rooted in his respect for Celan's "hermeticism", not so much as sealed secret meaning, but as an opportunity of phenomenological opening through the not-knowing,[161] and uses such opportunity to "see" the poem itself through an "attentiveness" that resonates with Celan's emphasis in the *Meridian*. Gadamer's phenomenological approach to Celan's "hermetic" poetry is also applicable to Wáng Wéi, since Wáng Wéi's poem, with its utmost simplicity, already denies the efforts of tracing any external reference through any rhetorical device.

22 The phenomenological approach to comparison: an "encounter" to discover the Other within

No critic studying Paul Celan could deny Celan's Jewish heritage and the impact of the Holocaust on his work; as well, no critic studying Wáng Wéi could avoid mentioning the spirit of Chán Buddhism and traditional Chinese culture. These historical and biographical facts are given, indeed incommensurable, and not reasonably available to form a ground for comparison. The "sameness" in these two poets is not obvious. It derives from a complex interaction of their poetic phenomena that is centered on their non-metaphorical approach to poetic language, based upon an ontological conviction of Not-knowing. To pursue it requires a phenomenological method, utmost attentiveness and patient listening to discern the poetic logic, to confront the challenge of an uncanny Other that might bring wonder, as well as threatening the existing understanding; this Other is, however, interior to the self.

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[161] Peter Szondi pointedly explained the significance of "Not-knowing" in his pioneering reading of Celan's poem *Engführung*: the reader of Celan's text is treated as "someone who has no right to know" (Szondi 2003: 28). However, " ...it is precisely this absence of information that lets the reader assume the phrase refers to him (though not necessarily to him alone)..." and "...the reader finds himself transported to the interior of the text in such a way that it is no longer possible to distinguish between the one who is reading and what is being read. The reading subject coincides with the subject of reading" (29).

Such ground of comparison is a type of theoretical affinity that Zhāng Lóng Xī, following

Claudio Guillén, has proposed for East West studies in general. But here, *Begegung* is not a

cognitive theory but indicates living experience, i.e. participation. I, therefore, call it

"phenomenological" since it does not take formal analysis or biographical information as

objectified reality, but realizes how these investigations are guided by the discerning of the

internal logic of the poems and the affinity of such gathering. Comparison is to show and to

constitute the meanings of such meeting with adversities. It is an encounter.

However, if this phenomenological approach of poetry is taken as the "ground" of

comparing Celan and Wáng Wéi's poems, how could one justify that the choice of any particular

poem has an inner logic, indeed necessity, and is not merely an expression of arbitrary personal

preferences? The particular choice of poems for comparison may depend upon their thematic

connections, formal similarities and complementary contrasts. But such "sameness" is not

established upon any supposedly commensurable categories, whether from formal or historical

aspects, but reflects concrete phenomena that constitute fresh meaning through the very process

of the activity of comparison—discovering and listening to the interior Other through encounter.

In the following analysis of Paul Celan's poem "DU DARFST" and Wáng Wéi's poem

"Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn", I will mainly present the poem as a unique phenomenon through its own

"textual landscape" that questions, contends, and explores with the Other and rejects being

reduced to a decoding of metaphors. I also include the historical and biographical information

about both authors whenever it is illuminating to prevent errors of reading.[162] Above all, I perceive the poem as an eventful, and phenomenal site of encounter, which is self-referentially reflected as the quintessential theme in both "DU DARFST" and "Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn".

23 Reading Celan's Poem "DU DARFST" ("FEEL FREE")

DU DARFST mich getrost

mit Schnee bewirten:

sooft ich Schulter an Schulter

mit dem Maulbeerbaum schritt durch
                    den Sommer,

schrie sein jüngstes

Blatt.

FEEL FREE, for all I care,

to welcome me with snow:

as oft' as I strode side by side

with the mulberry tree through
                    summer days,

its youngest leaf

screamed.

(GWII: 11)

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[162] Besides emphasizing the intuition in grasping the internal logic of the poems, Gadamer himself refers to literary knowledge as some kind of "guarantee" from technical errors in exegesis, but questions the ultimate value of *Literaturwissenschaft* in terms of understanding the poem itself. See Gadamer 1973:137.

23.1   Previous readings of the poem

The poem "Du Darfst" (Feel free) is the first, also the programmatic piece of Celan's poetic cycle *Breathturn* (*Atemwende*, 1967), of which the first part was previously independently published in 1965 as *Breath Crystal* (*Atemkristall*), including eight engravings by his wife Gisèle Celan-Lestrange. Celan expresses his own excitement when he wrote to his son Eric on April 4th, 1967, announcing the forthcoming publication of *Atemwende*: "[...] This is an important landmark in my life, because this book in many respects implies a turning point, among them, above all, with regard to its language…" (Celan and Celan-Lestrange 2001: 442).[163]

Compared to his previous poetic collections, the poems in *Atemwende* are drastically shorter and the language becomes scarce and "dry", a phenomenon that the critic Marlies Janz describes as "the most extreme reduction and scantiness of language" (*äußerste Reduktion und Kargheit der Sprache*, Janz 1985: 36). And the effect, for the critics such as Thomas Sparr, indicates Celan's withdrawal into silence: "This cycle [*Breathturn*] marks scepticism against the word, a drastic reduction of that which remains for the poem to speak of" (Sparr 1989: 63).[164]

Gadamer, on the other hand, interprets *Atemwende* as a state of wonder and a breathless moment between inhaling and exhaling, when the true word (*das Wort*), as subtle as a crystal, could be heard in silence (Gadamer 1973: 14; 19). Gadamer's reading recalls Celan's own mention of *Atemwende* in the *Meridian* speech: "Poetry: this can mean a breath turn." (*Dichtung:*

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[163] *[...] das ist ein wichtiges Datum in meinem Leben, denn dieses Buch [Atemwende] bedeutet in vielerlei Hinsicht, darunter, vor allem, im Hinblick auf seine Sprache, eine Wende [...].*

[164] *Diesen Zyklus [Atemwende] prägt Skepsis gegenüber dem Wort, eine drastische Reduktion dessen, was dem Gedicht zu sagen bleibt.*

das kann eine Atem wende bedeuten. GWIII: 195),[165] which indicates that the significance of this

book, named on behalf of the very nature of poetry, not so much lies in its "linguistic" features

that may reflect the poem's external circumstances, but signifies an interior change that is

associated with breath: a vital existential urge. In "DU DARFST", the programmatic piece of

Atemwende, Celan states his poetic agenda – "breath-turn" – by presenting a piece of the "secret

of encounter", as "encounter" is in fact the very theme of the poem, signified even by the very

first line "*Du darfst mich getrost*". However, is "encounter", as it is being applied in this poem

itself a metaphor? According to Hendrik Birus, "Nothing is more obvious than to metaphorically

interpret the reality of this opening poem of Celan's *Breath-turn*."[166] Even Gadamer's tone turns

out to be "apodictic" (*apodiktisch*), when he comments on Celan's verbal images, openly

referring to some kind of "metaphorical" interpretation. For example, regarding the "mulberry

tree" (*Maulbeerbaum*) in "DU DARFST", Gadamer is convinced of his reading: "The mulberry

tree here, without doubt, is the concept of striving energy and of always newly abundant

constructing of new striving, a symbol of unquenchable thirst for life."[167] As Gadamer himself

explained in a later Essay "A Phenomenological and Semantic Approach to Celan"

(*Phänomenologischer und semantischer Zugang zu Celan?* 1991), it is crucially important to

"see" that "the mulberry tree symbolizes a never subdued, inexhaustible striving force"[168] and

then one could understand the meaning of "pacing side by side with the mulberry tree", through

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[165] See footnote 13 of this chapter.

[166] "*Nichts scheint näher zu liegen, als die Realien dieses Eröffnungsgedichts von Celans 'Atemwende' (GW II 11) metaphorisch zu interpretieren*." (Birus 1991: 135)

[167] "*Der Maulbeerbaum ist ohne Zweifel hier der Inbegriff treibender Energie und immer neuen üppigen Herausbildends neuer Triebe, ein Symbol unstillbaren Lebensdurstes.*" (Gadamer 1973: 15) For a list of Gadamer's metaphorical readings on Celan's "DU DARFST", see Birus 1991: 135, note 48.

[168] *Dieser Maulbeerbaum also symbolisiert in der Tat eine nicht zu bändigende, unermüdliche Triebkraft.*

which eventually the "praise of silence" (*Verstehen des Lobs der Stille*) that the poem evokes is achieved (Gadamer 1991: 312).

By actualizing his metaphorical reading of "mulberry tree", i.e. explaining the image as a rhetoric trope that refers to some more familiar source, does Gadamer contradict his own overall phenomenological agenda that rejects to proclaim one "correct" reading of the poem but aims to understand how the seeming inconsistencies and contradictions of the phenomenon facilitate an exploration, opening up to "the poem" itself? It is this site of the poem, its very phenomenon, which has been kept "forgotten" or explained away in recent scholarship through metaphors, allegories or Celan's biographical information, enhanced by the recent availability of very significant material related to Celan's life and personal archives.[169]

For example, John Felstiner proposes a "hidden" connection between Celan's "Du Darfst" and his translations of Shakespeare's sonnets, especially Sonnet 5, which Celan translated into German when he was probably also working on "Du Darfst" in October 1963. For Felstiner, the theme of temporality between summer and winter reveals the secret of such connection (Felstiner 1995: 208-209). Roland Reuß, admitting that "there is always no such straightforward interpretative access to Celan's poems" (Reuß 2001: 9), attempts a detailed interpretation for every single phrase and important verbal image of "Du Darfst" with his method of "paraphrasing": he analyses "non-understandable" phrases into "understandable" units; inquiring verbal images not only in historical and cultural "contexts", but in Celan's own

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[169] For example, in the recent decade, we have seen the publications of Celan's personal correspondences with his wife Gisèle Lestrange, with his close friends Ingeborg Bachmann, Nelly Sachs, Ilana Shmueli, and with Peter Szondi, Hans Bender etc., as well as the publication of a detailed documentation for the so-called "Goll Affair", and the opening of his private library in Paris etc.

conceptual and linguistic framework to trace an "immanent" coherence between words and metric units, in order to establish multivalent meanings of the poem (Reuß 2001: 121-149). As to the textual versions of this poem, Bücher sketches the process of editing Celan's manuscripts, especially the significant changes during different compositional stages, which can be read in accordance with the 2000 edition of the *Tübinger Ausgabe* of *Paul Celan: Atemwende: Vorstufen, Textgenese, Endfassung* (Bücher 1987: 99-106).

23.2   The poem as a site of encounter

Focusing on the theme of encounter in the poem, and viewing the poem as an encounter with "the Other", my reading of Celan's poem "DU DARFST" intends to initiate a phenomenological approach to comparison without eliminating the important contexts of the poems. This approach, on the one hand, intensifies Gadamer's methodological emphasis on seeing "the poem" in and of itself, rather than unquestioningly relying on the biographical information about the poet or the rhetorical analysis of the images. On the other hand, specific historical and biographical information is drawn upon with a purpose of correcting unnecessary errors of the readings.

For such purpose, I apply the innovative device of a visual grammar, to formulate a unique "textual landscape" as a mini-universe of the poem where an event of encounter is presented in multiple relationships that construct a poetic site, which are woven across different "times". Therefore, the following textual analysis and contextual studies of the poem are meant to be guided by the insights from what we have seen through the textual landscape, which, in turn either verifies, intensifies or questions these conceptual yet tangible relationships presented in the sketch.

On the other hand, assuming that the poem is always bigger and richer than any linguistic, historical and cultural analysis could possibly achieve, my phenomenological perspective of reading "Du Darfst" intends to open a horizon for "the Other" to participate in, which is essentially derived from the internal dialogical demand in Celan's own notion of encounter. And "the Other", in this case, is multi-dimensional: on one hand, it is an immanent alterity that Celan's text contends with, which will be revealed through the textual forms and internal structures; on the other hand, the Other is the poem's dialogical counterpart in this particular context: Wáng Wéi's "Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn", chosen, above all, from their thematic and theoretical connection to the notion of "encounter".

23.3 A textual landscape of the poem: an encounter between *Ich* und *Du* (I and You)

At first glance, "Du Darfst" presents a conceptual scene of encounter: we witness an implied encounter between "you" (*du*) and "I" (*ich*): "Feel free, for all I care, / to welcome me with snow [...]." However, we do not know who *I* is and who *you* is, and we do not know the circumstances – whether there could be an actual dialogue or merely an imagined one – "you" and "I" are simply located in undefined time and space. We encounter the crisp silence of the winter and the fecund noise of the summer, and we encounter snow, the mulberry tree, and his screaming leaf... Of course, we wonder what these words and images mean. But we do not know, and our journey with the poem in fact starts from this strong sensuous feeling of "Not-knowing".

Approaching the poem through an attitude of not-knowing, on one hand, reflects what critics such as Szondi, Gadamer, Sparr and Hamacher already allude to, that Celan's poem is by no means "mimetic", and it questions and refuses to be pinned down by any external reference, but remains open to multiple co-existent levels of interpretations; on the other hand, the poem

presents its own "precision"[170] through an interior dialogical relationship between the entities, which also resists arbitrary interpretation.

Here, I present a visualized "textual landscape"[171] for the poem, revealing that the poem seen as a phenomenon consists of multiple relationships that manifest the internal structures of the alterity-dialogicity between the poetic concepts:

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[170] Gadamer offers an important distinction between the autobiographical precision and the precision that is derived from the poem: "the precision in understanding the poem, which the ideal reader achieves out of nothing but the poem itself and the knowledge that he possesses, would certainly be the actual metric." (*Die Präzision im Verstehen des Gedichts, die der ideale Leser aus nichts als aus dem Gedicht selbst und aus den Kenntnissen, die er besitzt, erreicht, wäre ganz gewiß der eigentliche Maßstab*. Gadamer 1973: 132).

[171] I borrow this term from Thomas Sparr: Sparr applies Hart-Nibbrig's notion "textual landscape" to indicate that nature and landscape in Celan's poems function no longer as the representation of any particular location or site, but entirely as "poetic realization" (Sparr 1989: 62).
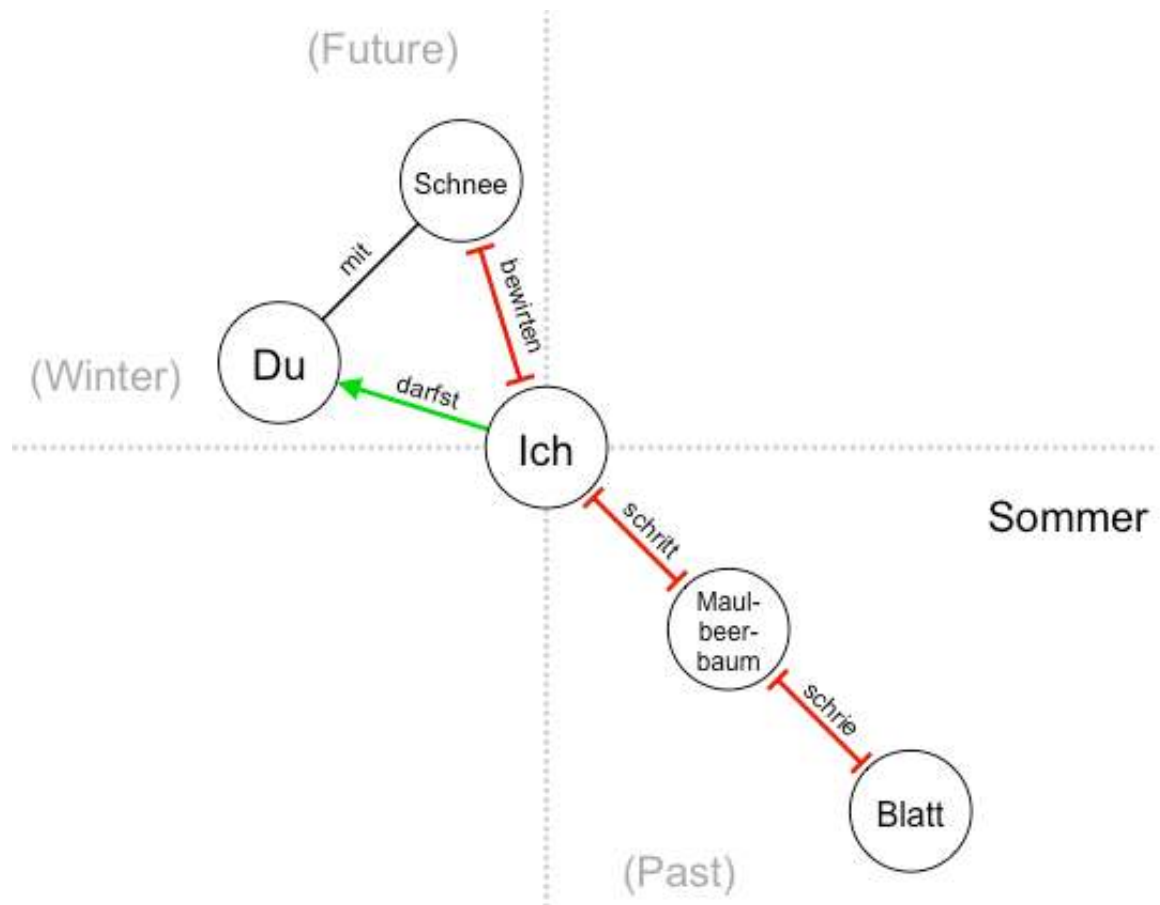
Figure 1. The poetic landscape of "Du Darfst". One perspective of reading is from top to bottom. Concepts are shown as labelled circles, principal relationships are shown as lines and named. Black lines are relationships of a general type, red bars indicate opposition or contradiction (e.g. a shrieking leaf), green arrows indicate support or entailment. The underlying time and space are shown, given in parentheses and grey font if not explicit but implied. The dynamics of the poem lead from a space of future welcome–albeit a cold, snowy winter–to the confusing and disturbing past.

Through this visual map, we are able to see[172] how poetic concepts traverse across the poems

immanent layers of time as we are conceptually spacing the landscape. And we naturally focus

on the encounter between *I* and *You*, and their relationship(s) with other concepts. In this site of

multiple dialogues, we also see the contrasts, such as the snowy, silent winter *vs*. the leafy, noisy

summer; the warm welcoming gesture in winter *vs*. the harsh screaming sound in summer; the

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[172] I use the verb " to see", in order to distinguish from the common use of "to understand", for understanding implies a recognition of some more familiar knowledge or feeling, but "to see" simply means to grasp intuitively in a holistic sense.

hospitality in a future welcoming gesture *vs*. the exotic overabundance of a past memory, which

are not presented as anything "symbolic" as Gadamer assumes,[173] but concrete, yet conceptual

reality. Similarly, as readers' attention passes from the cold yet warm snow to the green but

disturbing leaf, which evoke an existential dialogical relationship between *I* and *you* despite the

tangible gaps within such intimacy, which are displayed through the red bars in the graph. The

landscape evokes a strong sense of this interior alterity, an innermost estrangement as Celan once

explicitly expresses in the verse: "With you/ on the vocal-cord bridge, in the/great In-between/

night over" ("SLATE EYED" (SCHIEFERÄUGIGE) in *Atemwende*, GW II: 98).[174]

Such a "textual landscape", visualized through graphic configurations of poetic concepts, is

not a description of any metaphorical, allegorical or symbolic meaning; nor is it a reference to

any biographical information or historical circumstance. The "textual landscape" is a mapping

that is entirely based upon the poem itself, suggesting a reading that is not confined by the

conventional concepts of time and space. In this interpretative participation, there is neither a

pre-determined "correct" reading, nor "anything goes", but a reading of "this poem", which, in

Gadamer's words, even though it may not be error-free, "yet, as a task, can be neither relieved

nor replaced by anything" (*der aber als Aufgabe durch nichts abgelöst oder ersetzt werden kann*,

Gadamer 1973: 113). Although we do not know the specific referent of the concepts that the

author intentionally refers to, our conceptual comprehension of the internal logic of the poem is

prior to any more specific, historical reading.

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[173] Gadamer interprets such contrasts as symbols for "desire and renunciation" (*Verlangen und Verzicht*), "summer and winter" (*Sommer und Winter*), "life and death" (*Leben und Tod*), "scream and stillness" (*Schrei und Stille*), "word and silence" (*Wort und Schweigen*) (Gadamer 1973: 17).

[174] "*Mit dir/ auf der Stimmbänderbrücke, im/ Großen Dazwischen,/ nachtüber*."

What the textual landscape most impresses on us is a visual presentation of the internal logic of the poem. More specifically, here, it is this extraordinary dialogical relationship between *I* and *You*. As the blocking red bars of failed entailments illustrate in contrast to the single green arrow – "*darfst*", the reality, possibility and potentials of the relationship may have been underestimated. This is significant, as a recurring theme in Gadamer's interpretation of Celan's *Atemkristall*. Gadamer concludes that this "*I*" does not simply stand for the poet's selfhood, rather, it refers to the self in general, to "that individual who is each of us" (Gadamer 1973: 11),[175] when "the You is so much and so little I as the I is I " (12).[176]

23.4   Celan's impersonality

It is, however, interesting to note that elsewhere in *Atemkristall* (the first poetic cycle of *Atemwende*), Celan in fact precisely instantiates the relationship between *I* and *you* in a remarkable poem that is written unusually in conventional rhymes, and intentionally put in a parenthesis:

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[175] "*'jener Einzelne' [...] der ein jeder von uns ist* [...]"

[176] "*Das Du ist so sehr und so wenig Ich, wie das Ich Ich ist.*"

(ICH KENNE DICH, du bist die tief Gebeugte,   (I KNOW YOU, are the subjugated,

ich, der Durchbohrte, bin dir untertan.   I am the pierced, lowest under you.

Wo flammt ein Wort, das für uns beide zeugte?   What flaming oath is that we dedicated?

Du–ganz, ganz wirklich. Ich–ganz Wahn.)   I –wholly mad. You– whole, and wholly true.)

(GWII: 30)

Celan's exceptional use of rhyme makes a point (albeit parenthetical)[177] in that it is juxtaposed

with a somewhat less elusive "*Du*" through the use of the female gender "*die tief Gebeugte*".

Whereas elsewhere the "sign" ("*Du*") does not have any specific referent – it could be a God, a

lover, the reader, even the author himself, but maybe none of these, as scholars have noticed in

contending with Celan's perplexing use of personal pronouns[178] – here, dialogue and recognition

arise on the basis of a, as it were, biological complementarity (the opposite gender), in a

vocabulary that alludes to passion and abandon, in the most existential way. This, however, in

rhyme, that is, in a form that relates back to traditional German poetics with all its historical

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[177] For a specific connotation of the "German rhyme" in Celan's verses, see Zilcosky 2005: 673-677.

[178] For example, Marko Pajević agues: "Celan's I-You is not necessarily to be understood that he leads a dialogue with a concrete person, he in fact addresses No-one, even the so frequently occurring You in his poems, is not – or not only – a concrete Other, but equally himself or the indeterminate No-one" (*Das Ich-Du Celans ist nicht unbedingt so aufzufassen, daß er einen Dialog mit einer konkreten Person führt, er wendet sich ja an Niemand, selbst das so häufig vorkommende Du seiner Gedichte ist nicht – oder nicht nur – eine konkrete andre Person, sondern ebenso er selbst oder der ungewisse Niemand*. Pajević 2000: 109); John Zilcosky considers the distinction between *I* and *you* to be an indication of a "split poetic identity, in which the 'you' overwhelms the 'I'" (Zilcosky 2005: 684); Moreover, Beth Hawkins suggests that the *You* refers to an "impersonal, silent God" that the self willingly submits to (Hawkins 2003: 50).

implications,[179] and placed in parentheses. We have here in any case an encounter, no less uncanny than any other Other.

Such encounters may make the actual, pervasive "impersonality" of Celan's text less obvious, since the personal pronouns of *I* and *you* are not absent. Particularly, Celan seems to embark on his poetic adventure with a longing to encounter a Thou, and an earthly divine I-You relationship, for between *I* and *you* is where truth exists.[180] However, the profound uncertainty between *I* and *you* in Celan's text suggests the intense and spontaneous nature of encounter, intensified through his anti-metaphorical use of language, into a primordial expression where the pronouns *I* and *You* have not yet attached to anything "personal".

23.5   An evidence for non-metaphorical poetics

In fact, Celan's non-metaphorical gesture is most revealed in the changes the poems underwent, documented in the draft versions that are collected in the 2000 *Tübinger Ausgabe* of *Atemwende*. For example, in Celan's discarded draft of "DU DARFST", the poem reads:

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[179] For the German rhyme as the "established form" that is "equivalent to domination", see Zilcosky 2005: 677.

[180] For the influence of Martin Buber on this topic, see Lyon 1971 and Pajević 2000: 108-110.

Dᴜ ᴅᴀʀғsᴛ mich	Fᴇᴇʟ ғʀᴇᴇ to
mit Schnee bewirten:	serve me snow:
ich komme mit sieben	I come with seven
Blättern vom Sieben-	leaves of the sevenfold
stamm.	trunk.

(Celan 2000: 7)

Rolf Bücher offers a detailed analysis from Greek and Jewish mythological traditions that are associated with the tree of life to interpret the verbal image of "seven leaves" (*sieben Blätter*, Bücher 1987: 104).[181] He identifies the seven-armed lampstand, one of the core symbols of Judaism, as an obvious referent for the "*Siebenstamm*" and points out the kabbalistic significance of the number seven, consistent with a tendency of Celan to use symbols of the Kabbalah from time to time. In this reading, I note that the modern Jewish menorah in fact has nine branches, and the seven-armed lampstand was exclusively to be used in the Temple. Thus coming from there, and bringing something has a compelling allegorical reading which extends

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[181] Bücher points out the reference of this image to: "the seven-limbed tree of light, perhaps the Sephirot tree [the tree of Life], whose meaning could be preserved in the image of the seven-branched candelabrum" (*den siebengliedrigen Leuchter-Baum, vielleicht den Sephirot-Baum, dessen Sinngehalt im Bild des siebenarmigen Leuchters mitgemeint sein könnte*. Bücher 1987: 104).

to the structural symmetry of the activity of exchanging hospitality, and bridges the dialogical discrepancy by means of particular cultural exegesis.

This, however, is not what Celan had in mind with the radical departure from previous work that *Atemwende* was to become. Gadamer expresses this change from "esoteric expression" (the seven fold trunk) to "common and accessible connection" (the mulberry tree) – while we could debate the notion of "accessible" – as a means to strengthen a "far greater sensuous power" (*weit stärkerer sinnlicher Kraft*) of the verbal images (Gadamer 1973: 143).

By eliminating this allegorical topos in the published version of "Du Darfst", Celan fractures the encounter between self and Other across time, across the seasons winter and summer, which opens the encounter and thus creates an impossible possibility – an irreducible otherness, beyond any resolution in a particular event – of encounter between "You" and "I" as principles, not just instances. The change manifested in the manuscript thus renders Celan's non-metaphorical intention strikingly visible, and highlights how the non-metaphorical is not just a poetic device, enhancing the sensuous quality of articulations and images, it precisely manifests Celan's phenomenological approach to create a poetic language that transcends structure and form and the words of the language itself. At its root, this is the "encounter" of poem and recipient. Thus "Du Darfst" presents "encounter" as a quintessential reality of poetry that cannot simply be explained away.

23.6 Poetic rhythm

The following textual analysis of the rhythm, syntax and verbal images of the poem "Du Darfst" reveals how this anti-metaphorical and impersonal approach is manifested in the internal structure of Celan's design, which is centred on the tangible "otherness" that vividly

expresses the immanent alterity of the "secret of encounter". Examining the metric pattern of

Celan's poem "Du Darfst" is generally neglected in Celan studies, perhaps simply because his

later poems have been widely perceived as "free verse".[182] However, Celan's poems are in fact

carefully constructed and show an intriguing interplay of structure and form. "Du Dafst"

requires only minimal adjustments to conform to an "underlying meter" of fifteen dactylic

feet:[183]

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[182] For example, Peter Horn's 2012 kindle edition of his 1970 dissertation *Rhythmus und Struktur in der Lyrik Paul Celans* exams Celan's metric patterns from the earliest *Poppy and Memory* (1952) (*Mohn und Gedächtnis*) to *The No-One's Rose* (1963) (Die *Niemandsrose*), and proposes the ancient metric Amphibrach (*Amphibracchus*) as the "basic rhythm" (*Grundrhythmus*) for all of Celan's verses. However, Horn's study excludes Celan's later works from *Breathturn* (1967) (*Atemwende*) to *Snow Part* (1971) (*Schneepart*).

[183] According to Horn, Celan frequently applies the "six-footed Amphibrach" (*Der sechshebige Amphibracchus*) meter and its variations, formulated by a long syllable surrounded by two short ones, which "encourages a stream of language unlike any other German metric scheme" (*Der Amphibracchus begünstigt ein Strömen der Sprache wie sonst kaum ein Versmaß im Deutschen...*65), and he further comments on the function of this rhythmic pattern in Celan's works: "it is from the beginning, by Paul Celan, not an equally measured stream, but a structured one. The tension swells up and subsides" (*...aber es ist bei Paul Celan von Anfang an kein gleichmäßige Strömen, sonder ein gegliedertes. Die Spannung schwillt an und verebbt.* ibid.). Instead of accepting Horn's general presumption of the "Amphibrach", I analyse Celan's poems from the Greek-Latin epic meter, i.e. the "Dactylic hexameter", the traditional heroic meter that symbolizes the pace of the running horse, as the basic metric pattern.

Figure 2. Metric Pattern of "Du Darfst". An underlying dactylic meter is postulated for this poem. Accents are marked in the traditional way with diagonal lines for the accented– and arcs for the unaccented syllables. The underlying meter is marked in pale red, while the actual rhythm is indicated black; this illustrates how dialogically close the poetic realization remains to the meter. Elongated syllables that occupy two spaces in a foot are indicated with a dashed grey arc.

Through Figure 2, one can easily discern the existence of an intrinsic dialogical Other, manifested through Celan's noticeable "battling" with the underlying poetic rhythm, supported by a number of metric interventions that both intentionally break the meter and reinforce the poetic landscape.

For example, the first line is a five-footed meter that starts with an unaccented syllable, which implies a moment of silence at the beginning. The first dactylic foot (*dàrfst mĭch gĕ-*) is followed by two nominally trochaic feet; however the meter, once initiated, tends to persist and causes the lengthening of the vowels in "*getrost*" ([ge'tʀoːst]) and "*Schnee*" ([ʃneː]) respectively.[184] The second line begins with a striking foot of three unaccented syllables, since

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[184] Consider for contrast the situation if the beginning were inverted: |*Dàrfst dŭ* | *mìch gĕ* | *tròst mĭt* | *Schnèe bĕ* | *wìr-tĕn* |. This immediately fixes a trocheeic meter and as a result both *-trost* and *Schnee* are not lengthened; the halting, pausing effect of the original is lost.

the expected accent, which would have to fall on the first syllable of *sooft* contravenes German prosody ([zoˈoft]). Remarkably, this again does not induce an iambic continuation – at least not after multiple readings – since the duplicated *Schulter an Schulter* strongly re-establishes the dactyls. The missing final syllable of the last foot and the first syllable of the third line create a noticeable gap, a "breath-turn", after which the rhythm accelerates, first into the galloping stride of three dactyls, pacing with the mulberry tree, until the meter is decisively broken, for every dactyl is fragmented into a trochee like pattern, which emphatically suggests the disturbing Other that is embedded in this unsettling poetic landscape.

As is the case for the entire cycle, "DU DARFST" is not conventionally rhymed. The recurrences of sounds do not appear at the end of the verses, but just as the poem is conscious of meter, it is also not without rhyme, but a unique 'counter-rhyming'. The repetitions in Celan's language are prominent, such as alliterations in *Schnee*, *Schulter*, *schritt*, *schrie*; consonances in *mit*, *Maul-*, *dem*, *-baum*, or *schritt, Blatt*; and assonance in *mit* and *schritt*. In other words, Celan's rhymes are a form of "*Binnenreim*" (Internal Rhyme) (Reuß 1991: 28), which bridges different parts in the text. As Reuß points out, the rhyme in *mit* and *Schritt* links two parts of the poem otherwise separated by the colon.[185]

23.7 Syntax

In addition to rhythm and rhyme, we can also find the traces of "the Other" in Celan's German syntax with which Celan "contends". For example, with a slight rearrangement, there is a quatrain-like composition after the colon:

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[185] It is noticeable that this use of "repetition" as an "internal rhyme" is a significant feature of Celan's later poems. For a detailed study on the patterns of poetic repetitions in Celan's earlier works, see Horn 2012.

Du DARFST mich ge-trost

mit Schnee be-wir-ten:

so-oft ich Schul-ter   [an Schulter]

mit dem Maul-beer-baum

durch den Som-mer schritt,

schrie sein jüngs-tes Blatt.

Following an apparent duplication in the third line: "*Schulter an Schulter*", Celan inverts the expected grammatical structure in the fifth line by moving the unusual verb *schritt* to the beginning, and he fractures the sixth line by dropping its final noun into a line of its own. These syntactic rearrangements create a sequence of progressively shorter nouns that terminate the lines–if we consider the last two lines as one unit–thus bringing the end of the poem into ever sharper focus:

Figure 3. Noun Structure of "Du DARFSt". A sequence of progressively shorter nouns, in the poem's last four lines.

23.8   Verbal Image: *Maulbeerbaum* (Mulberry Tree)

Similarly, Celan also "contends" with words and verbal images, with a result of their profound ambiguity based upon multivalent implications. Such ambiguity does not require one to choose a single answer from multiple possibilities, but creates an impossibility to "know" the

meaning unless one questions what knowing and meaning could possibly "mean". For example, in the first line, a German reader might anticipate "*bewerfen*"–to throw at–instead of "*bewirten*"– to host, supply food or drink, entertain. Celan's wording breaks the anticipation.

Let us, again, consider the "*Maulbeerbaum*" and its screaming leaf. Here, Celan's poetics conveys multivalent messages by violating the literal meaning of the images. Indeed, the tree contradicts even its tree-nature: how is it possible that the "*Maulbeerbaum*" is pacing along with "me" side by side? How can a component of the tree – the youngest leaf – obtain its separate individuality and scream? The topos of the "moving mulberry tree" is not new in the literary canon. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the mulberry is specifically mentioned among the trees who came to listen to Orpheus's charming songs; it also appears in the *Bible*, as the witness of true faith: "And the Lord said, 'if you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you" (*Bible* Luke 17: 6; English Standard Version, 2001). Celan himself also refers to a wandering tree in one of his earliest poems "The Olive Tree" (*Der Ölbaum*): "May we go, light, when the fires have started / wandering oil tree, may we go up to you?"[186] The tree itself – and these are botanical facts that Celan was very familiar with – is a source of paper fibre, and food for the silkworm. The text, however, does not actuate any of these references and interpretations. The "*Maulbeerbaum*" does not even derive from "*Maul*" (mouth), although, as Gadamer points out,[187] its semantic field resonates with the action of screaming, which suggests to him the noise of abundance in the

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[186] "*Dürfen wir, Licht, wenn die Brände beginnen, / wandernder Ölbaum, hinauf zu dir gehn?*" (GWIII: 19)

[187] Etymologically, the root is derived from the Latin *morus* (mulberry) and not "mouth".

summer–a strong contrast and deep tension with the silence of the snow in the winter (Gadamer 1973: 15).

Not less ambiguous is the word "*mit*" in the propositional phrase "*mit dem Maulbeerbaum*", which could mean "*in Begleitung von*"(accompanied by), or "*in Verbindung mit*" (in alliance with), or "*durch Hilfe von*" (through the help of) (Reuß 1991: 29, note 31). Every possible reading of this phrase changes the relationship between *Maulbeerbaum* and *ich*. Finally, what about the crying leaf? Since the tender leaves of mulberry trees can be the food of silkworms, then who is in fact screaming? Reuß suggests to read the cry in the context of a child's birth: "Scream: in the context of the imagination of birth this means: breath, and it is well known, that with a newborn, who does not immediately scream itself, the obstetrician takes measures, in order to get the youngest to scream—so that the lifelong exchange of breath can begin."[188]

23.9 Encounter as a phenomenological approach to interpretation and comparison

The polyvalence and ambiguity of poetic words and verbal images, in accordance with structural and thematic anti-metaphoricity, also manifested in impersonality, reveal Celan's phenomenological approach to poetry and poetics that is embodied in his "secret of encounter". Such "secret" is not particularly associated with any religious or philosophical mysticism, but calls for the attentiveness to reveal the wonder of every single phenomenon from every possible perspective, as Gadamer quotes Celan's own words:

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[188] "*'Schreien': das heißt im Kontext der Vorstellung von Geburt: Atmen, und es ist bekannt, daß bei einem Neugeborenen, der nicht sogleich von selbst schreit, der Geburtshelfer Anstalten trifft, um das Jüngste 'zum Schreien zu bringen'– damit der lebenslange Austausch des Atems anheben kann.*" (Reuß 1991: 31)

The polyvalence of expression takes into account the circumstance that with respect to anything, we observe facets which make it visible from various angles of sight, various refractions and dispersions which are not mere appearance. I strive to reproduce at least linguistically sections from this spectral analysis of things, to make them visible simultaneously in various aspects and in permeations with other things that are related, subordinate, or contrary. For, unfortunately, I cannot make things completely visible. (Gadamer 1997: 180)[189]

This phenomenological approach, embedded in concrete living experience and intrinsically opening up to the Other with inexhaustible possibilities, is the fundamental of meaningful comparison that transcends the author's specific historical and cultural boundaries. The poem, therefore, as Celan states in the *Meridian*, is doomed to be detached from its author, on its own way,[190] embarking on a journey that is, to use a Heideggerian word, *Begegnenlassen* (letting-oneself-be-encountered-by).

No doubt, such a phenomenological approach evokes certain emancipation, especially when applied to the method of comparison. It encourages us to create "new relations", as the relationships of living phenomena are never just pre-given, but constantly need to be sought out and constituted. The following reading of Wáng Wéi's "Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn", illuminated by comprehending the interior logic through reading "Du Darfst" is a presentation of such cross-cultural encounter. Reading "Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn" from a phenomenological perspective, focusing on

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[189] Gadamer did not provide a reference for this quotation.

[190] "The poem is lonely. It is lonely and under way. He who writes it, remains taken along with it" (*Das Gedicht ist einsam. Es ist einsam und unterwegs. Wer es schreibt, bleibt ihm mitgegeben*, GWIII:198).

the theme of encounter, its non-metaphorical tendency and special manifestation of the Other–

the topics that we have explored through Celan's poem "Du Darfst"– will reveal the

complexity of a common poetic ground that is not confined by particular religious or

philosophical boundary, nor by linguistic and cultural barriers.

24   Reading Wáng Wéi's Poem "Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn" ("Bird Song Dale").

24.1   Previous Chán buddhist readings of the poem

"*Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn*" is the first of "Five Miscellaneous Poems about Cloud Valley, the Estate

of Huáng Fǔ Yuè" (《皇甫岳雲溪雜題五首》) that Wáng Wéi dedicated to the estate of his

friend Huáng Fǔ Yuè 皇甫岳[191] in the "Cloud Valley" (云溪):

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[191] For information about Huáng Fǔ Yuè, see Chén Tiěmíng 1997: 637.

鳥鳴礀[192]	Bird Song Dale
人閑桂花落	To be at rest[193]; a cassia petal drops.
夜靜春山空	Empty spring mountains and a night serene[194].
月出驚山鳥	Moonlight breaks out, alarms a mountain bird.
時鳴春澗中	From time to time birds sing within the spring ravine.

(Zhào 1972 vol.1: 240)

Glossing the Chinese characters is the first approach to the poem:

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[192] The poems are presented in traditional Chinese characters.

[193] To emphasize the impersonal, I omit the personal pronoun, instead of translating it as "One is at rest".

[194] I switch the original order of night and mountain to reflect the original rhyme.

人	閑	桂	花	落
person(s)	to be at rest	cassia	flower(s)/blossom(s)	to drop
夜	靜	春	山	空
night(s)	silent	spring	mountain(s)	empty
月	出	驚	山	鳥
moon	rise	to startle	mountain	bird(s)
時	鳴	春	澗	中
time to time	to sing	spring	ravine(s)	within

This poem has been the subject of literary scholarship, literally for more than a thousand years. Most classical Chinese commentators read this poem similar to Wáng Wéi's other quatrains, as a manifestation of the Chán spirit, which intensifies the effect of silence through its special depiction of motions. For example, the Míng 明 scholar Xú Zēng 徐增 (1612-?) commented on how Wáng Wéi was a master of "Chán principles" (Chán *lǐ* 禪理), and his poems are all "sacred teachings" (*shèng jiào* 聖教). He also specifically referred to "Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn" as "entirely a product of nature, not achievable by human beings" and reading it could substitute for religious canons.[195] Likewise, the Qīng 清 dynasty scholar Lǐ Yīng 李瑛 comments on this poem in his *Simple Records of Poetics* 《詩法簡易錄》, on the effect of silence, promoted by the

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[195] See Xú Zēng 徐增: *Ér Ān Shuō Táng Shī* 《而庵說唐詩》："'夜靜春山空', 右臣精於禪理，其詩皆合聖教，有此五個字，可不必讀十二部經矣。'時鳴春澗中'，夫鳥與澗同在春山之中，月既驚鳥，鳥亦驚澗，鳥鳴在樹，聲卻在澗，純是化工，非人為可及也。"

bird's singing as an important "motif" (dòng jī 動機) that tells a "divine secret (*huà jī* 化機)".

Such effect is overwhelmed from the writing, and could not be attained by human efforts.[196]

Although the classical reading of Wáng Wéi as a Buddhist poet does realize the difference between aesthetic and religious approach to the Buddhist teachings, and the Chán spirit is also characteristic of its emphasis on sudden enlightenment rather than doctrines, their commentaries, however, have led to alternative "mystic" accounts that metaphorically refer to the "unspeakable" features of the poem.

24.2   Discovering the theme of encounter

Reading "Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn" as a dialogical counterpart to Celan's "DU DARFST" elicits an inquiry on Wáng Wéi's poetic mode of encounter, his formulation and attitude towards the Other and his anti-metaphorical devices. Perceiving this poem as an event of encounter, which also presents encounter as a theme, is not going to take any Chán Buddhist teaching as a pre-given fact nor simply take the poem as an allegory of the imperial harmony and prosperity of the Táng Dynasty at Wáng Wéi's time.[197]

Rather, we illuminate the now familiar theme of encounter. The poem, first of all, presents a harmonious yet eventful encounter between man and Nature, which is reflected in the multiple encounters in and of Nature itself – between the bird and the moon, the bird and the valley, the mountains and the night *etc*. Addressing the poem as an event of encounter is to confront a

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[196] See Lǐ Yīng 李瑛 *Simple Records of Poetics* 《詩法簡易錄》：" 鳥鳴，動機也；澗，狹境也。而先著夜靜春山空；五字於其前，然後點出鳥鳴澗來，便覺有一種空曠寂靜景象，因鳥鳴而愈顯者，流露於筆墨之外。一片化機，非復人力可到."

[197] For a general reading of this poem, see, for example, Liú Xué Zhōng (2010); Liú Zhì Hóng (2012).

specific "secret of encounter" that we have been exploring in Celan's poem, which transcends an artificial distinction between the poem itself and its historical circumstance. Rather, the world is already "intentionalized" within the phenomenon of the poem as it is perceived at this very moment, rather than simply existing as an external reality.

What draws the two poems together is the phenomenological perspective manifested in their non-metaphorical poetic language – not any other literal or allegorical approach – that provides access, and presents the contrasts and contradictions embedded beneath the poem's harmonious surface as a form of "contending with the Other". And this same perspective orchestrates their differences – Wáng Wéi's unique transformative naturalness *vs*. Celan's fracturing of language – and makes them complementary paths on an inward journey.

24.3 A textual landscape of the poem: a dynamic encounter between *Person* und *Nature*

Without an obvious gesture of hospitality, but sharing a similar precise mental awareness towards silence manifested in Celan's "DU DARFST", "Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn" presents a series of mini-eventful encounters situated in a cosmos of silence: A man encounters a dropping cassia petal; a bird encounters the rising moon, birdsong is encountered in the dale, which, all together, formulate a textual landscape that is centered around an awakening mind (Figure 4):
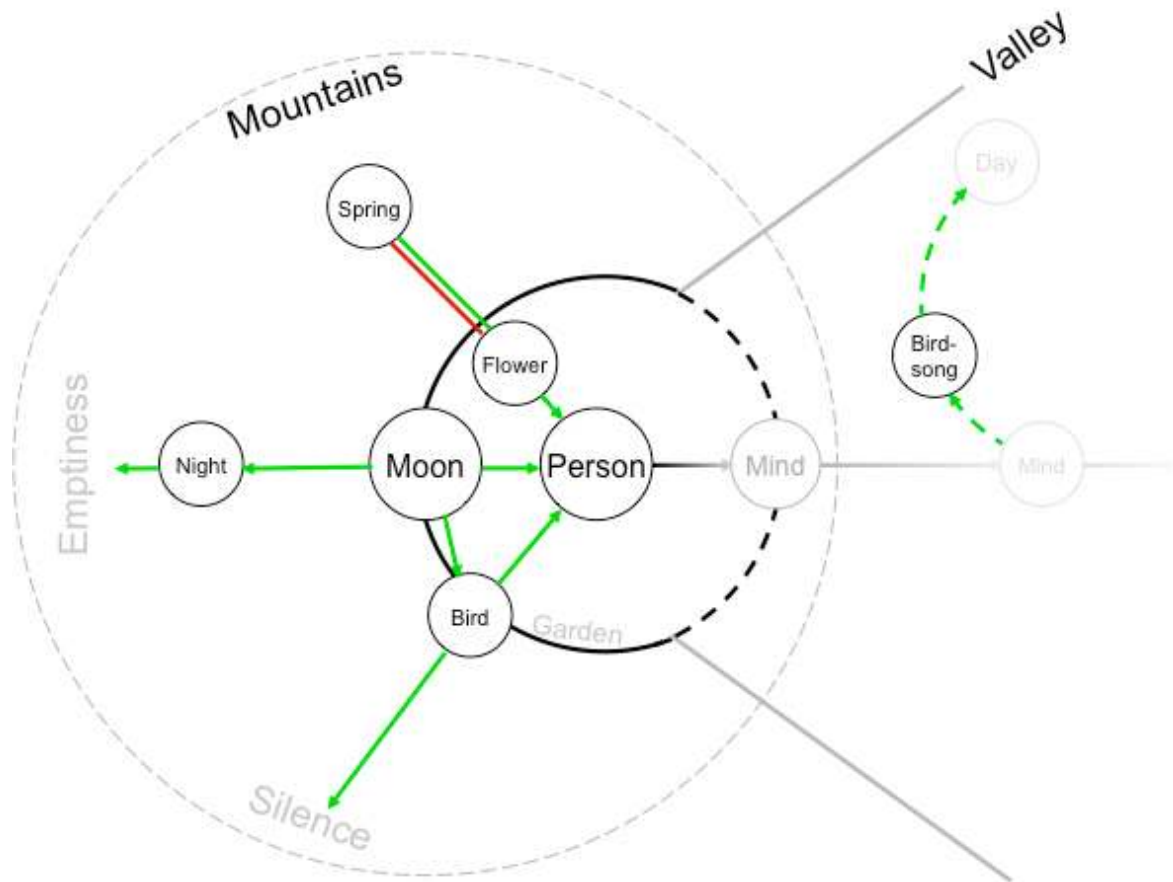
Figure 4. Poetic Landscape of "Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn". A person at rest centres the world around him. Green arrows show supporting relationships. The contradiction of spring season and a cassia blossom – a staple of autumn in China – is indicated with a red/green double line. The person's observation of the tiny cassia flower is a sign of heightened awareness; the moon makes emptiness visible and through startling the bird, it makes the surrounding silence audible. In this state of repose, the mind wanders, traverses the landscape and enters an idealized realm of spring, birdsong and implied daylight.

In contrast to the textual landscape of "DU DARFST", which manifests various tensions through

red bars surrounding the dialogical relationship between *I* and *You*, this conceptual landscape of

"Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn" is dominated by green arrows and harmonious circles, which presents

supportive, enhancing relationships between the concepts. Even the startled bird, the only

obvious dissonance in the text, which has attracted scholarly attention to interpret it as a

manifestation of the structural "tension",[198] in fact intensifies the effect of the overall serenity. The "real" conceptual inconsistency, as shown in the landscape with both green arrow and red bar, is the cassia blossom in spring, which we will discuss in detail below.

Viewing from the centre to its open ended periphery, the textual landscape displays a dynamic poetic realm that is spaced around the centred person, who is surrounded by a spring garden, and as the inner eye of imagination extends vision and awareness, the presence of the individual's mind overlaps the entire natural surrounding and the regions far beyond. Such congruence, however, does not mean that the poem is free of tensions and contradictions. In fact, the contrasts that we have experienced in "DU DARFST" such as sound and silence, dark and bright, human being and nature, present and future, enclosed space and open horizon *etc*. can also be found in this landscape of "Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn", however such contrasts are not presented as "conflicts" or "oppositional forces", but are complementary components, that contribute to the peace and harmony of the scene in their own way; tension, yes, but at equilibrium.

24.4   The complexity of profound simplicity

When we first read this poem, we are confronted with rather "simple" words such as people, cassia blossom, spring night, moon, mountain, bird, ravine etc: the vocabulary does not exceed the capacity of a Chinese sixth grader.[199] There is no neologism in the poem, no conspicuously striking, uncanny "otherness", no visible darkness (*Dunkelheit*) that we

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[198] See Marsha Wagner, who follows Allen Tate's "Tension in Poetry", in considering such tension as "the meaning of poetry", as she claims: "tension is a more accurate description of Wang Wei's style and attitude than 'quiet'" (Wagner 1975: 36).

[199] The poem appears in the official sixth grade textbook of Chinese, 2011, volume 2. People's Education Publishing House (《小學語文課本六年級》下冊，人民教育出版社，2011).

experienced in Celan's poem. Still, the textual landscape manifests an intrinsic openness and profound complexity embodied in "silence" (*jìng* 靜) and "emptiness" *(kōng* 空) that is centered on a person's mind, which alludes to the multi-dimensional depth of Wáng Wéi's stylistic simplicity.

This complexity in Wáng Wéi's profound simplicity suggests that the poem's immanent affinity with Celan's "Du Darfst" lies not in superficial similarities – seasonal features, a silence that is enhanced by sound, presenting various forms of encounter – but in a common, fundamental approach to an existential knowing by questioning knowledge itself through marking the simple words at the surface as "deceptive", which alerts the attentive reader to experience the poem as his/her own meaningful phenomenon.

24.5   Impersonality

Compared with the textual landscape of Celan's "Du Darfst", which is centred on the personal pronoun "I" (*Ich*), the impersonal character of the "Person" in the landscape of "Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn" is a striking contrast. For some scholars, this feature of "impersonality" manifested in Wáng Wéi's poem is a representation of classical Chinese language and philosophy. For example, Pauline Yu points out that "Classical Chinese offers the poet means unavailable to the Westerner to avoid reference to a particular speaker, and Wang Wei exploits these opportunities more than most" (Yu 1980: 28). This linguistic feature is considered a manifestation of the non-dualistic classical Chinese philosophy, as Yu also remarks: "A crucial difference [...] rests in the fact that for the Chinese the Way already exists as a given, to be revealed, whereas Western poets must create their unifying myth" (ibid.).

Looking closely at the interior structure of the textual landscape of both Paul Celan's "Du Darfst" and Wáng Wéi's "Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn", especially the relationship between *I* and *you* in "Du Darfst", and the "person" with the surrounding world in "Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn", we find that this "*you*", or "the Other", is embodied in the "person" (*rén* 人), who actually functions as a "me", manifesting the mind's encounter with the world. This invisible "I" is presented not as a personal pronoun, but as a mind's perspective that "sees" the world, "the world" that is no other than a "me". Thus integrating *I* and *me*, I find an unequal relationship between the *you* in "Du Darfst" and the potential *me* in "Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn": for the *me* for Wáng Wéi, is equivalent to the entire world: the moon, the bird, the mountains, the valleys etc. etc, whereas between *I* and *you*, for Celan, the world is "lost", the mulberry tree and even the snow is estranged from *I* and *you*, a feeling that Celan openly states in his poem "Gross, glühende Wölbung" ("Great, blazing arch") in *Atemwende*:

> Die Welt ist fort, ich muß dich tragen.   The world is gone, now be my burden.[200]
>
> (GWII: 97)

This carrying, in Celan's context, is an impossible task, and it does not imply the elimination of distance. With the loss of the world, the *you* (*Du*) in Celan's context is separated from the *I* (ich) through an abyss, which becomes both overwhelming as well as intangible unless one accepts such unfathomable gap between *I* and *you* as the world—which is, in fact, a must.

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[200] *Ich muß dich tragen* – literally: I have to carry you.

If the "impersonality" in Celan's text is rooted in such estrangement of the world, which functions as an abyss, the uncanny alterity that one must confront, even in the most intimate relationship between I and you; for Wáng Wéi, it is a personal inclusion of the world into his innermost mental awareness that creates a seemingly impersonal effect, with the fact that the "*me*" is manifested in every piece of the world that the "*I*" encounters, naturally, without any metaphorical *Übertragung*. Revealing such anti-metaphorical approach in Wáng Wéi's poetic feature of impersonality, through a comparison with Celan's, allows us a perspective to perceive his "*tiān jī*", not so much from a general cultural identification, but closer to the poetic phenomenon itself.

We can pursue this more specifically in a textual analysis of the metrics, the syntax and the verbal image of *guì huā* ("cassia blossom") of Wáng Wéi's "Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn", as a dialogical counterpart of Celan's "Du Darfst", through which the phenomenological-comparative perspective allows us to see how Wáng Wéi contends with, and most of all, transforms "the Other" into an integrated "self" as a "*me*", through his own non-metaphorical manner, in particular, how this non-oppositional, multivalent "alterity" is manifested in his verbal image of *guì huā*.

24.6 Metric pattern

If the metric pattern in Celan's "Du Darfst" shows how Celan intentionallycontends with a discernable underlying pattern by breaking down the rhythm and fragmenting the lines, the visual grammar of the rhythmic pattern of Wáng Wéi's "Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn" shows how the poem

contends with the canonical pattern of the "newly" established "*jìn tǐ shī*" 近體詩[201] (Recent

Style Poetry) (see figure 5 below):

平起仄收式　　　　　　　　　　　　鳥鳴磵

－　－　－　＼　＼　　A(B)　　　　－　－　│＼　－│　＼

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　人 閑｜桂 花 落　A

＼　＼　＼　－　－　　B　　　　　＼　＼　│－　－　－│

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　夜 靜｜春 山 空　B

＼　＼　－　－　＼　　C　　　　　＼　＼　｜－　－　＼

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　月 出｜驚 山 鳥　C

－　－　＼　＼　－　　B　　　　　－　－　│－　＼│　－

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　時 鳴｜春 澗 中　B
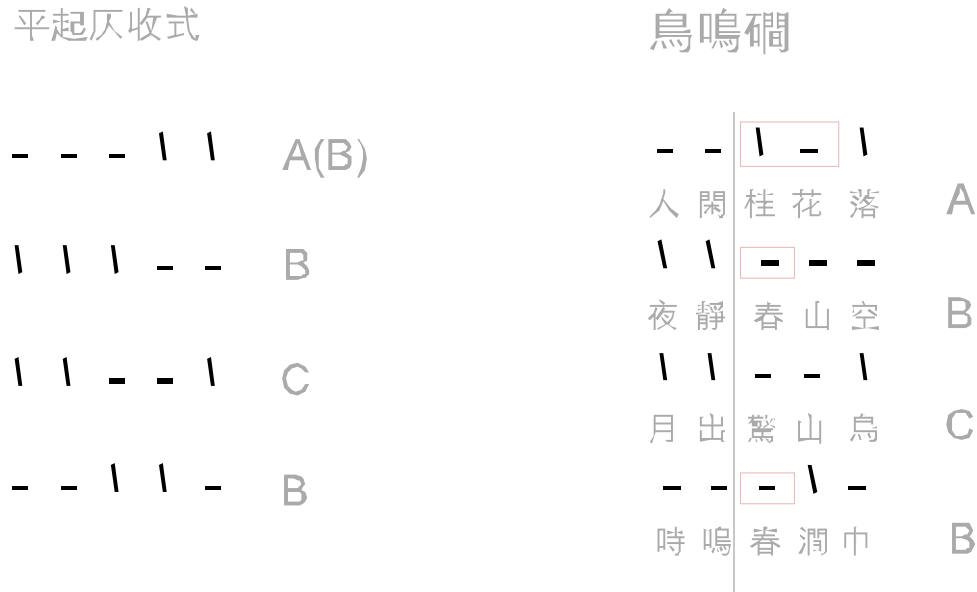
Figure 5. Metric Pattern of "Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn". One of the four canonical forms of pentasyllabic quatrain (*píng qǐ zé shōu* 平起仄收 "Starting from the level and ending with the deflected tone"), showing the scheme of the meter in terms of tonal quality (–: level tone, 平; \: deflected tone, 仄) and rhyme (left). The variation of the "*píng qǐ zé shōu*" metric form in "Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn" (right). The non-conforming syllables are boxed.

Compared with the metric pattern of "Du Darfst", the rhythmic pattern of "Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn" is

not determined by the length of the syllables, but the patterns of the tones. Chinese is a tonal

language, i.e. tones not only function as a mode of emphasis or syntactic variation, but are

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[201] "*Jìn tǐ shī*" was invented in the 5th to 6th century and flourished in the Táng 唐 dynasty. The new form is established particularly through the efforts of literati in the Six Dynasties period, such as Shěn Yuē 沈約 (441-513). Ancient Chinese poetry developed for more than a thousand years without conscientiously following any articular form until the influence of Buddhist chanting when Buddhism flourished in China around 5th century. For a recent study on the development of Chinese prosody through a cultural and historical presentation of the invention of "*Jìn tǐ shī*" in the Yǒng Míng 永明 era (483-493), see Goh 2010.

crucially relevant to the semantics: different tones of the same syllable correspond to entirely different meanings. In classical Chinese, tones have two major types: the level tone and the deflected tone, which formulates the basic canonical patterns of *jìn tǐ shī*.

"Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn" is written in a "new" form of "pentasyllabic quatrain" (*wǔ yán jué jù* 五言絕句), a variant of *jìn tǐ shī*, a conscientious reform of the so-called "ancient style" (*gǔ tǐ shī* 古體詩), emphasizing tonal counterpoint and syntactic parallelism, which requires strict adherence to syllable count (either five or seven monosyllabic words in each line, but not mixed), line numbers (four or eight lines), and symmetry of meter.

Meters, established through patterns of level and deflected tones, are often in complementary pairs that always contain either three of the same tone followed by two of the other (3+2) or two of one, two of the other and the final tone equal to the first (2+2+1). The principle of "adherence" (*niān* 粘) is also required. In "*jué jù*" 絕句 (quatrains), for example, the tone of the second syllable of the third line should be the same as the second syllable of the preceding line. Rhymes fall on even lines (optionally, the first line may share the rhyme if the required change in tone can be accommodated, but the third line's rhyme must vary); rhymes have a plain and long level tone, and in each line, a caesura comes after the first two syllables which–in accordance with the metric scheme–always have the same tone. Clearly, the metrics of Wáng Wéi's "Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn" is based upon one of the four most common metric patterns of "pentasyllabic quatrain" called *píng qǐ zé shōu* 平起仄收 (starting from the level and ending with the deflected tone).

But, as Figure 5 shows, Wáng Wéi introduces significant variations in several places. In the first line, Wáng Wéi chooses a noun with a deflected tone "*guì*" 桂 (osmanthus or cassia) for

the third syllable, instead of the level tone required by the canonical meter; consequently the fourth syllable has to adopt a level tone so as not to end the first line with a jarring succession of three deflected tones. The composite noun "*guì huā*" (桂花，osmanthus or cassia blossom) fulfils this and "rescues" the line from being out of rhythm. Such strategy, acceptable and practical in real poetic compositions, is called an "*ǎo jiù*" 拗救 (twisted redemption).[202] Consequently, for reasons of symmetry, this twist extends to the third syllable of the second line which now needs to be a level tone, only the following syllable does not need to participate in the "twist", it is expected to be level and three level tones in a row are not jarring but harmonious.

Rhymes fall on the even lines with long level tones (*kōng* 空 ; *zhōng* 中), which gives an overall dominance of level tones, further emphasized by the variation in the final line, where the poet changes one more deflected tone to a level one, and thus gives the line a timeless silent tranquillity while making the last three syllables symmetric to that of the first line.

For most Chinese linguistic scholars, Wáng Wéi's poem, despite its significant variations, is still considered a metrically conforming pentasyllabic quatrain. Particularly, it is regarded as a transitional form from the ancient to the regulated style. However, the variations in Wáng Wéi's choices of the metrics reveal his particular concerns that could not be explained away simply by referring to the historical development of the Chinese prosody, which means the choice is rather

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[202] The most severe flaw in the composition of regulated verse is called "the level alone"(*gū píng* 孤平):
a line only has one level syllable in addition to the rhyming foot. "*ǎo jiù*" 拗救 particularly targets this kind of metric problem.

"personal" due to his contesting with the "new" form than simply conforming or adjusting to the requirement.[203]

One of the similar metric features that are chosen by both Celan and Wáng Wéi is "repetitions", particularly as a form of an "internal rhyme", which has not previously been discussed as a significant feature in the metrics of "Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn". For example, it is noticeable that in this poem, Wáng Wéi twice applies the same syllables (also the same characters) in similar metric positions: *shān* 山 (mountain(s)) in the second and third line and *chūn* 春 (spring(s)) in the second and fourth line. However, only the repetition of *shān* 山 fulfils a similar concept of the "internal rhyme" that Celan applies to "DU DARFST". As *shān* does not only function as a cohesive element between different lines, the two *shān* also carry different parts of speech: in the second line *shān* is a noun whereas in the third line, an adjective. It is such variation in repetitions that allows *shān* to perform as the "internal rhyme", similar to the *Binnenreim* in "DU DARFST", whereas *chūn* simply functions as a recurrence.

24.7   Syntax

On the syntactic and lexical level, regulated verse in principle requires an alternation between "full words" (*shí cí* 實詞) ("the substantives and the two types of verbs: verbs of action and verbs of quality") and "empty words" (*xū cí* 虛詞) ("the collection of tool words: personal pronouns, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, words of comparison, particles, *etc.*") in symmetric opposition within the couplets, perhaps for the purpose of liveliness (Chéng 1982: 23). Wáng Wéi, however, here applies only "full words" in the first three lines, whereas in the last

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[203] The prevailing view regarding to Wáng Wéi's relatively "free" style is to consider his poetry as a transitional form between the "ancient" and the "recent" style.

line, the "empty words" appear twice, both at the beginning *shí* 時 (*from time to time*) and at the

end of the line: *zhōng* 中 (*within*).

N	V$_a$	N	N	V$_a$
N	V$_q$	N	N	V$_q$
N	N	V$_a$	N	N
adv	V$_a$	N	N	prep

Figure 6. Syntactic pattern of "Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn". Full words are given in upper case, empty words in lower case. I follow Francois Chéng's nomenclature and classify the adjectives here as "verbs of quality" (V$_q$) as opposed to "true" verbs, i.e. verbs of action (V$_a$).

The first line sets up an alternation of word classes in a noun/verb/(composite noun)/verb pattern.

This pattern is repeated in the second line, but substitutes verbs of quality for the verbs of action.

There is a dynamic arrangement between the "verbs of action": *xián* 閒 (to be at rest) and *luò* 落

(to fall) in the first line, and the "verbs of quality" (adjectives): *jìng* 靜 (silent) and *kōng* 空

(empty) in the second line. These verbs modify the nouns *rén* 人 (person), *guì huā* 桂花

(osmanthus or cassia blossom(s)), *yè* 夜 (night) and *chūn shān* 春山 (spring mountain (s))

respectively in a symmetric pattern, which introduces a painting-like visual and imaginative

serene beauty.

However, this rhythmic and syntactic pattern is broken in the second couplet where Wáng

Wéi not only ignores the expected symmetry of word classes, but also surprisingly applies

"empty words" more than once in the final line, which creates a sharp contrast to the first

couplet. Particularly, the verb *jīng* 驚 (to startle), as it occupies the centre, a startling word in and

of itself, which, supported by all the tonal variations in the previous and following line, creates

an acoustic and visual inner tension in a moment of timeless tranquillity.

In "Du Darfst", a similar surprising effect is also created by a verb that indicates strong motion: *schrie* (screamed). Celan, however, placed this startling word close to the very end of the poem, which creates an unresolvable tension between the first and second unsymmetrically balanced parts of the text separated by a colon. Wáng Wéi, on the contrary, seems to have "resolved" tension by shifting the focus to the tranquillity of the mountain valley in the last line of the poem. On the other hand, similar to Celan's case, it is not the symmetry of the poetic form, rather the breaking of symmetry that most pointedly carries the meaning. However, in Wáng Wéi's poem, nature's irregular confusion where moonlight startles the subtlest sensitivity of a bird is powerfully transformed into a scope of awareness that maintains silence and tranquillity. This natural transformative power through the "simplest" words perhaps is where Wáng Wéi's "*tiān jī*" resides.

How do these simple words have such profound significance as "Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn" has shown?

François Cheng remarks that Chinese poets tend to reduce the use of "empty words", through which they introduce "the dimension of the truly empty, precisely of the Void". He further explains that movement between the three semiotic dimensions of "verbs": "the dynamic" ("when it is used as a verb of action"), "the static" ("when it is used as a verb of quality") and "the empty" (when it is replaced by an empty word), generates a Void that is "between the signs and 'behind' the signs" (24). The interaction of these three types of "verbs" creates a dynamic that invites the readers' imagination to enter into a space where the contrast between silence and sound creates a void, an emptiness that speaks both for and of itself.

This notion of "void" (*kōng* 空) as a concrete space is also presented in the textual landscape of "Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn" (figure 4), where the "void" is in fact omnipresent and participates in the encounter of "the person" with all these living beings in nature. In the textual landscape of Celan's "Du Darfst", the "void" is also not an absence, but in fact a concrete existence that prevails in the poetic space and objects, for example, in an apparent gap between winter and summer, snow and mulberry tree, between I and you. But in Celan's poetics, void sometimes appears as an abyss. Void also suggests a fusion of time and space, which is a common feature of both Celan and Wáng Wéi's poems, which I will further elaborate in the second chapter.

24.8   Verbal image: *guì huā* (*Osmanthus fragrans* or cassia flower)

The most debatable issue of the poem "Niao Mǐng Jiàn" is on the verbal image of "*guì huā*" 桂花, in the first line of the poem: 人閑桂花落 (To be at rest; a cassia petal[204] drops).Here, the Chinese name designates not what is commonly referred to as "Cassia" in the West–*Cassia fistula*– but sweet osmanthus, *Osmanthus fragrans*, which, as any Chinese reader knows, blossoms in autumn not in spring. A cassia petal that drops in a spring night seems to be unseasonably displaced in time.

According to recent scholarship on this poem, there are mainly four approaches to interpret this "abnormally": (1) It is Wáng Wéi's intentional design of displacing the flower into a wrong season, a similar strategy that he also applies in the painting "Yuán Ān lying in the snow", where a green banana tree stands in the snow. One then concludes, that since Wáng Wéi creates with

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[204] Here, I translate the Chinese *guì huā* as "a cassia petal" rather than the literal "cassia flower", to express meaning that is implied, rather than directly expressed in the Chinese original.

"*tiān jǐ*", he achieves the natural spirit by refusing to imitate Nature.[205] (2) There are various species of Osmanthus. One rare species is called "*sì jì guì*" 四季桂 (*Osmanthus fragrans var. semperflorens*) that blossoms throughout the seasons. Especially, "*chūn guì*" 春桂 (spring osmanthus) is both recorded in the Chinese medical book *Species of Plants* (*běn cǎo gāng mù* 《本草綱目》), and mentioned in the poems of other authors from the *Táng* dynasty[206]. Although this species originally grows in the South, one still can find some historical record about its growth in the Northern region close to where Wáng Wéi lived. Therefore, Wáng Wéi in fact does not introduce any abnormality by mentioning *guì huā* in a spring setting. (3) "*Guì huā*" does not actually refer to a blossom, but is a metaphor for moonlight: according to the Chinese mythology, there is an osmanthus tree in the moon called "*yuè guì*" 月桂 (moon osmanthus) thus the falling of osmanthus blossoms refers to the shedding of moonlight. Moreover, the character of *xián* 閒 in the first line is considered to be a variant of *jiān* 間, which makes the first line read as: 人間桂花落（osmanthus blossoms fall in the human world）instead of the current version which reads 人閒桂花落 (man at rest, osmanthus petals fall).[207] (4) If Yún Xī 雲溪, where Huáng Pǔ Yuè's estate locates, in fact refers to the place name in Southern China instead of in the North, it is unlikely that Wáng Wéi travelled to the South but rather he wrote the poems (the "Five Miscellaneous") for the paintings that are dedicated to his friend's estate.[208]

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[205] For this interpretation, scholars take a similar perspective as in Shěn Yuē's comments on Wáng Wéi's "green banana tree in the snow".

[206] For the evidence of spring blossoming osmanthus in Táng poetry, see, for example, Xú Lǐ Jié and Yú Wén Yīng (2004); Qiáo Lěi (2009).

[207] For such argument, see, for example, Zhū Dōng Rùn (ed.) 1980 vol.1; Jì Yǒng Guì 2011.

[208] See Sūn Guì Píng 2013.

These scholarly debates, on one hand, show the interests in exploring *guì huā* as an "unusual" object of potential contradiction or displacement. On the other hand, the multiple possibilities for readings cannot disambiguate the factual possibilities. In other words, such scholarly approaches cannot aim to provide any answer to the "correct" meaning of *guì huā*, but should rather call for a vision of inexhaustible possibilities of reading, even a poem of only four lines and twenty characters, and to embrace personal reading experiences that would bring out meaningful changes of previous perspectives.

For example, in addition to placing this transitional event – an encounter between a bird and the rising moon – the textual landscape of "Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn" (Figure 4) reveals a common space of mountains that connects the second line 夜靜春山空 (Empty spring mountains and a night serene) with the fourth line 時鳴春澗中 (From time to time birds sing within the spring ravine), whereas the third line 月出驚山鳥 (Moonlight breaks out, alarms a mountain bird) is in fact conceptually closer to the first line with which it shares an extremely delicate sensibility of a resting man that hears the sound of a falling flower petal and sees the motion of a rising moon "startling" a bird. Here, the verb "startling" (*jīng* 驚) in fact reveals the poet's mind, yet such an awakening of mind is presented as a piece of "nature". Instead of being a confrontational uncanny Other, Nature, as an "alterity" that is indispensable for this encounter, is not only welcomed and accepted, but celebrated as a unity of human-nature.

According to such conceptual affinity revealed by the textual landscape, the phrase *guì-huā* 桂-花 in the first line can be read as an adjective-noun structure analogous to *shān-niǎo* 山-鳥 (mountain-bird) in the third line, which does not aim to express a particular species of bird but a generic term to emphasize the bird's present situation as being in the mountain; similarly, *guì*

huā, particularly in this mental setting, is chosen not so much for a manifestation of the spring season, but for its function of denoting an extremely small, light petal[209] that crystalizes silence into a tangible movement of "falling" (*luò* 落). Therefore, I propose *guì huā*, in this special context, is a metonym for a conceptual but tangible lightness, a manifestation of an awakening mind that is as subtle as a bird being startled by the rising moon. In addition, *guì huā*, as a sensuous verbal image that presents a certain delicate complexity between man and nature, transforms its apparent seasonal feature to a special temporality of spring that reveals the moment of awakening.

My reading of *guì huā* as a more generic rather than a specific name of flower is also supported by the parallelism between "*guì huā luò*" 桂花落 (cassia-petal (s)-dropping) and "*chūn shān kōng*" 春山空 (spring-mountain(s)-empty) in the first couplet. Here, the paradoxical combinations between mountains and "emptiness", as well as spring and "emptiness" suggest the notion "*kōng*" 空– "emptiness" – in fact embodies the abundance of life, expressed through a verdant and vivid spring, which opens a vast mental space that invites an endless imagination of the possible amplification of nature through a piece of silence (*jìng* 靜), intensified by the bird's singing in the ravine. This spiritual silence and emptiness is similarly manifested in Wáng Wéi's choice of *guì huā*.

But such interpretation does not mean we could "solve" the apparent contradiction in the poem caused by the displacement of season and flower.

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[209] Compared with other flowers, the petals of *osmanthus* are remarkable for their small sizes and lightness.

If the falling of "*guì huā*" in Wáng Wéi's "Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn" can be perceived as a celebration of life, which transforms a certain sense of decay – a falling blossom – to a welcoming gesture, its function in the poem is analogous to the verbal image of "*Schnee*" (snow) in Celan's "Du Darfst": a sense of welcoming warmth and hope through a setting of tranquil but powerful silence. Structurally speaking, instead of the clear demarcation between the first and second part of "Du Darfst", Wáng Wéi's poem expresses an almost invisible transition, which occurs through a "continuation" from the first to the second couplet. The meaning(s) of *guì huā* could be determined by how we read this "transition": if it is simply caused by a startled bird in a quiet spring night, with "the man" situated in the wild space of the mountains, we might want to accept that *guì huā* here indeed means "*chūn guì*", the "spring osmanthus" that is historically recorded and also mentioned in other literary works of the same time period. However, if the overall situation is perceived to be a cultivated garden-like setting where the poet is contemplating on the falling petals, moving from there to a remote-imaginary atmosphere of an actual mountainous spring valley, *guì huā* could also mean "mountain osmanthus" (石山桂花, *Osmanthus delavayi*), which blooms in April and May. This plant, indigenous to mountainous regions much further to the South, indeed could have been cultivated in gardens of the North where Wáng Wéi lived.[210] In this reading, *guì huā*, instead of a wild mountain plant, would be a cultivated and imported species, a contrast to the wild nature in the second couplet, but congruent with the "person" at the centre. However, this interpretation too cannot be claimed to be the only "correct" one.

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[210] For details of the species of *guì huā* that blossoms in spring in traditional Chinese records, see Xú Lǐ Jié and Yú Wén Yīng 2004; Qiáo Lěi 2009.

24.9   *Guì huā* encounters *Maulbeerbaum*

The multivalent and ambiguous verbal image of *guì huā* in Wáng Wéi's "Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn"

recalls the crucial image of *Maulbeerbaum* in Celan's "Du Darfst". Our juxtaposition

emphasizes how both evoke profound, controversial implications that cannot be identified with

one single "correct" interpretation, but call for intense and attentive participation from the

readers' own experience to witness the potential "dramas". This is, however, not trivial.

Although in general, poetry, by its very nature, transcends the common use of language to a

certain degree, Celan and Wáng Wéi, achieve such a goal through an utmost simplicity that is at

its core non-metaphorical.

From such comparative perspective, Gadamer's interpretation of the "*Maulbeerbaum*", as,

"[...] undoubtedly...a symbol of unquenchable life thirst" ([...] *ohne Zweifel* [...] *ein Symbol*

unstillbaren Lebensdurstes, Gadamer 1973: 15), is an insightful comment, but we have shown

that a multitude of equally consistent interpretations would apply. This is not to call one view

wrong, but to realize how both reading in a cross-cultural context, as well as how scholarly aids,

rather than give rise to new absolutes, may enrich our experience of multiple possibilities of

interpretation, "*ohne Zweifel*". The purpose of such analysis, therefore, is not to denude the

author's verbal art, but to show in greater clarity the details of the phenomena that are

illuminated through a perspective of encounter. Just as "seeing" itself can never be exhausted,

when we experience the poem as a phenomenon, we may seek to experience it in a "primordial"

way, before it attaches to anything that we have already known, or preconceived, channelling

both Wáng Wéi and Celan's refusal to be tied down, and achieving the quintessential meaning of

an "encounter".

25   Encounter: a self-referential theme that transcends the incommensurables

Encounter, illustrated through this moment of "seeing", is however also a self-referential theme of both poems, in the sense that both poems explore the very nature of poetry– encounter – through the very theme of the poem itself; encounter is also the manifestation of alterity as contending with the Other in various textual formations such as rhythmic, syntactical and semantic structures, as well as verbal images. Both poems are non-metaphorical, in the sense that meanings of the words are intrinsically polyvalent and ambiguous, in order to maintain the otherness of the poem that is not to be carried away by any kind of familiarity or domestication.

In seeing such parallels through an encounter between Celan and Wáng Wéi's poem, their differences have become ever more interesting to grapple with. In particular, the striking transformative power of Wáng Wéi's naturalness that seems to be able to overcome the existential abyss between man and the world, *I* and *you* that permeates Celan's poem. Does this phenomenon reveal a quintessential difference between Wáng Wéi and Celan? Seen from the "phenomenon", the question is rephrased into a challenge to transcend the notion of "incommensurables" caused by abstract divisions such as the "East" and the "West", the "non-dualistic" and "the dualistic", the "Pre-Modern" and the "Modern", the intuitive and the rational, *etc.*, *etc*. However, a thorough understanding of how encounter functions in a cross-cultural poetic context requires a step further: an understanding of the precondition of encounter.

Chapter 2
The Site of *Begegnung – Ort:*
Paul Celan's "Mɪᴛ ᴅᴇɴ Vᴇʀꜰᴏʟɢᴛᴇɴ" and Wáng Wéi's "Xīn Yí Wū"

26   *Ort*: the precondition of encounter

In the previous chapter, we have seen how Celan's notion of "encounter" – as expressed in his

Meridian speech – evokes possibilities of conceptual dialogues with Wáng Wéi's "*tiān Jī*", and

how such dialogue facilitates a comparative reading of Celan's poem "Dᴜ Dᴀʀꜰꜱᴛ" with Wáng

Wéi's poem "Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn". This phenomenological-comparative approach allows us to see

both poems from a common theme of encounter, which alludes to the ontological basis of

understanding, namely, the realm of Not-knowing, reflected in both twentieth-century

phenomenological thinking and the twelfth-century Chán Buddhist koan. Inquiring into both

Celan and Wáng Wéi's non- metaphorical poetic language, we discover their complementary

perspectives manifested in the phenomena of textual landscapes, poetic rhythm, syntax, and

especially the multivalent interpretative possibilities of verbal images. The analysis of each

phenomenon in both poems exposes the complexities of the very notion of sameness and

difference through revealing the "thickness", to employ Merleau-Ponty's term, of formal features

in a dialogical context rather than simply taking them as abstract concepts. In other words, it is

this phenomenological depth that is the goal of a meaningful comparison.

However, although the comparison between Celan and Wáng Wéi's poem as a meaningful

cross-cultural dialogue is initiated through an encounter of their non-metaphorical approach to

poetic language, we should not simply take encounter for granted, nor does such encounter

necessarily take place in any meeting. In this chapter, we will explore the pre-condition of

encounter, the concept of space and time, in both Celan and Wáng Wéi's poems. If in the previous chapter we have shown how formal analysis can be applied as a useful means to present the nature of encounter, in this chapter we will show how biographical information can also be used to prevent errors in interpretation and to assist the understanding of poetic concepts, without neglecting the multivalent possibilities of phenomena.

Ultimately both Paul Celan and Wáng Wéi's poetry, as their non-metaphorical approach implies, seek a type of "primordial" language – a language that indicates "the beginning" and "the original" (*OED*), a language that is neither entirely attached to specific referents, nor to abstracted, generalized concepts, but that derives its effect through capturing the concrete, unique, transient immediacy of the encounter of word and phenomena. Celan emphasizes the purity, authenticity and radical uniqueness of such language by re-inventing the notion of *Handwerk*,[211] through which he envisions poetry as crafting a "site" (*Ort*) that presents a notion of "time" as "here and now", as "present and presence" (*Gegenwart*); he spatializes the moment into the poem's landscape and thus, unconstrained by the sequential linearity of the ordinary concept of time, creates an encounter that is both instantaneous and enduring, collocated and extended. This resonates fully with the *Handwerk* of Wáng Wéi, who "naturally" articulates the special temporality of *Gegenwart* in his artistic spatialization of the void, in utmost stylistic simplicity and "ordinary" language.

Such an apparent contradiction, the seemingly impossible temporality of *Gegenwart*, deserves deeper consideration. We will develop a notion of "*Ort*" – site, or place – which refers to the preconditions of the encounter by bringing about an interior awareness of the very

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[211] Craft, trade, but literally: work of the hand.

precarity and instability of human existence, and thus producing the kind of openness without which the encounter would be meaningless. This is not only recognized, but celebrated in both Celan and Wáng Wéi's poems, as a potential force of breaking down the reification that is inherent in the everyday use of language, and in fact creating a certain type of primordial expression.

When we talk about *Ort* however, this is not in the literal sense a point in space: time is just as important a component, and Celan's poetics presents an individualized, and even figurative notion of "time" that is infused into "space". This, once again resonates with the Chán traditions that do not consider space and time as some kind of measurable container or sequence, but as dynamic, multi-faceted, in fact, embodied concepts, which is the original, or the "primordial time" speaking through both Celan and Wáng Wéi's poetry.

We cannot take for granted, the positive, enriching, even enabling consequences of the encounter. From life experience, if a meeting is not at its proper *Ort*, it can be consumingly destructive. Celan himself was a victim of this, through the notorious "Goll Affair"[212] that

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[212] The so-called "Goll Affair" was initiated by Claire Goll (1890-1977), who was the widow of the French-German-Jewish poet Yvan Goll (1891-1950), Celan's former friend and collaborator. In August 1953, Claire Goll circulated a letter to the German public press, radio stations, newspapers *etc*., claiming that Paul Celan, in his first poetic collection *Mohn und Gedächtnis* (*Poppy and Memory*, 1952), had plagiarized words from Yvan Goll's works, mainly, the *Traumkraut* (*Dreamweed*) (Wiedemann 2000: 187-198), followed by an anonymous letter from Stuttgart degrading Celan as "a master plagiarizer, who mediocrely repeats in his own verses what Yvan Goll had brought to perfection"(198). In May1960, shortly before Celan received the prestigious Georg Büchner Prize of German Literature, Claire Goll launched a press campaign against Celan by publishing another article titled "Unknown Facts about Paul Celan" (*Unbekanntes über Paul Celan*), deprecating Celan's originality from a condescending moral stance (Wiedemann 2000: 251-257).

Peter Szondi, at that time a guest professor in the Free University at Berlin (*Freie Universität Berlin)*, wrote a series of articles under the title "Borrowing or Slander? To the Controversies on Yvan Goll and Paul Celan" (*Anleihe oder Verleumdung? Zur Kontroverse um Yvan Goll und Paul Celan*) to the leading newspapers in German language, (*Die Welt*) and (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung*) on November 11, and November 18, 1960, respectively, and demonstrated from solid chronological and philological evidence that Claire Goll's accusations were baseless (Szondi and Celan 2005: 85-92). For example, Szondi points out that most of the poems in Celan's *Mohn und Gedächtnis* had already been

severely burdened his life from 1953 until his death in 1970. In addition to Celan's personal

experience in the Holocaust and its impact on his poetry, recent scholarship also associates

Celan's later poetics with the influence of this "Goll Affair", especially from an ethical

dimension. For example, Michael Eskin discovered Celan's "love affair" with Shakespeare's

sonnets (especially the sonnets no. 70, no. 90, and no. 105) through his personalized translations

in 1960s when the "Goll Affair" was at its peak. According to Eskin, Celan was able to

transform the "affair" from its "sociopolitically extraordinary, transgressive, and scandalous

character" to "an amatory, erotic sense, above all" through his practise of poetic translations

(Eskin 2008: 6). Through such activities, as Eskin states, Celan succeeded in "translating the

untruth of the Goll affair into the truth of his love affair with Shakespeare and, by extension, into

the truth of his life and poetry" (Eskin 2004: 100).

27   *Handwerk* (work of the hand): "My poem is my biography"

It is perhaps a consequence of the "Goll Affair" that Celan became acutely sensitive to the need

to clarify the *Ort* and precondition of encounter, indeed of poetry itself, in his quest for a poetic

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published in his previous poetic collections *Das Sand aus den Urnen* (*Sand from the Urns*) in 1948 before Celan even met Yvan Goll, and thus he could not possibly have known anything about the manuscript of Goll's *Traumkraut* (*Dreamweed*), which was published posthumously in 1951. It is in fact Claire Goll, who edited Yvan Goll's texts in the original and in translation to make them more similar to Celan's wording. Szondi shows a striking example how Claire Goll, in her German translation of Goll's French poems, plagiarized Celan's translations, and then claimed similarities between the German text of Yvan Goll's French poems and Celan's works (90). However baseless the accusations were, they fuelled public suspicions and attacks against Celan – reflecting a latent antisemitism of the German bourgeois, as much as their discomfort with Celan's radical poetics – and this "affair" in fact lasted more than a decade until the end of Celan's life. Celan himself drew analogies between the "Goll Affair" and the "Dreyfus Affair", and considered it to reveal new form of antisemitic mindset, which was not simply limited to former Nazis, but also repeated by some German Jewish intellectuals (Wiedemann 2000: 226-234; 507-511 for Celan's letters to Alfred Andersch on July 27th. 1956 and to Alfred Margul-Sperber on July 30th 1960). It is not until 2000 when Barbara Wiedemann published a 925-page book *Paul Celan – Die Goll-Affäre: Dokumente zu einer "Infamie"* in which she collected materials about the entire "Goll affair", that the facts have finally become evident and the persecution of Celan by Claire Goll has been authoritatively discredited.

truth and contrast it to biographical "facts". Although as interpreter of Celan's works, we may inevitably need to draw evidences from the author's biography, we might also need to remain alert that such evidence, like all facts, already involves an immanent interpretation, which is however not more "true" than the poem itself as perceived as a phenomenon. Celan himself stated: "My poems are my poems. They don't need any biographical legitimacy; my poems are my biography." (*Meine Gedichte sind meine Gedichte. Sie bedürfen keiner biographischen Legitimerung; meine Gedichte sind meine Vita,* Wiedemann 2000: 522). By insisting that his poems did not need to be explained as a reflection of his private life, Celan regards the poem itself as "life", it is "a work of life" (*Lebenswerk*), which he emphatically presents through his characteristic re-definition of the notion "*Handwerk*" (Work of the hand) as he writes to Hans Bender on May 18th, 1960:

> [...] The work of the hand is, like cleanliness in general, the precondition of all poetry. This "trade in hand"[213], certainly finds no gold [...] It has its abyss and depth [...]

> "Work of the hand" — this is a matter of the hands. And yet these hands, only belong to *one* man, i.e. a unique and mortal soul, that seeks its way with its voice and its silence.

> Only true hands write true poems. I see no principal difference between a handshake and a poem[214]. (Celan and Bender 1984: 48-49).

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[213] Here using the English idiom "A trade in hand finds gold in every land" as the closest analogy of the German expression "*Das Handwerk hat goldenen Boden.*"

[214] *[...] Handwerk ist, wie Sauberkeit überhaupt, Voraussetzung aller Dichtung. Dieses Handwerk hat ganz bestimmt keinen goldenen Boden [...] Es hat seine Abgründe und Tiefe [...] Handwerk — das ist Sache der Hände. Und diese Hände wiederum gehören nur* einem *Menschen, d.h. einem einmaligen und sterblichen Seelenwesen, das mit seiner Stimme und seiner Stummheit einen Weg sucht. Nur wahre Hände schreiben wahre Gedichte. Ich sehe keinen prinzipiellen Unterschied zwischen Händedruck und Gedicht.*

The word "*Handwerk*" is in fact also used by Heidegger in *The Origin of Art* (*Der Ursprung des Kunst*). But for Heidegger, *Handwerk* is simply "handiwork", craft. Even if set in contrast to "*Fabrikware*" (manufactured goods), a handiwork is still not a true creation (Heidegger 1960: 64). According to Heidegger, the essence of an artistic "work" (*werk*) cannot be interpreted through any kind of "craft", even made by "hands". Therefore, for Heidegger, it is the essence of the "work" (*Werk*), rather than the "*hand*" that signifies the origin of art: "The question about the work as having been created, should bring us closer to its constructed nature and therefore closer to its reality" (74).[215]

Heidegger's interpretation of *Handwerk* is rooted in the Greek origin of art as τέχνη, which emphasizes its association with craftsmanship. Poetry and poets are derived from the Greek word ποίησις "making", and poetry, as Aristotle mentions in his *Poetics*, is a kind of verbal art, however, art, τέχνη, in its conventional sense, is not much different from any other technology or construction (Aristotle *Poetics* I).

In contrast to Heidegger's Aristotelian definition, Celan, however, re-emphasizes the significance of "the hand" and perceives it as the crucial part of "*Handwerk*". Rather then alluding to the technical aspect of creation, however, he transforms the concept through its affinity to the body, the unique individuality of man, and the principled honesty and probity of the handshake, not as an expression of what the poet does, but who he is.

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[215] *Die Frage nach dem Geschaffensein des Werkes sollte uns dem Werkhaften des Werkes und damit seiner Wirklichkeit näher bringen.*

28   *Gegenwart* (here and now): primordial time

It is – to Celan at least – an inevitable consequence of the emphasis on *Handwerk*, on the individual, unique existence, that the nature of the poem is to be clarified through seeking a "primordial language", by re-discovering and even re-inventing the "original", thus fresh meaning of language, and through awareness of the temporality and spatiality of the encounter: the "here and now" and his reconstruction of "space" and "time". Celean wrote of his notion of *Gegenwart* (present, mostly, but also presence) in his "Notes" for the *Meridian*:

> The present of the poem is – and this has nothing to do with biographical data, the poem
>
> itself is the record of life (*Lebensschrift*) – the present of the poem is the present of a
>
> person. This person participates– as a name– and this can remain unexpressed because
>
> perhaps it remains inexpressible–, not readable as a pronoun. – With the poem, open to
>
> time, permeable to time, the porous poem, it projects into time. Time can congregate here...
>
> Poetry, that is, under this present heaven, heart-grey language in the time.[216]

 (Celan 1999: 113)

As recent scholarship[217] has already noticed, Celan's notion of *Gegenwart* shows an affinity with the phenomenological concept of *Augenblick* (Instant) expressed in the works of Martin Heidegger and Edmund Husserl. In *Sein und Zeit* (*Being and Time*), Heidegger defines

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[216] *Die Gegenwart des Gedicht ist – und das <hat> nichts mit biographischen Daten zu <tun>, das Gedicht ist Lebensschrift – die Gegenwart des Gedichts ist die Gegenwart einer Person. Diese Person partizipiert – als Nomen – und das kann unausgesprochen weil vielleicht unausprechbar <bleiben> – , nicht ablesbar als Pronomen.– Mit dem Gedicht, dem zeitoffenen, dem zeitdurchlässigen, dem porösen Gedicht steht sie in die Zeit hinein. Zeit kann hier hinzutreten...*

Gedicht, das ist, unter diesen heutigen Himmeln, herzgraue Sprache in der Zeit.

[217] See, for example, Pasanen 2006; Räsänen 2007 etc.

Gegenwart as *gegen-wart*: "waiting-towards", as an "anticipatory" resoluteness that reveals the "phenomenon of the instant", which is essentially "futural".

It does not refer to "a now that has not yet become 'actual' and sometime *will be* for the first time" (Heidegger 2010: 311), but an existential anticipation towards the potentials and possibilities of Being.[218] Moreover, Heidegger distinguishes a "primordial time", the temporality of "ecstasies" that is "'outside of itself' in and for itself," from the ordinary, the "vulgar" (*vulgär*) time. For Heidegger, "Temporality is not [...] a being that first emerges from itself; rather its essence is temporalizing in the unity of the *ecstasies*", which should not be "leveled down" by the "vulgar" time, simply seen as "a pure succession of nows, without beginning and without end [...]" (314).

Since Heidegger's "ecstatic temporality" is rooted in his interpretation of the Greek notion *καιρός* [219] and St. Paul's explanation of the coming of the Messiah,[220] his distinction between the "primordial" and the "vulgar", chronological time raises the question of the ontological status of these two types of "time", and especially, whether time without "sequence" could really be called "time" at all.[221] This is implicit in Celan's notion of "primordial time", which derives from ordinary lived experience of mortal beings, rather than a metaphysical "condition" of it; its

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[218] For more an elaborated account on Heidegger's notion of "futurality" and "having-beeness", see McMullin 2013: 105-106.

[219] In ancient Greek, time is split into the notions of *καιρός* and *χρόνος*, the former denoting a qualitative concept of "moment", not determined by its extent, but attached to the event itself, whereas the latter is quantitative, sequential time, the continuous container in which we are supposed to exist.

[220] For the etymological and religious root of Heidegger's "ecstatic temporality", see Pasanen 2006: 220-224.

[221] For a possible "solution" (a concept of "world time") for Heidegger's distinction between these two types of "time", see McMullin 2013: 108. For an account on Derrida's challenge to Heidegger and his own interpretation on this issue, see Boer 2000: 378; especially Pasanen 2006: 224-228.

unique temporality of "present and presence" cannot be substituted by either Heidegger's "futurality" or "having-beenness".

On the other hand, Celan's notion of *Gegenwart* also cannot be identified with the *Augenblick* that Husserl states in *Vorlesung zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewußtseins* (*Lecture on the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*). For Husserl, the temporality of the "immediate now" (*Gegenwart*) is impossible, since every present has its "retention" and "protention" that preserves the past and anticipates the future.[222] In other words, as Outi Pasanen vividly paraphrases: "The now can only be a now by already being another now, like a wave folding over on to the next has, in order to be a wave, already included another in itself. The self-identical, the same, can only be the same by being the other" (Pasanen: 226). For Celan, the "here and now" must have some kind of "duration", a presence on top of the present, which is neither the ecstatic religious experience of Heidegger's ontological definition, nor the subjective consciousness of Husserl's psychological description, but a poetic site –*Ort*–, an open horizon where one encounters the Other.

In a seminal passage, arguably the most difficult one of the *Meridian*, Celan presents the temporality of *Gegenwart* through a reinvented notion of *Ort* as he elucidates the "secret of encounter":

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[222] For a detailed analysis of Husserl's technical term "retention" and "protention" and their differences from "recollection" and "anticipation", see Zahavi 2003: 81- 86.

Noch im Hier und Jetzt des Gedichts – das Gedicht selbst hat ja immer nur diese eine, einmalige, punktuelle Gegenwart –, noch in dieser Unmittelbarkeit und Nähe läßt es das ihm, dem Anderen, Eigenste mitsprechen: dessen Zeit.	Still in the here and now of the poem – the poem in fact is always confined to only this one, singular, immediate present –, still in this immediacy and intimacy, it utters in resonance that which is the Other's most innate: its time.
Wir sind, wenn wir so mit den Dingen sprechen, immer auch bei den Fragen nach ihrem Woher und Wohin: bei einer "offenbleibenden", "zu keinem Ende kommenden", ins Offene und Leere und Freie weisenden Frage – wir sind weit draußen.	When we thus speak with things, we are always also concerned with the questions where from and where to: with a question "to remain open", "coming to no end", a question that leads into the open, the empty and the free – we are far outside.
Das Gedicht sucht, glaube ich, auch diesen Ort.	The poem seeks, I believe, this *Ort* as well.

(GWIII: 199)

It is significant that Celan applies an ambiguous grammatical construct in this passage. "D*essen Zeit*" can refer to the poem's time or the Other's time – or both? What does it mean when the poem resonates with "its own time" or with "the Other's time"? In his lecture on Celan's *Meridian* delivered in 2002, Derrida translates the ambiguity of Celan's text into a gesture of accepting alterity: "to leave or give to the other its own time" (Derrida 2005: 119). In his exegesis of Derrida's reading, Pasanen explains the structure of such alterity as "a movement of temporalization", and concludes that Celan's concept of *Gegenwart* presents a moment when the

poem leaves the author and is alone, under way: the author can only be "the long of the poem" (*gedichtlang*), i.e. as the first "Other" of the poem, and through such self-estrangement, the "I" becomes the Other, which "takes place in a 'unique, fleeting moment,' in an *einmaligen kurzen Augenblick*" (Pasanen 2006: 234-235).

Derrida and Pasanen's interpretations, however, overlook Celan's quintessential contribution to phenomenology, his conjunction of this "impossible" moment of "present" with the concept of *Ort*, as an imagined fusion of time with space, i.e. a spatialized temporality, which embodies the καιρός of *Gegenwart* as a unique individual, expressed through "the Other's time", and in addition gives it a certain "duration" by colocating it into the site of the poem, that site where the "encounter" unfolds.

Celan's spatial concept *Ort*, though having a Heideggerian undertone,[223] indicates a poetic realm that is open and unbounded, a horizon that situates the encounter between one and the Other's "time" – an individualized and characterized temporality of *Gegenwart* – which elicits a poetic estrangement of the I*,* as the I*,* in contending with the poem, becomes an instance of the Other. Such self-detachment as an internal liberation is presented here as a crucial step for poetry, as well as for the very fact of existence, as Celan references Büchner's Lenz when he writes in the *Meridian*: "Shall we now perhaps find the site, where the Strange was, the site, where the person would set himself free, as an estranged I? Shall we find such a site, such a step?" [224] Here we see how this step must precede the encounter, prepare the ground so to speak

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[223] For the connection with Heidegger's concept of the "site of the principle of reason" (*der Ort des Satzes vom Grund*), see Lyon 2006: 127.

[224] "*Finden wir jetzt vielleicht den Ort, was das Fremde war, den Ort, wo die Person sich freizusetzen vermochte, als ein– befremdetes – Ich? Finden wir solchen Ort, einen solchen Schritt?*" (GWIII: 195)

for the *I* to realize and experience the change, the self-shaking awakening moment of encountering the "Other", which is "outside" of the self. The poem, according to Celan, witnesses such precarious moment and "stands" into its own time –the *Gegenwart*.

In his well known essay "The Second of Inversion: Movements of a Figure through Celan's Poetry", Hamacher analyses Celan's temporal concept "*die Sekunde*" (the second) from the poem "*Stimmen*": "*Stimmen, ins Grün/ der Wasserfläche geritzt./ Wenn der Eisvogel taucht,/ sirrt die Sekunde:...*"[225] (GW I: 147),[226] and points out the poetic device of "inversion" applied in the text: "*Die Sekunde – diese Kunde*; the second – this conduit: it is time, the cutter, that conducts its message in the inversion of the world of images, but this message accomplishes the inversion only by subjecting the second itself – the temporal atom – to its own principle of fission, by splitting the unity of the message, cutting off the conduit." (Hamacher 1996: 359). Hamacher's innovative interpretation of Celan's "metaphorical" use of the concept "*die Sekunde*" applies the Celanian method of *Handwerk*, discovers another example of Celan's "primordial" language that is based upon a reinvention of the ordinary. On the other hand, what Hamacher did not point out, the function of spatializing time is implied in this very action of "cutting"—a method that achieves the moment of "being aware of" the lived life of such *Augenblick* and provides a seemingly impossible duration for this very "second".

Through the textual landscape of Celan's poem "DU DARFST", we have already experienced the landscape, as a poetic site that ingeniously spaces a crossing-over of times: from summer to winter (or winter to summer), and from past to future (or from future to past) that

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[225] "Voices, inscribed in/the green sheet of water/ when the kingfisher dives/the second whirs."

[226] I also mentioned this poem in the "Introduction": see section IX for a concept of metaphor.

formulates a *Zeitenschrunde* (time-fissure) that Celan expressed in his poem "WEGGEBEIZT"

("ETCHED OFF"), the last poem of *Atemkristall*:

WEGGEBEIZT vom	ETCHED OFF by
Strahlenwind deiner Sprache	the solar wind of your speech,
das bunte Gerede des An-	the gaudy chit-chat of the all-but-
erlebten – das hundert-	experienced – the hundred-
züngige Mein-	tongued per–
gedicht, das Genicht.	poem, the no–em.
Aus-	Gusts
gewirbelt,	swirled
frei	free
der Weg durch den menschen-	the path through anthropo-
gestaltigen Schnee,	morphic snow,
den Büßerschnee, zu	penitent snow, onward to
den gastlichen	hospitable
Gletscherstuben und –tischen.	glacial parlors and –tables.
Tief	Deep
in der Zeitenschrunde,	in the fissure of time,
beim	by
Wabeneis	hexaform ice
wartet, ein Atemkristall,	waits, a crystal of breath,
dein unumstößliches	your final and binding
Zeugnis.	credential.

(GWII: 31)

Critics in general agree to interpret "*Meingedicht*" in the first stanza as "false poem"[227], which, like *Handwerk* and *Sekunde*, another sample of Celan's re-inventive use of ordinary vocabularies in German language that creates completely fresh meanings,[228] the kind of *Nenncraft* (Naming Power)[229] that is a crucial approach to create "primordial language". The unusual combinations of "*Zeiten-schrunde*", "*Waben-eis*" and "*Atem-kristall*" in the last stanza are not "metaphors". They are, as the critic Günter Blöcker correctly remarks in an essay on Celan's language in general and specifically in his *Sprachgitter*, "a primal creation of images"; however not as he goes on to say merely: "...joined to form structural language-masses. [for which] the decisive element is not the view but, rather, the combinations" (Celan and Bachmann 2010: 191).[230] Discrediting the "primal" – or primordial – aspect of non-representational art as "arbitrary" is a familiar reflex of the positivist attitude. What the positivist perspective perceives as "unreal" is precisely such poetics as Celan's that is established upon the temporality of *Gegenwart*, as a "primordial time", most "truthfully" presents as much "reality" as any form of language may be

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[227] Gadamer explains the meaning from an analogy with "*Meineid*" (false oath, perjury), and contrasts it with the last word "*unumstößliches/ Zeugnis*" (irrefutable testimony) and also discusses the (im)possibility of understanding "*Meingedicht*" as mine (private) poem, therefore, "false" poem. See Gadamer 1997: 125.

[228] For other examples of Celan's fresh and unusual applications of common and compound German words, see Lyon 2006: 193.

[229] Heidegger defines "*Nennkraft*" as "language, by naming beings for the first time, first brings beings to word and to appearance. This naming nominates beings *to* their being and from *out* of that being." (*Indem die Sprache erstmals das Seiende nennt, bringt solches Nennen das Seiende erst zum Wort und zum Erscheinen. Dieses Nennen ernennt das Seiende zu seinem /sein aus diesem. Solches Sagen ist ein Entwerfen des Lichten, darin angesagt wird, als was das Seiende ins Offene kommt.* Heidegger 2002: 46; 1960: 84) For a detailed account on Heidegger's concept *Nenncraft*, see Smith 2013: 62ff.

[230] Blöcker's review in general, however, as Celan realizes, does not truly appreciate Celan's "primal language" and dismisses its distance from external reality, see Celan and Bachmann 2010: 191-192 for the article and Celan's tacit reaction, and for more detailed discussion on this issue, see below.

able to. It is not an "imitation", "representation" or "reflection" of the external world, but an irrefutable fidelity towards the very nature of this *Gegenwart*, which is "true".[231]

Anticipating that some of the critics would consider his "primordial language" as somewhat "naïve", Celan, in his essay on Edgar Jené's painting "*Edgar Jené und der Traum vom Traume*" (Edgar Jené and the Dream of the Dream) considers such naïveté as an authentic approach to this world: "I saw this naïveté as a primal vision purified from the slag of century-old lies about the world".[232] And his capturing of the temporality of *Gegenwart* is such a "primordial time" that breaks down the conceptual barriers that are determined by the "normal" linear time: "The wall, which separates today from tomorrow, must be torn down and tomorrow would be yesterday again"(ibid.).[233]

By rejecting to follow the single linearity of the conventional notion of "time", Celan sees "time" as a "circle" where the beginning converges with the end, "*das Morgen-Gestern*" ("the tomorrow-yesterday") (GWIII: 156). Celan's notion of "primordial time", however, is not simply an unnatural construction, as some critics have commented,[234] but a notion, as his connection

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[231] Celan's idea of "truth" and "reality" is in fact closer to the Chinese concept of *zhēn* 真, which Robert Smid explains in the following way: "'Truth' for the Chinese, then, is not so much a matter of knowing what a thing *is* but rather of being able to relate to it appropriately as a particular convergence of relations: it is better to be a true friend and to have true friends than to be the one who knows the truth about friendship (as if there were some such abstract truth)" (Smid 2009: 127). It is noticeable that in Celan's German translation of Shakespeare's Sonnet 105, he applies the German concept "*treu*", instead of "*wahr*" to translate the English word "true", for which Eskin interprets as an ethical approach to the "truth" (Eskin 2004: 95). Celan's translation, however, shows a deeper concern for a re-invented notion of "poetry" itself, see Szondi's pioneering reading in Szondi 2003: 1- 26.

[232] *Ich sah diese Naivität als eine von der Schlacke der Jahrhunderte alter Lügen von dieser Welt gereinigte und ursprügliche Schau an*. (GWIII: 156)

[233] *Die Mauer, die Heute von Morgen trennt, sei niederzureißen und Morgen würde wieder Gestern sein.*

[234] See, for example, Rochelle Tobias who considers Celan's poetic realm as "a universe that attests to what is no longer and projects what is not yet. This is the unnatural world of Celan's poetry" (Tobias 2006).

with the idea of *Handwerk* shows, that indicates a rediscovery of the innovative authenticity of the language. This is partially a cultural agenda, in terms of his specific concern for the prevailing abuse, misuse and overuse of the language, which, for Celan, is not only a "political" phenomenon, but a "human" problem, since "Man not only languished in the chains of the exterior life, but was also gagged and forbidden to speak." [235]

29   Primordial language

Celan's intentional "purification" of human spirit through primordial language resonates with Heidegger's philosophical reconstruction of the German language. However, as to the concrete source of the "original", Heidegger proposes that language is "the house of being" (*das Hause des Seins*),[236] and different people, for example Western and East Asian people, dwell in entirely different houses, and by no means can they truly understand each other.[237] Therefore, only through going back to one's own "origin", i.e. the Greek culture for Westerners, could one find "something that wells up from a single source" (Heidegger 1971: 8), the source of a common humanity. Celan, on the other hand, seeks to transcend this barrier and looks for a primordial language through "re-capturing the immediacy of the beginning" and from embracing the spirits of a "remotest region" that brings out an interior 'shaking' of the self, as he states in the same essay: "It may be from the remotest regions of the spirit that words and figures will come, images and gestures, veiled and unveiled as in a dream. When they meet in their heady

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[235] *der Mensch nicht nur in den Ketten des äußeren Lebens schmachtete, sodern auch geknebelt war und nicht sprechen durfte*. (GWIII: 157)

[236] This phrase appears in both *Wrong Path* (*Holzwege*) and *A Letter on Humanism* (*Über den Humanismus*). For Celan's acquaintance of Heidegger's saying, see Lyon 2006: 32.

[237] See Heidegger 1971: 5, particularly in his essay "A Dialogue on Language" where he formulates a conversation between a Japanese scholar and an inquirer on the possibility of understanding East Asian mind through European language.

course, and the spark of the wonderful is born from the marriage of the strange and the most strange, then I will know I am facing the new sanctity" (Celan and Rosmarie Waldrop (trans.) 2003: 6).[238]

The similarities between Celan and Heidegger's wording such as "veiled and unveiled" (*verschleiert*, *entschleiert*), "strange and the most strange" (*Fremdes Fremdesten*) *etc.*,[239] intensifies the difference between them. For Heidegger, seeking the origin or the primordial is to go back to the source of one's own culture; for Celan, it is to break down the walls of the cultures, which means, encounter must be both preconditioned in the realization of *Ort* as well as followed by a new, radiant light, so that the Other's time could "stand" into the innermost realm of the self through the *Ort* of the poem. In other words, Celan, fully realizing the changes and risks that the Other would bring to the self through an encounter, counters the risk by establishing what he calls the "naiveté" of the "primordial" where the embrace of such awareness of the "abyss" can be unconditional–the transience and instability of *Gegenwart* that is anticipated by his own *Handwerk*.

Celan's poetics of *Handwerk*, *Ort* and *Gegenwar*t, as well as that of primordial language and primordial time, function as a witness and awareness of the impermanent, mortal, unique being in the present, as a very "here and now", as the fundamental nature of poetry. Celan's belief in the seemingly impossible duration of a transient *Gegenwart* deeply resonates with

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[238] *Aus den entferntesten Bezirken des Geistes mögen Worte und Gestalten kommen, Bilder und Gebärden, traumhaft verschleiert und traumhaft entschleiert, und wenn sie einander begegenen in ihrem rasendem Lauf und der Funken des Wunderbaren geboren ward, da Fremdes Fremdesten vermählt wird, blicke ich der neuen Heiligkeit ins Auge.* (GWIII: 158).

[239] According to Lyon, at the time when Celan wrote this essay, he "had no way of knowing how closely his own words or concepts approached Heidegger's, but the similarities are striking" (Lyon 2006: 6).

Wáng Wéi's sensibility towards transience and its paradoxical duration, which, albeit implicit and metaphorical, is also articulated in an essay – "Wáng Wéi's *Meridian*" – on painting.

30   "The Secret Ways of Painting" and "divine dragon"

Wáng Wéi, despite being a renowned poet in his life time, portrayed himself as a professional painter (*huà shī* 畫師) "in previous life", and mistakenly became a poet in this life[240]. His single surviving essay on aesthetics is "*Huà Xué Mì Jué*"《畫學祕訣》("The Secret Ways of Painting"), where, instead of referring to any mystic concept such as "*tiān jī*", Wáng Wéi reveals his "*tiān jī*" through every single detail of the artistic skills that he tries to teach: from what type of landscape one should paint to how to draw lines, as well as the principles and pitfalls of painting a "landscape".

At the centre of this essay, Wáng Wéi teaches what he considers to be "the ways (*jué* 訣) of painting" (Zhào 1972 vol.2: 490):

> As to the painting of mountains and water, the intention should lead the brush. The size of the trees is one tenth of that of the mountains; the size of the horses is one tenth of that of the trees; the size of people is one tenth of that of the horses. No eyes are drawn to the human faces in far distance, no branches to the trees far away, no stones to the remote

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[240] In a poem about himself, Wáng Wéi mentions: "This life mistakes me to be a guest-poet, previously I must have been a professional painter" (夙世謬詞客，前身應畫師) (Zhào 1972 vol. 2: 519).

mountains, they all appear from concealment as if eyebrows. No waves in the remote

waters, which should be as high as the clouds: these are the ways of painting.[241]

This way of painting also tells the *tiān jī* of poetry. Similar to his painting strokes, Wáng Wéi's

poetic words evoke a keen sensibility to the transience of being through an austerity of

expression, or, to use the expression Celan had applied to the primordial: its "naïveté". For Wáng

Wéi, such naïveté is expressed in his natural affinity to Nature (*dào*, the "Way" 道), and art is to

"inhere the nature of Nature, and to accomplish the achievement of Nature" 肇自然之性，成造

化之功 (Zhào 1972, vol.2: 489). As Wáng Wéi states in his account, the "secret" of art,

therefore, is to "naturally" reveal an awareness of Nature's "impermanence" through

individualized spacing, evoking a lively "void" manifested through a few verbal or brush traces.

And, for Wáng Wéi, the "skill" is not due to any supernatural impact, as his critics normally

credited him, but the concrete step-by-step every-day experience, crucial for any *Handwerk*.

Wáng Wéi's invention of the "broken ink" style (*pò mò* 破墨) in the "ink monochrome"

(*shuǐ mò* 水墨) landscape painting pointedly illustrates the quintessential feature of his

Handwerk. This innovative way of painting uses the simple, existing material: the ink, through

which the brush paints layer upon layer of ink in a single stroke, and "in controlling the amount

and density of the ink on the brush and in broadening his strokes", he is able to "separate the ink-

line into 'fibres'" (Calvin and Walmsley 1968: 103), which creates a result that look like

"engravings" (右臣畫如刻畫 Zhào 1972 Vol.2: 514).

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[241] 凡畫山水，意在筆先。丈山尺樹，寸馬分人。遠人無目，遠樹無枝。遠山無石，隱隱如眉，遠水無波，高與雲齊。此是訣也。

Wáng Wéi's painting method is also compiled in a later work by the Qīng 清 dynasty scholar Shěn Xīn Yǒu 沈心友 a son-in-law of the famous literati Lǐ Yú 李渔, in his *A Mustard Seed Garden Manual* 《芥子園畫傳》, where Wáng Wéi was recorded to have taught such "skills":

> When one is painting a waterfall [sic.[242]], it should be so painted that there are interruptions but no breaks. In this manner of "interruptions but no breaks," the brush stops but the spirit (*Ch'i*) continues; the appearance of the flow of water has a break but the idea (*i*) of it is uninterrupted. It is like the divine dragon, whose body is partly hidden among the clouds but whose head and tail are naturally connected. (Calvin and Walmsley 1968: 105; 108) [243]

This metaphor of "divine dragon" (神龍) and Wáng Wéi's painting "technique" regarding to "interruptions but no breaks" (斷而不斷), surprisingly, is a vivid expression of the very "same" "primordial time" and "primordial language" that we have encountered in Celan's poetics: here, this "interrupted but not broken" circle of the "divine dragon" recalls the implication of the "cutting" moment inherent in Hamacher's reading of Celan's notion of "*die Sekunde*," or as Pasanen paraphrases Husserl's idea of *Gegenwart* as "a now by already being another now", which shows how such "spacialized temporality" re-creates the sense of "duration" for the immediacy of *Gegenwart* that Celan presents as "the beginning meets the end" in his essay on Edgar Jené's paintings. Wáng Wéi shows such "connection" by skilfully spacing the "void", manifested through this disconnected-connected "divine dragon".

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[242] The original Chinese *quán* 泉 means "spring" rather than "waterfall".

[243] (摩詰謂) 畫泉欲其斷而不斷，所謂斷而不斷者，必須筆斷氣不斷，形斷意不斷，若神龍雲隱首尾相連.

31   The primordial: *gǎn fā* (stirring) for poetry

Indeed, Wáng Wéi's painting "ways" are to teach how to create true art without leaving

any trace of "craftsmanship", an open secret that is also manifested in his stylistic poetics, as

Stephen Owen rightly calls "austere simplicity", which is "a mask of naïvete and

understatement" (Owen 1981: 32). Take, for example, Wáng Wéi's poem "Luán Jiā Lài" 欒家瀨

(Luan's Falls) from his well-known poetic collection, the *Wǎng River Cycle* 《輞川集》:

颯颯秋雨中   A rustling, swirling autumn rain,

淺淺石溜瀉   cascades and spills on slippery stone

跳波自相濺   and skipping wavelets spurt and splash,

白鷺驚復下   startling an egret, rushing on.

(Zhào 1972 vol. I: 247)

This poem seems to be right from the strokes of Wáng Wéi's "ink monochrome" landscape – as

the temporality of "void", or transience of *Gegenwart* is made "tangible" by creating the vivid

sound of *sà sà* 颯颯 for the leaves rustling in the autumn rain and *qiǎn qiǎn* 淺淺 for the water

washing down the stones in the first couplet, as well as by presenting a "significant" instant

(*Augenblick*) through the splashing of the wavelets that – in oblivious passing – startles the

skittish egret in the second couplet.

Wáng Wéi, according to Owen, captures such "an authenticity of unmediated perception" (Owen 1981: 31) that arises prior to cognitive knowledge. In Pauline Yu's comments on Wáng Wéi's nature poems, she categories this unique temporality as "moments of transition": "The refusal to concentrate detail on specific objects ...characterizes the dominant temporal patterns underlying Wang Wei's depictions of natural scenes... His preference for the unknowable, unspecifiable, and vague emerges especially clearly in his focus on extended moments of transition..." (Yu 1980: 157).

In fact, the "original" temporality of such moment of movement presented in Wáng Wéi's poem, as previous scholarship has not realized to the same degree in Celan's poetics, cannot be identified with the initial stage of cognitive thinking, as a "point of departure" towards rational categorization in a Kantian sense,[244] but precisely is what Celan considers the "primordial time" when "the beginning and end were one" (GWIII: 156). Such a moment, as Wáng Wéi's poem shows, does exist in everyday life without appealing to any "spiritual" ecstasy, but imbedded in a unique, particular "startling", which traditional Chinese aesthetics would call "stirring" (*gǎn fā* 感發)[245] that is not supposed to be attached to any rational category, not even any emotion or

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[244] For an analysis on this original Kantian concept and Heidegger's interpretation, see McMullin 2013: 103.

[245] For example, as "Canon of Shùn" states, the first account of "poetry" in Chinese, recorded in the *Book of Documents, Shàng Shū*: "Poetry expresses the heart's intent; Song sings the words; Sound accompanies singing; melody matches sound; eight tones can be attuned without violating each other's orders; through these means gods and mens are in harmony." 詩言志。歌永言。聲依永。律和聲。八音克諧。無相奪倫。神人以和。《尚書. 舜典》 The Southern dynasty critic Zhōng Róng 鐘嶸 (468-518) also describes this notion in his *Poetic Characters*: "*Qì* 氣 animates matter, matter awakens souls, and human dispositions and emotions are stimulated, and articulated in dances and songs." 氣之動物，物之感人，故搖蕩性情，形諸舞詠。鐘嶸，《詩品》

feeling such as "happy, anger, sorrow or joy" (*xǐ nù āi lè* 喜怒哀樂),[246] but an emancipation, a realization of the "time" itself.

In fact, both Celan and Wáng Wéi explore the multi-faceted depth of the temporality of *Gegenwart*– as the quintessential primordial time, through their own, unique, "primordial" language. The following analysis of Celan's poem "MIT DEN VERFOLGTEN" ("With the persecuted") and Wáng Wéi's poem "Xīn Yí Wū" 《辛夷塢》 ("Red Magnolia Hollow") intends to show how the poems, regardless of their apparent different historical, social, cultural and linguistic conditions that are defined by the conceptual idea of "time" and "space", converge at their *Ort* – a keen awareness of the paradoxical nature of *Gegenwart*, being transient and enduring at the same time. We encounter a shared notion of a re-invented, spacialized time, however in different forms (*Gestalt*).

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[246] Yè Jiā Yíng 葉嘉瑩 regards Wáng Wéi as a master of portraying such "stirring", but she still considers such moments as the "initial" stage of human emotions and feeling, "not yet" attached to them. See Yè Jiā Yíng 2008: 214-215.

32   "MIT DEN VERFOLGTEN" ("COALIZED WITH THE PERSECUTED")

MIT DEN VERFOLGTEN in spätem, un-	Coalized with the persecuted in late, un-
verschwiegenem,	concealed,
strahlendem	radiant
Bund.	pact.
Das Morgen-Lot, übergoldet,	The Plumb of Dawn, brightly gilded,
heftet sich dir an die mit-	tacks onto your co-
schwörende, mit-	avowing, co-
schürfende, mit-	abrading, co-
schreibende	authoring
Ferse.	heel.

(GWII: 25)

32.1   Previous exegeses of the poem

Previous exegeses of this poem have concentrated on how the poem represents an alliance with the persecuted of the Holocaust. For example, Gadamer expresses a strong conviction in identifying the first stanza of "MIT DEN VERFOLGTEN" with a post-Holocaust writer's moral consciousness:

Such is the fundamental human condition, that there are persecuted, to whom oneself no longer entirely belongs (in the 'later' league), to whom however one entirely commits to ('un-concealed'), so entirely, that the league with them can be called 'radiant', and this not

only means wholeheartedly and convincingly, but presenting and radiating true solidarity–like light.[247]

Gadamer interprets the poem in a spirit of solidarity with the persecuted, a responsibility of co-writing the poetry for the future, and an unwavering oath from the poet: never again. Celan's neologism "*Morgen-Lot*", according to Gadamer, is the weighty moral plumb, the criterion of justice, which is inescapably attached to the poet, and he emphasizes the poetic endeavour as a "*Mit-tun*" (co-operation), a co-promising to the future in the light of hope (Gadamer 1973: 81-84).

Gadamer's ethical reading is more particularized in Renate Böschenstein-Schäfer's politicized approach to the second stanza of this poem. In "*Traum und Sprache in der Dichtung Paul Celans*" ("Dream and Language in the Poetry of Paul Celan") (1987), Böschenstein-Schäfer points out a possible link between "*Morgen-Lot*" and "*Morgenrot*", and how "*Morgenrot*" symbolizes the awakening of a dream, alluding to the "*Aurora*" presented in the poem "In eins" ("In One") in Celan's poetic collection *Die Niemandsrose* (1963) (*No Man's Rose*), which is normally read as the sign of October Revolution (Böschenstein-Schäfer, in Colin 1987: 229). [248]

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[247] "*Es ist die menschliche Grundsituation als solche, daß da Verfolgte sind, zu denen man selber nicht mehr ganz gehört (in >spätem< Bund), zu denen man sich jedoch ganz bekennt (>un-verschwiegen<), so ganz und gar, daß der Bund mit ihnen >strahlend< heißen kann, und das meint nicht nur rückhaltlos und überzeugend, sondern wahre Solidarität darstellend und ausstrahlend – wie Licht*" (Gadamer 1973: 81).

[248] "Thereby an entire range of Celan's association comes into play: not only the inter-subjective symbol '*Morgenröte*' is intensified through the individual Celanian 'gold' of memory, but also the battleship 'Aurora' evoked in the poem 'Once', which signalled the beginning of the October Revolution ..." (*Damit kommt ein ganzer Hof Celanscher Assoziationen ins Spiel: nicht nur das intersubjektive Symbol 'Morgenröte', verstärkt durch das individuell Celansche 'Gold' der Erinnerung, sodern auch der im Gedicht 'In eins' evozierte Kreuzer Aurora, von dem das Signal zur Oktoberrevolution ausging...*). For the symbolic meaning of *Kreuzer Aurora* in "In eins", see Thomas Sparr's commentary: "On the evening of November 7th, 1917, the October Revolution was initiated by shots fired from the battleship 'Aurora' at the the imperial palace of Petersburg" (*Am Abend des 7. November 1917 eröffneten Schüsse vom Kreuzer 'Aurora' auf das kaiserliche Palais in Petersburg die Oktoberrevolution*, Sparr 1997, in Lehmann (ed.): 274).

Barbara Wiedemann, on the other hand, points out a more nuanced philological evidence for the neologism "*Morgen-Lot*", which, as she suggests, could allude to the story of the *Old Testament* of Abraham's nephew Lot who was rescued before God completely destroyed Sodom and Gomorrha. The *Luther Bible* reads (Wiedemann 2003: 723): "*Da nun die Morgenröte aufging, hießen die Engel den Lot eilen, und sprachen: Mache dich auf, nimm dein Weib und deine zwei Töchter, die vorhanden sind, daß du nicht auch umkommst in der Missetat dieser Stadt* (Gen. 19.15)."[249] This biblical passage seems for Wiedemann to be the source of Celan's neologism "*Morgen-Lot*", where "*Morgenröte*" appears in the text about Lot, who was a survivor of the cataclysmic consequence of moral judgment, and who lost his wife during the escape.

In a more recent biographical account of Paul Celan, Peter Selg noticed that "MIT DEN VERFOLGTEN" was composed in 1960s when Celan was severely troubled with the notorious "Goll Affair", and subsequently fell into a state of clinical depression. Selg therefore reads this poem as "a work that he understood as a life-testimony, for himself and a great number of victims".[250] But this time, the term of sacrificial "victim", here, contains even more bitterness than simply being a survivor of Holocaust, since during the period of "Goll Affair", Celan became a victim *because of* the fact that he was a poet in a particular cultural milieu.[251]

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[249] And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, 'Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city'" (*KJV Gen*. 19.15).

[250] "*ein Werk, das er als Lebens-Zeugnis verstand, für sich selbst und die Großzahl der Opfer*" (Selg 2009: 237).

[251] For Theodore Adorno's cultural criticism of the tendency of reification in the post war totalistic societies, see Adorno 1976: 30, also for his famous claim on the "barbarian" nature of poetry after Auschwitz. For Celan's personal reaction to Adorno's cultural and political vision, see his personal letter to Adorno on January 21st 1962 in Wiedemann 2000: 547-548. For the comments on Celan's spiritual association with Adorno in criticizing the "saccharine postwar poetry", see Zilcosky 2005: 672.

32.2   An alternative reading: the figure of plumbs and a textual landscape

Whether relating this poem to Celan's personal trauma under Nazi persecution or his later suffering from the absurdity of the "Goll Affair", the previous reading of a proclaimed alliance with the voice of those who have died in persecution is seemingly suggested by the common political implications of the vocabularies such as "*die Verfolgten*", "*der Bund*", "*das Morgen-Lot*" etc., and it is tempting to regard such expressions as Celan's self-identification.

However, even though Celan's poem seems to allude to the historical and cultural context of his own life, the subtleties of the words transcend their supposed representations and penetrate into the essence and boundary of language itself, and Celan shows the very moment of the primordial time through a unique image – the plumb – a phenomenon perhaps that sounded too obvious or naïve to be explored, or even mentioned previously.

This primordial feature can be reconstructed through the following textual landscape of this poem:
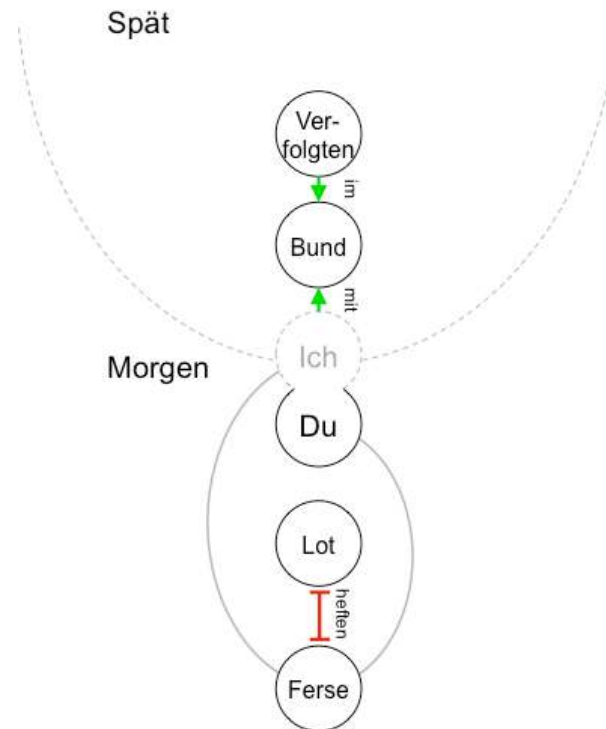
Figure 7. Poetic landscape of "MIT DEN VERFOLGTEN". The demarcation between the two temporal domains is shown as a dashed curve to emphasize the poem's strong sense of gravity. *Ich* and *du* are merged; while *du* is explicit, it lacks a referent since no explicit *ich* is in dialogue with it. Therefore this *du* is to be read in a generic sense, to the degree that it includes the *ich* as well.

The "primordial" element of this poem, as the landscape shows, does not only manifest through the vivid typographical layout of the poem that is formulated by the language itself, but also, as the landscape presents, the fusion of *I* and *you*, as an "original" unification: without a dialogical counterpart, and without attaching to any specific identity, a clear distinction between *I* and *you* has not yet been "made". Although different from "DU DARFST" in many formal aspects as well as in content, the textual landscape of this poem shares basic temporal and spacial features. For example, a similar cross-spacing between past and future, an invisible separated-bond between the (implied) *I* and the *you* mediated by certain object(s), and the *I*, present through absence in both the past and future domain, seeks possible dialogues with *you*, but constrained by particular

conditions. However, the circle of the plumb indicates a dynamic temporization "returning" from the future to the past.

The most perplexing feature of the poem is also the most obvious one — the typographically created image of the plumb. It is this figure that triggers our keener sensibility and suspicion towards the words such as "*Bund*", "*Lot*" and "*übergoldet*" and encourages us to ponder whether it is a thematic exposure, and what is the theme? How is it related to "*Morgen-Lot*"? Why it has to do with "the persecuted", and why it is attached to the "heel"?

Here, investigating into "the same" historical and biographical background provides us information for an alternative reading of the poem than the one proposed by Gadamer and other critics. We may assume that "the League" (*Bund*) might be derived from the name of the political association "*Bund der Verfolgten des Naziregimes*" ("Federation of the Persecuted of the Nazi Regime") that was established in Western Germany in 1950, as a politically motivated counterpart to the "*Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes*" ("Association of the Persecuted of the Nazi Regime") of 1946, which, though nominally a representation of all those who suffered under the Nazi regime, had come to be dominated – if not controlled – by affinities to dogmatic communism (Goschler 1992: 195). The special modifications of the "*Bund*" in the poem, such as "*spät*", "*verschwiegen*" and "*strahlend*", therefore, may suggest a distant and much more sophisticated approach to this political phenomenon than simply claiming to be a solidified solidarity. Likewise, the term "gilded over" (*übergoldet*) also reveals a certain level of irony. Celan once ironically mentioned the West as "*goldenen Westen*" to his friend Eric

Einhorn.[252] And he also referred to his notion of *Handwerk* as "finding no gold... It has its abyss and depth" (*Dieses Handwerk hat ganz bestimmt keinen goldenen Boden [...] Es hat seine Abgründe und Tiefe [...]* Celan and Bender 1984: 49).

This is a striking example of how biographical and historical information cannot be simply taken as facts that determine our correct understanding of the poem; rather, the way of reading and the perspective of choosing such facts is determined by the sensibility and intuition of the poem when it is perceived as a particular phenomenon, a *Handwerk* that is individualized not only by the author, but also by the participation of the reader. Viewed from the perspective of Celan's primordial language that he creates through playing between language and time, this underlying ironical tone becomes inescapable, which has apparently escaped notice by previous scholarship. This textual image of a plumb, therefore, is the proclamatory uprightness represented by *Bund* and *Lot*. Reading from top to bottom, we may literally feel the weight and the gravity of the image, a professed moral judgement in the name of the persecuted, its harshly upright trajectory through the landscape reinforced by the uprooted sense of the domain of the past implied by "*spätem*", and the sense of burden projected into the domain of the future implied by "*Morgen*". We also cannot escape the affinity to a much lighter practice: the humoristic "Trichtergedicht" ("Funnel poem") of Christian Morgenstern (1905)[253] comes to

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[252] "How dry this sounds! If you allow me, I will explain more to you next, also from my experiences in this so 'golden' West, from my experiences with West Germany" (*Wie trocken das klingt! Wenn Du es mir erlaubst, will ich Dir das nächste Mal mehr erzählen, auch von meinen Erfahrungen in diesem so "goldenen" Westen, von meinen Erfahrungen mit Westdeutschland.* Celan and Erich Einhorn 2001: 4).

[253]

mind, as does the practice of concrete poetry, or even DaDa - as in Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948)' "*i-Gedicht*".[254] Be that as it may – it would be a stretch to proclaim the playful subordination of contents to the form of typography to actually enhance the existential gravity and historic substance of what is being said. In this respect, my reading does not intend to devalue previous approaches, but to enrich the phenomenon from the other side, and to see it differently. However, only by juxtaposing both my and the previous perspectives, can our vision of the poem be more precise and enriched.

Die Trichter	The Funnels
Zwei Trichter wandeln durch die Nacht.	Two funnels stroll through woods and night.
Durch ihres Rumpfs verengten Schacht	Their narrow stems conduct the white
fließt weißes Mondlicht	and cheerful moonshine
still und heiter	all the better
auf ihren	upon their
Waldweg	bridle path
u.s.	e t
w.	c.

(Morgenstern 1964: 32)

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[254] *N* [*lies:"rauf,runter, rauf, Pünktchen drauf.*"] – Up down up, dot on top.

32.3 Metric constructions

Moreover, Celan's irony is also manifested in the metric pattern of this poem:
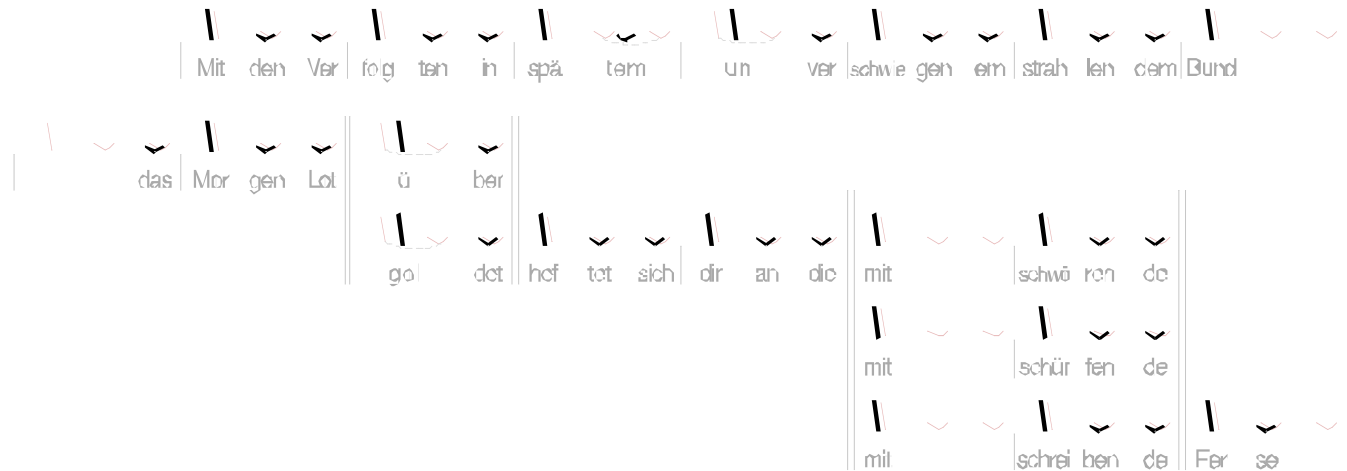
Figure 8. Metric pattern of "MIT DEN VERFOLGTEN". The structure is shown in two lines, corresponding to the two stanzas of the poem. The double bars, borrowed from music notation, emphasize the rhythmic repetitions in the second stanza. The long pauses in a reading rhythm after *mit-* are striking. Here the line breaks in the original layout support the loss of two syllables–a two beat rest–, separating two otherwise colliding, accented syllables with a buffer of silence.

Once again, the underlying metric pattern becomes apparent after some slight adjustments.

Dactyls create the underlying meter of the poem, but the rhythm appears to be more consistent

and forceful than that of "DU DARFST". Syntactically, the first line is a fragment, with repeating

dactyls giving the stanza an almost mechanical character. Two variations occur in the middle of

the line, where the trochaic feet: "*spä-tem*" and "*un-ver-*" are rhythmically lengthened due to

their lengthened vowels (*spätem* [ˈʃpɛːtəm]–late) and *unverschwiegenem* ([ˈuˑnfeʀˌʃviːgenəm]–

unconcealed). The result is a striking, waltz-like pace; the grandiose expressions sound hollow,

formulaic, almost sarcastically exaggerated. The line ends with a stressed syllable, abruptly, a

Bund that is followed by speechless silence. The second stanza has an even more dominant rhythm. The line starts from silence, as if a Dawn of Uprightness rises from darkness. However, the rhythmic repetitions in the phrases *über-gol-det*, and the three adjectivized gerunds (*mit-schwörende, mit-schürfende, mit-schreibende*) attach a sense of artificiality, if not insincerity to the moral *Lot.* This acoustic counterpart to the graphic image reinforces the poetic landscape, where the essence of moral and linguistic reification is not only visible, but also audible.

32.4   A phenomenological approach to biography: "Reality is not simply there, it must be sought and won"

Reading this poem from such renewed perspective does not intend to invalidate the information related to Celan's biography. Rather, it shows how the phenomenological approach does not mean to reject biographical reading; rather, being aware of the intuition about the poem in its entirety, this determines the choice of such information. A phenomenological reading is not some "new" approach; rather it is a drive to reflect on the perspective that is embedded in those supposed "facts", and conscientiously not taking any abstract image of the author for granted. As Gadamer insists on an authentic, patient reader's approach that is not burdened by the over-loaded, special knowledge about the author, the critical issue is not simply to avoid scholarship, but how to "see" the poem through an unconditioned, instead of a reified perspective, with an awakening awareness of the transience of the poem when perceived as a phenomenon.

For example, though inevitably associated with the social, cultural and political situation that Celan had to confront, though loaded with his personal traumatic memory and the torturing experience of the "Goll Affair", the poem "MIT DEN VERFOLGTEN" is nevertheless a primal example of the achievement of his idea of *Handwerk*, literally (*wörtlich*), and the image of the

plumb borne by words, as much as painted by letters, is a vivid example of Celan's "primordial language".

Understanding the true significance of "the primordial" and the graphic, and how Celan's primordial language is associated with reality or how it is not, was a controversial topic even in Celan's life-time. For example, Günter Blöcker, though realizing the "primal" features of Celan's language,[255] nevertheless considers Celan' poems to be "graphic constructs", through which he labels Celan's language as "pictorial", and concludes "His pictorial language feeds off itself " (Celan and Bachmann 2010: 191).[256] Moreover, for Blöcker, this "graphic" feature is not seen as a merit of Celan's poetics, but a weakness that shows a lack in the relationship with "reality": "Celan approaches the German language with more freedom than most of his fellow poets. [...] It seems to us that his most convincing poems are those in which he does not abandon all connections to a reality located outside the combinational fervour of his intellect" (192).

Blöcker's review represents a perspective that is rooted in the Platonic aesthetics of mimesis. According to Plato, a "picture" (as well as a painting) is at least three times removed from the Truth ($εἶδος$), however, language has a mystic association with the true nature of things, being able to represent them directly, and thus does not suffer from such a gap to the same degree.[257] Celan's language, however, precisely through its creation of as-yet unassigned

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[255] See previous quotation on P.144.

[256] Celan himself sent this review to his friends including Bachmann.

[257] In *Republic* 10, Plato claims that poetry, similar to visual arts such as painting, is only mimesis (imitation) of simulacrum ($εἴδωλον$), since the idea ($εἶδος$) itself is, by its nature, un-imitable. Therefore poetry is at least three times removed away from truth. For this reason, Plato concludes: "shall we say...the poet who imitates implants a bad constitution in the soul of each individual, fashioning images which are far removed from the truth, and indulging the senseless element in the soul...? "(*Republic* X, 605b-c). In fact, the concept of mimesis is first

images– a certain type of naiveté – functions as a non-metaphorical expression that rejects any possible euphony ("*Wohlklang*") that permeated post-war society, and demonstrates that "[...] Reality is not simply there, it must be sought and won".[258]

32.5   *Ort*: an awareness of *Gegenwart* as the site of encounter

In the poem "MIT DEN VERFOLGTEN" Celan's "naïve" primordial language, beyond all its possible political messages, shows an original openness to a primordial time, a self-awaking consciousness of "the present" (*Gegenwart*) that is embodied in his *Handwerk*: the figure of a plumb, which, he names as both past ("*in spätem...Bund*") and future "*Das Morgen-Lot*" event, indicating a primordial language that is featured as "*das Morgen-Gestern*" in his essay "*Edgar Jené und der Traum vom Traume*". This primordial language, associated with a primordial time, creates a poetic site (*Ort*) that enables encounter as a means of searching and establishing reality through change and reinvention, and an awareness of such change within the self and through the Other. Reality, in this sense, is not a "pre-given", but a constantly changing, multivalent phenomenon, a horizon that invites the Other to participate in and to co-formulate the identity of the self – in a continuing moment, on an ever extending *Ort*. Such awareness of the transience of *Gegenwart*, which is not yet obvious in previous reading of Celan's poem "MIT DEN VERFOLGTEN", will be illuminated and intensified through an open encounter with Wáng Wéi's

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introduced in Plato's dialogue *Cratylus*, in the context of his pursuing the etymology and mechanism of names, as well as the question on whether it is possible that language reveals the nature of things.

[258] "*Wirklichkeit ist nicht, Wirklichkeit will gesucht und gewonnen sein.*" (GW III: 168)

poem "Xīn Yí Wū" 《辛夷塢》 ("Red Magnolia Hollow"), which is also composed with an intentional "primordial language".

33 "Xīn Yí Wū" ("Red Magnolia Hollow")

"Xīn Yí Wū" 《辛夷塢》 ("Red Magnolia Hollow") is one of Wáng Wéi's most well known quatrains from the *Wǎng Chuān Jí* 《輞川集》 (Wǎng River Cycle) that Wáng Wéi composed in a dialogical fashion with his close friend Péi Dí 裴迪. Through presenting "Xīn Yí Wū" in a comparative perspective with Celan's "MIT DEN VERFOLGTEN" in terms of how both poets perceive time through their respective manner of spatialization, how their "primordial" language breaks down the boundaries of language itself according to the different linguistic features of Chinese and German, and how both seek a piece of "truth" that is not determined by any external "reality" through mimesis, the comparison achieves its *Ort* and illuminates the encounter through a reinvented notion of space and time.

33.1 A graphic design: the figure of "person" (*rén* 人) in the first verse

辛夷塢   Red Magnolia Hollow

木末芙蓉花   Branches bring forth lotus lilies,

山中發紅萼   In the mountains crimson buds,

澗戶寂無人   Silent doors, deserted valley,

紛紛開且落   And one by one unfolds and drops.

(Zhào 1972 Vol.1: 249)

Glossing the Chinese characters is a first approach to the poem:

木	末	芙蓉	花	
wood	tip	lotus	flower	
山	中	發	紅	萼
mountain	within	bud	red	calyx
澗	戶	寂	無	人
valley	door	silent	no	person
紛紛	開	且	落	
one by one	unfold	and	drop	

A most striking effect of Wáng Wéi's "Xīn Yí Wū" is an evidence of *Handwerk* through a particular graphic design of the poem. Wáng Wéi employs the graphic features characteristic of

the Chinese writing system, and through an ingenious "combination" he creates a poetic "blossom" in and of the language itself, visible to discerning eyes.

The peculiar graphic feature of the first line is evident even to those who are not familiar with classic Chinese, as the calligraphy shows in Figure 3:

Figure 9. The first line of "Xīn Yí Wū". Calligraphy by Yi Chen.

François Cheng, the Chinese born French Sinologist, in his pioneering book on Chinese poetics in European languages, *Chinese Poetic Writing: With an Anthology of Tang Poetry*, already points out the secret of this line that is inherent in the characters themselves: Observing the line, the sequence of the characters, one may discern a certain successive process indicated simply through the shape and structure of the characters. The line literally reads: "wood end, lotus flower". Notice that the second character *mò* 末 (end) only adds one more stroke to the first character *mù* 木 (wood), taken together, they vividly represent the image of the "end of a branch" (木末). The following three characters share the same "grass" radical (⁺⁺), and each character can be viewed as an icon of a particular stage of flowering: *fú* 芙 looks like a tender bud, *róng* 蓉

with the mouth–radical (口) indicates the emerging flower, whereas *huā* 花 (flower) with the change–radical *huà* 化 signifies a completed transformation (Cheng 1982: 9-10).

In addition to these relatively more visible features that Chéng has pointed out, I also notice that every one of the characters contains some form of the person–grapheme *rén* 人, as if the poet were lurking beneath the leaves, witnessing this miraculous metamorphosis of nature in every single moment of flower blossom, presented in Figure 4:

Figure 10. The presence of a *person* grapheme (人) in the first line of "Xīn Yí Wū". In the first four characters the grapheme can be discerned by its shape, in the fifth character the person is hidden in the left part of *huà* 化 (change), which is 亻, the form that 人 takes when written as a radical.

33.2 Is Chinese writing pictographic?

The graphical features of the Chinese written language has at one point stimulated immense debates among Western Sinologists. Chinese characters are generally considered to be logograms, i.e. a combination of phonetic and semantic units, in contrast to phonograms. However, there is a persistent notion in the West that they are in fact "ideograms"– a notion that authors like John DeFrancis completely dismissed and criticized as a representation of the fantasies and prejudices toward Eastern culture originated by early Christian missionaries (DeFrancis 1984: 133-143). For a native speaker, it is obvious that the truth lies somewhere in

between these extreme positions, with some characters tending towards the representational, other characters being mostly phonetic in nature, and some being abstract symbols.

The discussion is of some relevance here, because of the strong influence that Ezra Pound's *Cathay* has had on the reception of Classic Chinese poetry in the West. Apparently Pound–and the eminent Japanologist Ernest Fenellosa, whose widow had provided Fenellosa's original translations of Chinese poems, mostly of the greatest Táng poet Lǐ Bái'李白(701-762), to Pound, who himself spoke no Chinese– "stubbornly" believed that the ideogrammic nature of Chinese characters is "a guarantee of permanent health for language" (Haun Saussy in the "Introduction" to Fenollosa and Pound 2008: 6), since the Chinese ideogram "is based upon something everyone KNOWS", which prevents the kind of "abstraction" conveyed in Western languages. For Fenellosa and Pound, Chinese, "a language written in this way simply HAD TO STAY POETIC; simply couldn't help being and staying poetic in a way that a column of English type might very well not stay poetic" (Fenollosa and Pound 2008: 5).

Even though the features of Chinese language in fact cannot be fully categorized through principles that are principally derived from Western languages, and Fenollosa and Pound's praise of Chinese language is grounded in a false presupposition, the two authors are nevertheless conscientious of "a palpable timing" that is immanently associated with Chinese, as they point out in their famous essay "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry":

> One superiority of verbal poetry as an art rests in its getting back to the fundamental
> reality of *time*. Chinese poetry has the unique advantage of combining both elements. It
> 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 own fate. (45)

Through their reflection on what they perceived to be the Chinese language, Fenollosa and Pound realized the temporary dimension of the "things" led to the question of what language is expected to represent. In other words, by naming "things", language is not a mere functional mediationnal mirror, but also an animated force, a means of illumination, which allows "things" to appear and unfold. It is this notion that Pound later developed into his "Ideogrammic Method", a basis for Imagism.

Controversial as this may be regarding Fenollosa and Pound's fundamental linguistic perspective on Chinese, when written in a vertical column, in the traditional Chinese way as Wáng Wéi would have done it, the combination of the characters 木末芙蓉花 approximates a stylistically visualized branchwith main axis and branchlets, terminating in one or several flowers. Wáng Wéi, as a painter, would not have been oblivious to this effect; but he is also the painter who is not satisfied with imitation – the "person" (人) residing in each character – his visualized verse "figure" does not represent Nature, but seeking the *Ort* of this unique phenomenon at the moment when the flower blooms, to allow the crucial encounter unfold through language. Moreover, through such a "graphic" presentation, the poet (person)'s time–its most private essence – intertwines with this piece of nature; thus the entire poem becomes centred on such an awakening of a primordial time.

In this sense, Wáng Wéi's "graphic design" transcends its "Chinese" or "Chinese linguistic" character and converges with Celan's poetics, for both create an encounter through a radically "literal", nonmetaphorical manner, breaking down the conventional definition of

language itself. In other words, language, in both cases, does not limit their poets; rather, the poets use all available aspects, be it semantic, acoustic or graphemic in search for the original presentation of the phenomenon at the phenomenal moment of *Gegenwart*. In this sense, the distinction between "logogram" and "phonogram", perceived through such phenomenological-comparative perspective, like other dual categories that are supposed to describe the "incommensurables" between East and West, can be at best be seen as complementary – if at all distinct –, but certainly not "opposite" to each other.

33.3 Metric constructions

On the other hand, due to the specific features of the Chinese language, and the requirement of the "regulated verse" at Wáng Wéi's time, the text of "Xīn Yí Wū" is, however, not purely visual, but complementary to the meter, thus reinforcing the verbal music, not replacing it with drawings:
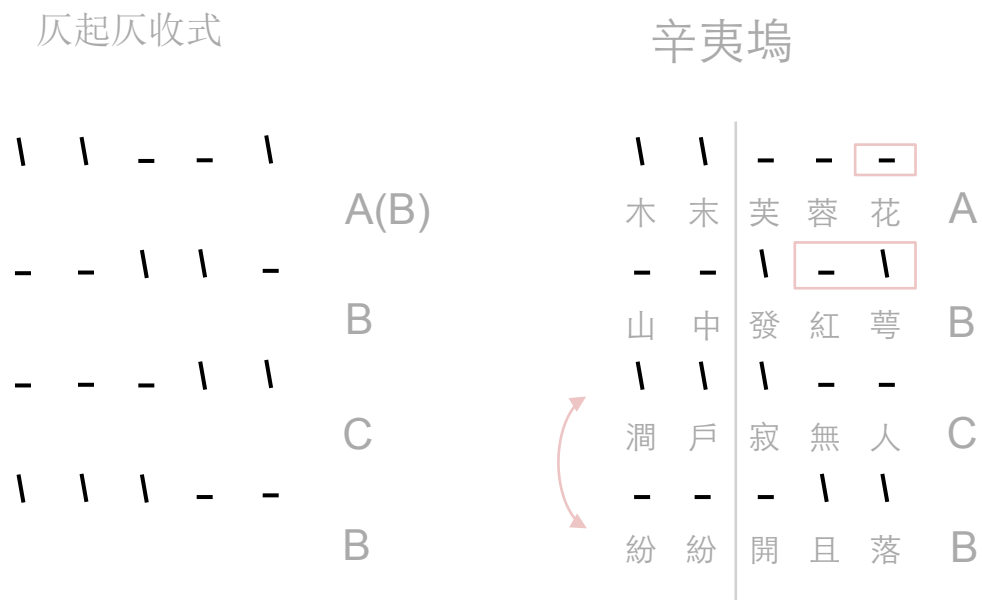
Figure 11. Matric Pattern of "Xīn Yí Wū". The variation of the pattern "Starting from the deflected and ending with the level tone" (*zé qǐ píng shōu* 仄起平收) Canonical metric form (left) found in "Xīn Yí Wū" (right). The non-conforming syllables are boxed, but note that the entire second couplet is non-conforming in that its lines invert the canonical order.

Once again, Wáng Wéi writes a quatrain in an active variation of the canonical scheme, with deflected tones as rhymes. In the first line, Wáng Wéi uses three level tones instead of two, required by the scheme, and in the second line, instead of the level tone required at the end as the rhyme, he adopts the deflected tone and changes the one before into level. In this case, since Wáng Wéi chooses to use a deflected tone as the rhyme in the second line, the third line then accordingly starts with a deflected tone, which generates a "reverse" metric pattern in the second couplet if compared with the canonical scheme. This metric pattern, congruent with the graphic image of the poem, manifests the theme of transience and an internal awareness of such unique temporality, a sensibility of awakening with nature (the flower), and seeking for its possible duration– the meaning, through this specific poetic presentation.

33.4   A textual landscape: spatialized transience as the presence of absence

In commenting on this poem, the ancient Chinese scholars again point out that such a poem is a masterful expression of the Chán spirit. For example, Hú Yìnglín 胡應麟 (1551-1602), one of the most outstanding scholars of the Míng 明 dynasty, describes his reaction to reading Wáng Wéi's "Xīn Yí Wū" as "forgetting both the body and the world; all the world's consciousness is extinguished" (身世兩忘，萬念皆寂，Hú 1979: 119). Lǐ Yīng 李锳 a Qīng 清 dynasty scholar, identifies the style of this poem to be "deep and bland to its extreme, yet abundant with long lasting allure" (幽淡已極，卻饒遠韻). A later Qīng and Early Republic (*mínguó*, 民國) scholar Yú Bìyún 俞陛云 (1868—1950) interprets this poem as a canonical representation of the Chán spirit in nature (Yú 1960: 8):

Orchids, growing in an empty valley do not cease to be fragrant because they are not seen. Dōng Pō[259] says in his poems "Praising Arhats": "Empty mountain, no person; water flows, flowers bloom": people call this "exquisite enlightenment" (*miào wù* 妙悟). The last two verses convey a greater sense of transcendence: fragrant flowers blossom lonely, no one ever mourns that they drop. Forests in the mountains, withered gardens, existing only in dark deserted places, really transcend the world of appearance.[260]

It becomes clear that such interpretation is not based on detailed analysis, almost as if Chán here were a metaphor for this hardly tangible quality of the transience, presented in this poem as a dynamic and paradoxical interaction between "presence" and "absence".

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[259] The Zì 字 of Sū Shì 蘇軾 (1037-1101) in the Sòng 宋 dynasty, one of the most significant figures in Chinese intellectual history.

[260] "蘭生空谷。不以無人而不芳。東坡羅漢贊云。空山無人。水流花開。世稱妙悟。亦即此詩之意境。後二句之意。更有花開固孤秀自馨。花落亦無人悼惜。山林枯苑。悉付諸冥漠之鄉。泂超於象外矣。"
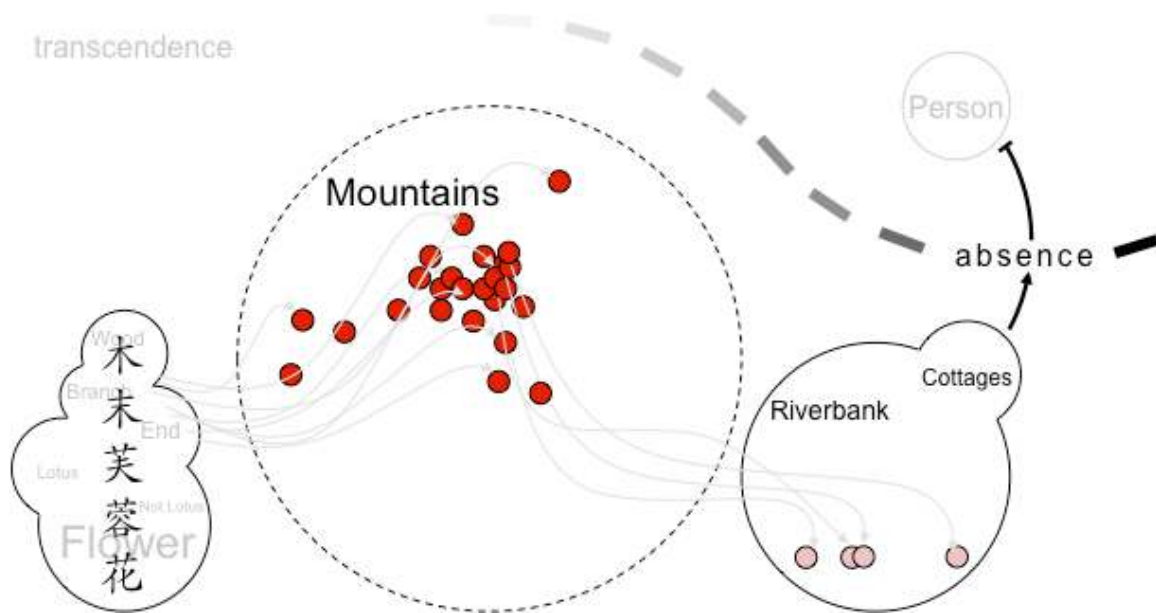
Figure 12. Poetic Landscape of "Xīn Yí Wū". The textual landscape of this poem is centred on the theme of "observation": On the left is Wáng Wéi's complex aggregate of visual and semantic elements, entailments and contradictions. The mountain range sets the open-ended scenery, our attention moves to the deserted hamlet at the riverbank where the poet explicitly excludes human presence as the flowers complete their life cycle. Although persons are absent from the scenery, the omnipresent, detached voice of the poet transcends the entire landscape.

In Celan's poem, the paradox of the primordial time, or the duration of *Gegenwart*, is revealed through a "temporal" convergence of past and future: "*das Morgen-Gestern*" that is spatialized through the "plumb"; whereas in Wáng Wéi's case, this spatialized temporality is manifested through the implied presence of the witnessing poet – whereas the poem explicitly describes the absence of observation. This textual landscape visually displays the "paradoxical" nature of this situation. The absence of the perception of observers–flowers blossom and decay unobserved– indicates an absence of appreciation or compassion for the splendor of the nature; such absence of any observer, however, is suggested by the presence of their traces, the silent doors, in the river valley—a few traces of human beings that intensifies the absence, recalling the methodic "ways" that Wáng Wéi mentions for painting.

For example, the presence of the poetic observation is manifested through the complexity embodied in the description of a flowering branch: its unique graphemic shape, the concept of a "lotus flower" that has no certain referent, and the perception of a poetic self, lurking beneath this natural splendor. Such wonder of nature's beauty, however, is isolated within the remote mountain range, and only through thinly fabricated imaginative threads is it associated with the seemingly tangible riverbank and the – albeit deserted – cottages, where the life cycle of natural beauty is silently completed, unobserved. Observing this impermanence with the omnipresence of the poet, both Celan's and Wáng Weí's poems demonstrate, how such awakening awareness can reconcile the world of presence and the world of absence, harmony and conflict, growth and decay, tragedy and enlightenment, man and nature into an open-ending poetic *Ort*, and achieve a specific "duration" for the impermanent *Gegenwart*.

Meanwhile, the voice of the poet–the only witness of the miracle of blooming flowers– remains "impersonal". It is, on the other hand, a personal perspective that prevails through a void, created by the absence of the personal voice. Just like the covert presence of the radical "人" (*rén*, person) in the characters of 木末芙蓉花, the ubiquitous presence of the poet is emphasized through his proclamation that this natural splendor and decay remains tragically unwitnessed (澗戶寂無人), while in fact through him, it becomes observed, recorded, and communicated. Though, unlike Celan, Wáng Wéi does not mention anything about *you*, this *you*, however, not only as a concealing form of "me", is embodied in the ubiquitous *I*, but also can be sensed as a calling, through extremely "simple" words, for witness and participation in this remarkable encounter.

33.5 The puzzle of "lotus flower"

Similar to the perplexing plumb presented in "Mɪᴛ ᴅᴇɴ Vᴇʀꜰᴏʟɢᴛᴇɴ", the paradox of the enduring instant is also manifested in the polyvalent-ambiguous image of the "flower". In the Chinese original, it is called "lotus flower" (*fú róng huā*, 芙蓉花). However, what exactly does this "lotus flower" refer to? Why does a "lotus flower" blossom at the end of a tree branch, but not in the pond?

While a botanist might observe, that the Chinese name for the "cotton rosemallow" (*Hibiscus mutabilis*) is "lotus on wood" (*mù fú róng* 木芙蓉), one of the earliest ancient Chinese poems *Songs of Xiāng Jūn* 湘君 in *The Songs of Chǔ* (*Chǔ Cí*《楚辭》, compiled around 300 BCE) uses the "lotus at the end of a branch" as a metaphor for incompatibility: "[matchmaking a lady who pines for her distant husband is to] Pick up climbing figs in water; pick up lotus flowers at the end of branches" (采薜荔兮水中，搴芙蓉兮木末). Thus through "Branches bring forth lotus lilies" (木末芙蓉花), Wáng Wéi creates a blend of an actual flower and its own impossibility. Indeed, in Péi Dí's particular response to this poem, which is also a part of the *Wǎng River Cycle*, he writes "In addition, there are red magnolia flowers [辛夷花, *Magnolia liiiflora*, or Lily magnolia] , whose colours can be confused with those of lotus flowers" (況有 辛夷花，色與芙蓉亂). Thus Péi Dí confirms that Wǎng Wéi does not describe an actual lotus, but he seems to understand his friend's *tiān jī*.

However, in spite of such "clarification", just like the cassia petal (*guì huā* 桂花) that we encountered previously, the multivalent connotations of the lotus flower do not end here. In the famous ancient botanic book *Er Rú Tíng Flower Register* 《二如亭群芳譜》by the Míng 明 dynasty scholar Wáng Xiàng Jìn 王象晉 (1561－1653), the lotus flower is described as the only

species that is capable of simultaneous flowering and fructifying: "All other species fructify after they flower, only this one [lotus flower], fructifies while flowering." (凡物先花而後實，獨此花實齊生。) For this reason, the lotus flower is a central symbol for Buddhism, symbolizing the unification of the past, the present and the future. In the *Amitabha Sutra* 《阿彌陀經》, the lotus is the symbol of eternal bliss and happiness: "In the Land of Bliss, there is the seven-treasure pond...there are lotus flowers in the pond, as big as wheels, green lotus shining green light, yellow, yellow light; red, red light; white, white light, miraculously subtle, fragrant, and pure."[261] If the poem signified an enlightened stage of Wáng Wéi's Buddhist practice, as the implication of lotus flower might suggest, and the scholarship on Wáng Wéi was generally convinced, why did Wáng Wéi particularly describe its unobserved decay? In this sense, this figure of lotus flower reveals the power of Wáng Wéi's primordial language, and again, through an "anti-metaphorical" approach, it presents the momentary "phenomenon" itself rather than any "religious" conviction.

34   *Ort*: The primordial, the ordinary and the phenomenon

On the other hand, Wáng Wéi's "lotus flower" indicates a "primordial" spatial concept that was further developed through the Chán tradition, and manifested in one of the famous koans about the Chán master Zhào Zhōu Cóng Niàn 趙州從諗 (778-897), as an illustration for Chán enlightenment when he was studying with his master Nán Quán Pǔ Yuàn 南泉普願 (748-834):

What is the Way (Dao)?

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[261] "極樂國土，有七寶池。。。池中蓮華，大如車輪，青色青光，黃色黃光，赤色赤光，白色白光，微妙香潔。"

Nanquan replied: "Ordinary (or everyday) mind is the Way."

Zhaozhou asked: "How can it be approached?"

Nanquan said, "The more you try to reach it, the further away you get."

Zhaozhou, a most discerning student, asked, "Then how do you know if it is the way or not?"

Nanquan elaborated, "The Way is not a matter of knowing or not knowing. Knowing is an illusion; not knowing is vacancy. If you reach the true Way beyond doubt, it is vast and open as space."[262]

(*The Gateless Barrier* Case 19; Translations from Leighton 2007: 102)

The concept "space" is translated from the Chinese *taì xū* 太虛, "the great void", presented as an expressive "Way" that transcends "knowing" and "not-knowing", indicating an approach "beyond", rather than the starting point, of cognition. In this koan, space is in particular manifested as an "emancipation" that is tangible and experienced in an "every-day mind/heart" (*píng cháng xīn* 平常心), which is further elaborated in the Japanese Chán master Dōgen Kigen's (1200-1253) teaching: "You should penetrate the inside and outside of space, You should kill space and give life to space, You should know the weight of space [..] in aspiration, practice, and enlightenment, throughout the challenging dialogues is no other than grasping space" (Tanahashi (trans.) 1998: 202-203).

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[262] 南泉因趙州問：〝如何是道？〞泉云：〝平常心是道。〞州云：〝還可趣向否？〞泉云：〝擬向即乖。〞州云：〝不擬，爭知是道？〞泉云：〝道不屬知，不屬不知；知是妄覺，不知是無記。若真達不擬之道，猶如太虛，廓然洞豁，豈可強是非也？〞州於言下頓悟。(《無門關》19)

This spiritual emancipation is similarly manifested in a Chán concept of "time". Dōgen not only emphasizes perceiving the world as "impermanent" or "transient", regarded as the quintessential principle of Buddhism, but also celebrates transience by presenting "here and now" through a multi-faceted temporality that is not only constructed by past, present and future, but also as "the past, present and future of the past, the past, present and future of the future; the past, present and future of the present as being the one instant of the present."[263] Thus Dōgen states: "it [time] passes from today to tomorrow, it passes from today to yesterday"; and "it passes from yesterday to today, it passes from today to today, it passes from tomorrow to tomorrow" (Cleary (trans.): 106). According to such temporality, time, as "individuals"[264], unfolds different passages that should not be interfered by the exclusive "linear" regulation accepted by the "normal". Rather, inhabiting time is to examine and participate in these multiple possibilities of time, and "history", according to this perspective, "is the changing process of defining the past for the present" (Leighton: 108).

The Chán illumination of space and time, which is rooted in the "everyday mind/heart", transcends its own "religious" confinement and resonates in both Celan and Wáng Wéi's poetics, which, we have interpreted as the preconditions for an encounter. In particular, both poets present their own "version" of capturing the "duration" of *Gegenwart* through ceratin spatialization by means of re-inventing the "ordinary" language.

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[263] For an explanation of the Mahāyāna approach to temporality that is based upon such "ten times", see Leighton 2007: 107-108.

[264] The best example for the idea of individualizing time in Chán tradition is Dōgen's famous identification between "being" and "time" in his most innovative concept of "being time": "In the time one climbed the mountains and crossed the rivers, there was oneself. There must be *time* in oneself. Since one-self exists, *time* cannot leave. If time is not the appearance of going and coming, the time of climbing a mountain is the *immediate present* of *being time*. If time preserves the appearance of going and coming, there is in oneself the *immediate present* of *being time* – this is *being time*" (Cleary (trans.) 1991: 105).

It is this "ordinary language" that sheds light and allows the thing, or the poem, to unfold as a phenomenon. Although by appearance, Celan creates numerous neologisms in his poetry, and Wáng Wéi never does, the comparison, however, reveals a common pursuit of the "primordial" that Celan states as "the spark of the miraculous" (*der Funken des Wunderbaren*, GWIII: 158; Lyon 2006: 6). We have already discussed their re-invention of the concept of space and time, as well as their re-definition of the boundary between language and figure, but the significance of such re-configuration can only be truly understood by exploring how they achieve the "light" that is embedded in the "ordinary" and how they enlighten the shadows through "the poem", which will be the major task for what follows.

Chapter 3
The Possibilities of Impossible Dialogue – *Licht*:
Paul Celan's "IN DEN FLÜSSEN" and Wáng Wéi's "Lù Zhài"[265]

If *Begegnung* emphasizes the immanent alterity brought about by the Other and *Ort* focuses on

its precondition, the topic of this chapter– *Licht* (light, illumniation) – is not only a recurring

theme of Celan's poetry,[266] but also reveals Celan's quintessential approach to the "world". This

world, however, is a lost world. Nevertheless, through showing the "grey-darkness" of loss,

absence, and failure, Celan's poem, his *Handwerk,* reveals an immanent viscosity and the depth

of a groundless ground, the potentials that are opened through the impossible.

Licht, however, is not a pre-given concept for Celan's poetry. As we have shown in

Chapter One[267] that Celan explicitly articulated in the *Meridian* speech: "...nowadays it has

become fashionable to accuse poetry of 'darkness' (*Dunkelheit*) –that is, [...] if not the inherent,

then that darkness associated with poetry for the sake of an encounter, in the face of – perhaps

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[265] A part of this chapter has been published as "Silence and Dialogue: The Hermetic Poetry of Wáng Wéi and Paul Celan", in Sell, Roger (ed.) 2014. *Literature as Dialogue: Invitations Offered and Negotiated*. Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins Publishing Company: 41-66.

[266] Lyon describes the frequent occurrence of the image of light in Celan's poetry as "[...] Celan's poetry regularly features 'light-words' (that is, images of light), ranging from tiny sparks or candle-glow to noonday brilliance, in representing the poet's sometimes successful, often frustrated attempt to recover this obscured language from silence or oblivion" (Lyon 2006: 6).

[267] See Chapter One, section III, P. 8.

self-inflicted – distance or unfamiliarity".[268] In a fragment of this speech, Celan also explicitly

states: "The poem has, like a person, no sufficient grounds. Therefore its [specific] darkness,

which has to be accepted if the poem is to be understood poetically. Perhaps rather: the poem has

its grounds in itself; with this reason it rests above, in the groundless."[269]

The site (*Ort*) of poetry, as Celan states above is in fact this intertwining of abyss and

ground, light and backlight, which evokes our explorations on the "phenomenological depth",[270]

the complexity of the source of *Licht* in Celan's poems. Especially through a comparative

reading with the notion of *kōng* in Wáng Wéi's poems, as the ultimate source of Being, this

inquiry to the nature of luminosity is therefore constituted as a cross cultural dialogue that shows

a phenomenological ground of poetry, focusing on how the dynamic elements of the poetic

phenomena bring out the potential of the very notion of *Licht*. The potentials that are unfolded

through such comparison does not only allow us to see the poem more and to see it differently,

but also illuminate the perspective itself: how we see the poem. Such original seeing is presented

in both Celan's "IN DEN FLÜSSEN" ("IN THE RIVERS") and Wáng Wéi's "Lù Zhài" ("Deer

Grove"), and both poems create language that presents the invisible phenomena that can only be

rendered visible through a certain backlight (*Gegenlicht*).[271] The comparison we embark on in

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[268] "*...es ist heute gang und gäbe, der Dichtung ihre "Dunkelheit" vorzuwerfen–Das ist [...] wenn nicht die kongenitale, so doch wohl die der Dichtung um einer Begegnung willen aus einer – vielleicht selbstentworfenen – Ferne oder Fremde zugeordnete Dunkelheit*" (GWIII: 195).

[269] "*Das Gedicht hat, wie der Mensch, keinen zureichenden Grund. Daher seine [spezifische] Dunkelheit, die in Kauf genommen werden muß, wenn das Gedicht als Gedicht verstanden sein soll. Viellecht auch: das Gedicht hat seinen Grund in sich selbst; mit diesem Grund ruht es oben im Grundlosen*" (Celan 1999: 88).

[270] For the interpretation of this concept that is derived from Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, see "Introduction", section VIII.

[271] *Gegenlicht* was also the title of a short collection of aphorisms in Celan's early work, published in a Zürich magazine in 1949. The technically correct English translation of this term from photography, "backlight", does not

this chapter, an intellectual duet performed between these two poems that originate from entirely different "houses of language", therefore, intends to inquire into the abundant possibilities of discourse, and mutual illumination in such a seemingly counter-dialogical partnership. However, in order to explore any potential illumination from the encounter of these two poems, we must first inquire into the phenomenological depth of *Licht* through Celan's and *kōng* through Wáng Wéi's poems, in order to show how the very idea of *Gegenlicht* leads to a tangible complexity.

35   *Licht* (light) as *Gegenlicht* (backlight)

"Light" occurs in Celan's *Meridian* speech, and is associated with his notion of "*U-topia*" (Out-of-place):

Toposforschung?	An inquiry into topos?
Gewiß! Aber im Lichte des zu Erforschenden: im Lichte der U-topie.	Certainly! However in the light of the subject of inquiry: in the light of U-topia.
Und der Mensch? Und die Kreatur?	And man? And the beings?
In diesem Licht.	In this light.
Welche Fragen! Welche Forderungen!	What questions! What demands!
Es ist Zeit, umzukehren.	It is time to turn back.

(GWIII: 199-200)

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capture the sense of contrariness well, which the German contains: a kind of light that while enhancing boundaries, does not illuminate and for which the English "glare" would be more accurate.

Speculating on the possibility of enlightenment from the subject of inquiry, from the impossible

place of Out-of-place (*U-topia*), critics in Celan studies have focused on various possibilities of

the impossible, which is based upon the logic of "inversion". For example, in "The Second of

Inversion: Movements of a Figure through Celan's Poetry", Hamacher argues that the notion

"light" (*Licht*) in Celan's poetry is in fact the backlight (*Gegenlicht*):

> In the early collection of aphorisms and parables Celan published in 1949 in the Zürich
>
> journal *Die Tat* under the programmatic title *Gegenlicht* (Counter-light), the sentence
>
> "Their embrace lasted so long that love despaired them" takes up a position against the
>
> concept of unification on behalf of its concrete realization, and this realization has the
>
> power to drive the general concept into despair and division.

> (Hamacher 1996: 344)

Backlight, *Gegen-licht*, is not simply undifferentiated darkness, for the prefix "*gegen–*" (counter,

against, opposed to), as in Celan's other "counter-words", here indicates not only an attitude of

resistance, but also numerous possibilities between affirmation and negation. In his essay,

Hamacher interprets this as a figure of "inversion" when he analyses how Celan's poetic

language arises from an approach towards the "impossibility", but seeks the possibilities of

disruptions, disfigurations, and indeterminacy, as "the most radical version of inversion

whereupon language no longer turns its own nothingness into the substantial Being of

appearance, sound, and consciousness...but rather turns its literary existence, compositionally

and semantically, into nothingness..." (366). At the core of this paradox, light appears as

darkness as well, as Hamacher quotes from Celan's writing: "Don't confuse yourself: this last

lamp no longer gives off light – the enveloping darkness has absorbed itself into itself " (345).[272]

But in the same essay, Hamacher also analyzes the limits of "inversion" and points out that Celan's poem also "opens in poetic speaking a hole that cannot be closed by the logic of inversion; it opens a distance that cannot turn into a unity, a mute site that cannot change into a topos of an eloquent image" (Hamacher 1996: 348).

36   *Abgrund* (Abyss)

In the *Meridian*, Celan presents a concept of "*Abgrund* " (Abyss): "Whoever walks on his head, ladies and gentlemen, – whoever walks on his head, he has the heaven beneath him, as an abyss"[273]. In addition, he also includes "abyss" in his own re-definition of *Handwerk*: "This 'trade in hand', certainly finds no gold [...] It has its abyss and depth [...]".[274] In a recent study on Celan's poetics of the abyss, Antti Salminen interprets the Celanian notion of *Abgrund* as *potentia*, initially from the etymology of this word: "The prefix *Ab*- approaches English 'ex', 'off', 'from', and 'away'. Thus the German word characterizes a movement that abandons ground (*Grund*) and firm base but not as a sheer negation. The prefix can be seen as building a space between ground and groundlessness" (Salminen 2012: 224). As Salminen further demonstrates, *Abgrund* in Celan's poems does not only indicate a vertical, bottomless condition that could be expressed through the German word *Schlund*, but essentially an opening to a sheer new horizon that is normally hidden between the two poles affirmation and negation (230).

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[272] "*Täusche dich nicht, nicht diese letzte Lampe spendet mehr Licht – das Dunkel rings hat sich in sich vertieft.* (GWIII: 165)."

[273] "*Wer auf dem Kopf geht, meine Damen und Herren, – wer auf dem Kopf geht, der hat den Himmel als Abgrund unter sich*" (GWIII: 195).

[274] "*Dieses Handwerk hat ganz bestimmt keinen goldenen Boden [...] Es hat seine Abgründe und Tiefe [...]*" (Celan and Bender 1984: 48).

Abyss, according to Salminen, is the site of "encounter" in Celan's poetics, and "every word is an abyss in itself, an abyss that carries a heaven in *potentia*. The abyss in language is a place to step into– as in Celan, it is poetic non-place" (Salminen 2012: 232). Moreover, this site of "non-place" is both within language itself "between sign and signified", and "between languages" (233), through translations. Therefore, Salminen suggests: "[...] in Celan's poetics the abyss is not only a metaphor of depth and despair but often also an inverted source of poetic meaning... the abyss in Celan is not a negation of ground but a non-founding foundation of poetics" (238).

37   A phenomenological approach to shadows: the source of light, *Gegenlicht*

Hamacher and Salminen's approach to Celan's *Gegenlicht* and *Abgrund* insightfully opens up a potential field of exploring Celan's language that comes from an opposite direction, i.e. from the poem's interior devices of fragmentation and breaking-down to reach a paradoxical "counter–" effect. Such critical approach, especially the detailed analysis in Hamacher's essay that reveals the immanent textures, tones, fabrics, even the "veins" and the "muscles" of Celan's poetic language, is a true anatomy of Celan's poetic language. This is the point of departure that we take from Hamacher and Salminen, and we now return to the connection between Celan's poetics of "inversion" and Merleau-Ponty's quintessential phenomenological concept "flesh".

Merleau-Ponty has developed the idea frequently in connection with a discussion of the visual arts: a famous example is the hand in Rembrandt's painting "The Night Watch":

The hand pointing toward us in *The Nightwatch* [sic.] is truly there only when we see that its shadow on the captain's body presents it simultaneously in profile. The spatiality of the captain lies at the intersection of the two perspectives which are incompossible [*sic.*] and yet together. Everyone with eyes has at some time or other witnessed this play of shadows,

or something like it, and has been made by it to see things and a space. But it worked in them without them; it hid to make the object visible. To see the object, it was necessary *not* to see the play of shadows and light around it. (From "Eye and Mind", Merleau-Ponty 1993: 128)

Here, Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the interplay between light and shadow, especially, the shadows that make objects visible is precisely the "site" to which Celan's notion *Gegenlicht* alludes. By showing various hues, types, ambiguities of shadows, Celan's poems explore this phenomenological concept of "primordial depth" through his non-metaphorical poetic language. Moreover, in his comments on Merleau-Ponty's passage quoted above, Lawrence Hass points out: "We are always seeing the natural and cultural things with light and through light, but the light itself is not experienced as a thing" (Hass 2008: 67). Precisely in this specific phenomenological sense, Celan's "light-poems" have sought and questioned the very source(s) of "light", rather than simply taking it for granted.

38   "Fadensonnen": a synaesthetic presentation of *Licht*

Let us start our journey with his poem *Fadensonnen*, taken from *Atemwende*:

FADENSONNEN	GOSSAMER SUNS
über der grauschwarzen Ödnis.	cover the grey-dark wastelands,
Ein baum–	a trunk-
hoher Gedanke	high thought
greift sich den Lichtton: es sind	seizes the tonelight: there are
noch Lieder zu singen jenseits	still songs to be sung beyond
der Menschen	the people.

(GW II: 26)

In previous scholarship, Celan's cultural background has been used as a source to interpret the image of "FADENSONNEN". For example, relating to the Kabbalistic image of "light" as "a 'thread-thin ray of love' (Matt.)", Norman Fischer regards Celan's "FADENSONNEN" as "Holocaust-inflected 'thread suns'" that signify only "thin rays of hope" (Fischer 2010: 64). Maurice Friedman, on the other hand, argues that though associating himself with "Jewish mysticism and its hidden God", the "ambivalence and vacillation" manifested in "thread suns" proves Celan to be "more of a blasphemer and contender than a believer" (Friedman 1997: 55). Moreover, Rochelle Tobias relates the image of light and thread with the rainbow that repeatedly occurs in Celan's poetry, and refers to the Greek mythology of the Goddess Iris as a messenger

of reporting death without corpse. Thus rainbow – "thread-suns" – is an emblem of the underworld that is to be perceived under the "light" (Tobias 2006: 22-23).[275]

Celan's neologism "Fadensonnen"[276] brings out an unusual combination of light ("suns") and shadows (dark-grey Wasteland), which is considered to be an "oxymoron", a vision that Kyung-Hong Suh interprets as "an apocalyptic scenery, sunlight penetrates the atmosphere merely in thin threads, not actually generating light, but only a somber, hazy spectrum" [277] (Suh 2006: 86). Such paradoxical combination is also manifested in the dialectic interactions between the cognitive (trunk-high thought) and the sensuous (songs).[278]

The complexity of Celan's neologism "Fadensonnen" indicates that this is not simply a metaphor or emblem of light; it manifests a perception of the nature of light itself, through the darkness, or more precisely, the "greyness" of the shadows that absorb it in the "wastelands". Based upon this phenomenological reading, I translate "Fadensonnen" as "gossamer suns", instead of the literal "thread suns", thus choosing an image that shifts in and out of perception, carrying with it both the intertwining of the strands of spider's silk as well as the translucent shadows that are sometimes visible, sometimes not – beyond the distinct materiality of "thread".

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[275] For other scholarly contributions to this poem, which is among "the most frequently debated poems" in Celan scholarship, see Englund 2012: 156.

[276] The literal meaning of this composition is "thread-suns".

[277] *Eine apokalyptische Szenerie, Sonnenlicht, das nur noch fadenartig durch die Atmosphäre dringt, kein Licht im eigentlich Sinne erzeugend, sondern nur ein dürsteres, diesiges Spektrum.*

[278] Peter König reads "*Fadensonnen*" as an image of "gnomon", an ancient device of sundial that casts shadow, which is also related to the Greek word of knowing and knowledge (γίγνομαι)(König 1991: 43-44).

This phenomenological approach also questions Gadamer's comment on the "trunk–high thought", which he interprets as stretching out for "a heavenly drama" that is completely unrelated to the deserted wasteland (Gadamer 1973: 87). In a recent study on the musicality of Celan's "FADENSONNEN", Axel Englund rightly points out the "deficiency" of Gadamer's reading:" Soaring above the mental wasteland, the thought that is tuned into songs beyond mankind thus privileges the celestial at the expense of the earthly...This kind of reading does not appear to be precluded by the poem [...]" (Englund 2012: 157).

Again and again a phenomenological reading calls into question the implicit dualism. Here we need to examine an implied gap between the earthly and the transcendental that has been read into Celan's expression "beyond people" (*jenseits/ der Menschen*): if not rooted in earthly ground, where else would Celan's "tree" supposedly be rooted? Therefore, I translate the poem's *baum–* as "trunk" to signify an internal "up-rootedness" that is inherent in the so-called "high thought" (*hoher Gedanke*), while capturing a connotation of vital strength, as the proximity to the German idiom *baumstark* (strong as a horse) suggests. Accordingly, I suggest the poem does not simply express a cry of despair or seek a transcendental salvation, but through rendering the grey-dark wastelands visible, that would be impossible to "see" through normal sunlight, Celan expands our vision to a place of "non-where", a site where the songs "beyond people" can be heard. In fact, if this "*jenseits/der Menschen*" did refer to a transcendental celestial realm as most scholarship has assumed, and rejects its connection to the "wastelands", Celan's poem would not only have been inconsistent with his emphasis and struggling for the "earth", but would also have lost the phenomenological depth of his notion "Fadensonnen".

The primordial depth of the poem, precisely, lies in the intrinsic interplay between *Fadensonnen* and the grey-darkness of the land. While Gadamer suggests that the plural form of

the sun indicates the possibilities of many worlds that are open to the "heavenly drama", I see the

plural "suns" as the possibilities of the many hues and subtle changes that are embodied in the

fabric of the *Faden*, as "gossamer", which on the other hand, also indicates the many shades of

the greyness of the wastelands that cannot simply be perceived as "lifeless" (*lebenslos*),[279] as it

may seem to be. Celan in fact illustrates such "greyness" in his response to the Paris bookshop

Flinker in 1958:

> The German lyric goes, I believe, in different directions than the French. [...]. Its [The
>
> German] language has become more sober, more factual, it does not trust the "beautiful", it
>
> seeks to be true. It is so, when I, remaining mindful of the polychrome of the apparently
>
> current, were permitted to search for an expression from the visual domain an increasingly
>
> "grey" language, a language, which among other aspects wants to see its musicality inhabit
>
> a place where it no longer has anything in common with the "Euphony" that sounded out
>
> more or less blithely with and beside the most dreadful. (GWIII: 167)[280]

After all, where do we hear and even create the songs "beyond people" if not based upon

this very greyness of the land? This being said, my reading does not intend to invalidate all

previous interpretations. On the contrary, a phenomenological approach fundamentally shows

how any reading of the poem must be held on a stage of contextualization, and it is this "private

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[279] See Suh's interpretation of the general atmosphere of the poem as "... The mood is gloomy, static, rigid – lifeless
in the absence of nature" (...*Die Stimmung ist gedrückt, unbeweglich, starr – leblos durch die Abwesenheit von
Natur.* Suh 2006: 87).

[280] "*Die deutsche Lyrik geht, glaube ich, andere Wege als die französische. [...] Ihre Sprache ist nüchterner,
faktischer geworden, sie mißtraut dem 'Schönen,' sie versucht, wahr zu sein. Es ist also, wenn ich, das Polychrome
des scheinbar Aktuellen im Auge behaltend, im Bereich des Visuellen nach einem Wort suchen darf, eine 'grauere'
Sprache, eine Sprache, die unter anderem auch ihre 'Musikalität' an einem Ort angesiedelt wissen will, wo sie
nichts mehr mit jenem 'Wohlklang' gemein hat, der noch mit und neben dem Furchtbarsten mehr oder minder
unbekümmert einhertönte.*"

context",[281] the context that allows "light" itself to become visible, that, first of all, one needs to be aware of.

On the other hand, one of the most important phenomenological aspects that the poem reveals is the synaesthetic feature of a counter-light phenomenon, manifested in another neologism "*Lichtton*", literally, "sound of light".[282] This notion evokes an awareness of a special "symbiotic" field through which Celan's poem stimulates our perceptions, a world of "*inter-sensorial life*"[283] that is characteristic of "flesh", and in this case, is the intersection between "*Gedanke*" (thought), and "*Lieder*" (songs).

The synaesthetic feature is a crucial aspect of Merleau-Ponty's addresses regarding the living and lived perceptions of the "phenomenon":

> If a phenomenon – for example, a reflection or a light gust of wind – strikes only one of my senses, it is a mere phantom, and it will come near to real existence only if, by some chance, it becomes capable of speaking to my other sense, as does the wind when, for example, it blows strongly and can be seen in the tumult it causes in the surrounding countryside. Cézanne declared that a picture contains within itself even the smell of the landscape. (Merleau-Ponty 1992: 318)

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[281] I borrowed this term from Marianne Noble's essay "Dickinson on Perception and Consciousness: A Dialogue with Maurice Merleau-Ponty" to reject any "universal" and "objective" correctness of poetic interpretation. See Deppman, Jed, Marianne Noble and Gary Stonum (eds.) 2013: 189.

[282] There is a commonly understood technical meaning to the German word *Lichtton*: "optical sound", or "sound-on-film" technology, the process through which a sound can be stored and retrieved from film through an optical track that encodes the sound, much like the grooves in a traditional record. I will not pursue this reading here; although Celan would have been aware of the parallel vocabulary, such literal reading would be contrived in the context.

[283] I borrow this phrase from Hass 2008: 68.

In his interpretation of Merleau-Ponty's thoughts, Hass keenly points out that it is precisely this "synaesthetic" quality that brings depth to the perception and reflects the "binocular vision" that is quintessential for a living body, as he states: "In virtually every experience of things in the world, there is overlapping of at least some of our sense modalities, just as there is an overlapping of views in binocular vision. And just as binocular vision yields an experience of the world's depth, the overlapping of sense modalities gives the things we perceive depth, consistency and density" (Hass: 69).

The synaesthetic feature of *Lichtton* presented in Celan's poem "FADENSONNEN", is, however, a "peculiar" and even uncanny "synthesis" through an existential gap articulated through the songs "beyond", or literally, from "the other side". In a recent study, Axel Englund critically examines various possibilities of interpretations for this enigmatic statement: "*noch Lieder zu singen jenseits/ der Menschen*" through the musical works that are specifically about or inspired by this poem, from which he rightly points out the prevailing naïve identification of Celan's own poetry with such "transcendental" songs (Englund 2012: 157), and shows a possibility of "reading terrestrial poetry as cut off from the transcendental promise of songs, which is available only as fragment or singable remnant" (162). It is however, according to Englund, not only a problem of perceiving the possibilities of the impossibility of "songs", i.e. poetry, but to realize that "communication, expression and signification are neither to be taken for granted nor discarded as irrelevant: they are necessary and problematic questions that need to be addressed by the poems [...] themselves" (Englund 2012:163).

Indeed, these synaesthetic features that are immanent in the "body" of the poem suggest the hues and ambiguities of the perceptions, which not only indicates the traces of life and reminisces of poetry, but also inquires into the source(s) of life and poetry. And the first

"lifeless" impression that the poem generates is in fact subtly "countered" by the plural form of the sun(s), which may indicate the abundant possibilities of life. Through such radical counter–presentation of the light, Celan renders light to be "heard" in terms of its very luminosity. In other words, the oxymoron of *Lichtton* directs Celan's poem to reach the very "voice"—the quintessential "flesh" of light, i.e. its own luminosity. Such poetic effect achieved through exploring the "impossible" resonates with Merleau-Ponty's criticism of the Cartesian notion of light, which has long been accepted as common sense, as Galen Johnson points out in his comment on Merleau-Ponty's concept of "light": "Descartes treats light as rays, largely straight, like the blind man's stick that 'feels' the object, thus eliminating the depth, latency and thickness of luminosity" (Johnson 2010: 27).

Through denying the conventional, taken-for-granted perspective of life, Celan's poem discovers and invites enormous possibilities to explore the invisible potential of life, which is not pre-given. In other words, the "impossibility" of the normal concept of life and nature radically questioned in Celan's poem intensifies an urge to truly discover and re-establish the "corporeality" that is based upon our existential "synaestheic" approach to the world,[284] which is, however fractured and distorted, already embodied in his poetic words, presented as a strong and stubborn affirmation by means of an apparent negation.

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[284] For an account on the existential significance of Merleau-Ponty's concept of the "synaesthetic", see Johnson 2010: 117: "Our bodies are a 'permanent *sensorium commune*' [...], and we perceive the inter-sensory object just as our two eyes communicate to produce one optical image."

39   "FÜR ERIC": an En-*light*-en-ed hand

Celan frequently presents the omnipresence of "body" in his poems through a means of

metonymy,[285] for example in the notion of "hand" from which he constructs as *Handwerk*.[286] In

one of the poems that Celan addressed to his son Eric, the "hand" is considered as "En-light-end"

(*erleuchtet*):

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[285] For the significance of metonymy, as a "counter-figure" for metaphor, in general and specifically in Celan's poetry, see Räsänen 2007. While Derrida emphasizes the significance of a particular "date" in Celan's poems, he considers "a date is always also a metonymy" (Derrida 2005: 20).

[286] For a detailed discussion of Celan's notion *Handwerk*, see chapter two.

FÜR ERIC	FOR ERIC
Erleuchtet	Enlightened
rammt ein Gewissen	a conscience rams
die hüben und drüben	the equation which is
gepesterte Gleichung,	pestilenced hither and yonder,
später als früh: früher	later than soon, sooner
hält die Zeit sich die jähe	time holds on to the jarring
rebellische Waage,	rebellious balance,
ganz wie du, Sohn,	just like you, son,
meine mit dir pfeilende	arrowing with you, my
Hand.	hand.

(GWII: 372)

In a recent study of Celan's poems dedicated to his son Eric, Michael Levine identifies the three stanzas as three "verbal-astral[287] constellations": "the first with Aries or *Widder*, the second with Libra or *Waage*; and the third with Sagittarius or *Schütze*" (Levine 2011: 1018). In fact, anyone who has read the Book II of *Metamorphoses* might want to trace the mythological figure Phaëthon "behind the scene", who rebelled against the wish of his father, the sun god Phoebus, and drove Phoebus' chariots across the sky without being able to control the steers. After causing huge cosmic disasters, Phaëthon vanished in the sky. What Phaëthon saw in the sky, as Ovid describes, are "*simulacra ferarum*" (images of beasts, *Metamorphoses* II: 194), which also seems to resonate with Celan's phrase "*gepesterte Gleichung*" (pestilenced equation) in the first stanza. According to the knowledge of this specific mythological implication, one might want to ask, if the light that illuminates the hand is from the sun, does Celan consider his own as equivalent to the steering hand of the sun god Phoebus?

Such interpretation, however, overlooks the most obvious and evident presence of "phenomenon", the primordial depth of "the hand", which stands for a mortal, unique man (*der Mensch*) – a concrete body, a mortal soul, not an abstract concept. The poem does not explicitly indicate the source of the enlightenment of the hand, which indeed confirms it originated from the light of *U-topia*, a type of *Gegenlicht* that, like that of the constellations, though remote and dim is indeed persistent.

In this specific case, the viscosity is manifested through "the hand" that lays the foundation for the biographical-mythological interpretation of the poem. For example, in the first stanza, by delving into primordial language, Celan renders the corporeal movements tangible through the

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[287] More precisely: zodiacal.

verb that indicates vital force such as "rams" (*rammt*), the adverbial phrase "hither and yonder" (*hüben und drüben*), and an explicit noun indicating the balancing: "equation" (*Gleichung*). In the second stanza, such corporality that associates with the constantly motional unbalancing is portrayed through a type of figurative time, his vision of the vivid, actional "primordial time": "Later than soon, sooner/ time holds [...]" (*später als früh: früher*/ hält die Zeit [...]), resonating with his expression "*das Morgen-Gestern*" ("the tomorrow-yesterday") in his essay on the painter Edgar Jené.

This Celanian primordial temporality, manifested as a shape of "circle", is not entirely irrelevant with the linear, sequential temporality that we are used to in daily life; rather, the "primordial time" can be perceived as a result of "bending" according to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological concept of "intertwining".[288] In a recent study on the temporality of intertwining, James Mensch presents the intertwining temporality as "taking the line of linear temporal determination and bending it in a circle" (Mensch 2014:79)– a circle that connects past and future with the present, precisely the image that Celan states as "*das Morgen-Gestern*".

In interpreting the meaning of the "circle", Mensch further points out, this circle implies *Lichtung* – clearing, a term from Heidegger that signifies the "apartness" of time in *Being and Time*, but only through Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, the "clearing" is understood as "flesh" (ibid.). With such embodiment, the "light" in the poem is not an abstract luminosity, but

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[288] Intertwining, according to Merleau-Ponty, indicates the ontological form of "flesh", the intersection of the selfhood and the world that formulates the very subjectivity and objectivity through perceptions, as he states: "[...] my eyes which see, my hands which touch, can also been seen and touched, because, therefore, in this sense they see and touch the visible, the tangible, from within, because our flesh lines and even envelops all the visible and tangible things with which nevertheless it is surrounded, the world and I are within one another [...]" (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 123).

concretely the "figure" that is tangible between the seer and the seen: the dim light from

constellation is intertwined with the "hand" that is "arrowing", which shows a possible

intersection between the illuminating and the illuminated.

In his essay "Eye and Mind", Merleau-Ponty wrote: "The painter 'takes his body with him'

[...] It is by lending his body to the world that the artist changes the world [...]" (Merleau-Ponty

1993: 123). This sense is also applicable in Celan's case, though, more evidently, Celan in fact

"lends" his "hand" to the poem, and his poem is his "*Handwerk*". More than a general

speculation on the truth and reality that is clung to the "hand", the poem "Für Eric" offers a

chance of perceiving "an enlightened ... hand", where the hand is not a "metaphor" but a

"metonymy" of the body. In contrast to metaphor, which became a privileged figure of speech

since Aristotle, metonymy is in general regarded as "prosaic" and contingent.[289] However, it is

this immanent relationship with the reality, and precisely because of the "contingency" of the

present, that metonymy is preferred here. Moreover, considering the immanent, intertwining

relationship between time and the bodily motions of balancing, "time", here, also features as

"metonymy", for the affairs that happened "in time", which, for example, deal with the

"rebellious balance" (*rebellische Waage*).

The specific challenge of Celan's poem "FÜR ERIC" to Merleau-Ponty's

phenomenological concept of intertwining, similar to "FADENSONNEN", is Celan's apparent

gesture of "countering" the world. However, looking closely, such "negation" is not a complete

elimination, but a qualified "negation", as the words such as "pestilenced" (*gepesterte*) and

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[289] For example, Roman Jakobson associates metaphor with "Romanticism" and metonymy with "Realism", see
Jakobson 1987: 114.

"rebellious" (*rebellische*) indicate. Therefore, the phenomenological "intertwining" between the self and the world is presented as an unbalanced "arrowing": once again, the "world" cannot be taken for granted, and must be questioned, whereas the darkness, as *Gegenlicht*, that renders the constellations visible therefore becomes the source that "enlightens" the "hand".

40   "Einmal": l-ich-ten and n-ich-ten

This "unbalanced" vision between self and the (non)world is more radically exposed Celan's poem "Einmal", the last poem of *Atemwende*:

EINMAL,	ONE TIME,
da hörte ich ihn,	yea I heard him,
da wusch er die Welt,	yea he washed the world,
ungesehn, nachtlang,	unseen, all night,
wirklich.	in truth.
Eins und Unendlich	Whole and infinite,
vernichtet,	annihilated,
ichten.	ihilate.
Licht war. Rettung.	Light was. Salvation.

(GWII: 107)

This is a poem that lays bare the "self" through an intriguing, counter-relational interaction between *I* and the *world*, when the world is "nothing", and how such odd, peculiar intertwining

is the source of "light". In a recent study of the poem, Ari Hirvonen points out the etymology: "'Ichten' – related to icht which comes from the Middle High German iht, "something" and "aught" as opposed to niht, "nought" –remains and crosses the line break, the deep silence, and comes into the "Licht" (light)" (Hirvonen 2013). Previously, the interpretations of this poem focus on the language of sanctification. For example, Beth Hawkins associates this poem with Celan's idea of purifying the world (Hawkins 2002); Or, Derrida approaches it from a certain religious perspective, especially associating such purification with circumcision, which implants Celan's notion of "light" into the roots of his Jewish background.

The poem itself, however, tells us that "light" happens only once (*einmal*), and it is lit through the intertwining between "I" (*ichten*) and the world, which nullifies (*nichten*), as both are set in motion through the words, functioning as certain "salvation" (*Rettung*). This *Ich*, intertwined with the world, now, has become a nullified subjectivity due to the loss of the world, as Celan more explicitly states in the poem "Grosse" ("Great") in *Atemwende*: "The world is gone, now be my burden" (*Die Welt ist fort, ich muß dich tragen.* GWII: 97). But strangely, it is not a "*you*", but a "*he*" that appears in this poem.

Once again, it is a "subjectivity" that is based upon an "impossible" balance with the loss of the "world", where *I* is constantly exchanging with the nothingness along with night, "enlightened", perhaps, through such *Gegenlicht*, which is from this dark absence. But from interacting with such impossibility, the I is deconstructed and re-established, and illuminates itself. Celan's poem seems to indicate that salvation could only come from such "self"-illumination, as shown in the connection between "*ich*" and "*L-ich-ten*", once and infinitely. Through such intrinsic expose of the body of the language, Celan affirms the intertwining between I and light, and "light" must be from within. However, he also shows the force of

"negation", which is also intrinsically embodied in the "*ich*", as "*n-ichten*", and light, as

Gegenlicht, is precisely generated from such force of negation. Once again, Celan combines the

logic of "inversion" into the poem, but he shows, once and for all, the immanent structure of the

language body that makes such paradoxical inversion possible. And that is the quintessential

piece of reality that Celan's poem renders visible through the *Gegenlicht*– the fractured poetic

language, which in fact formulates the phenomenological basis for other religious or political

reading.

Inspired by Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of body and his notion of flesh, the above

analyses of Celan's poems that are centred on "light" intend to illuminate the unique poetics of

"flesh" in Celan's poetry and the special depth and potential of the luminosity of Celan's notion

of *Licht*, seen as *Gegenlicht*. This, however, is not trivial, for such phenomenological approach,

which has not yet been fully developed in Celan studies[290], illuminates the foundation for the

prevailing reading of Celan's poetry, whether from mythological, religious, or political approach,

and at the core is the phenomenological approach of "intertwining" that is beyond the mind-body

dualism.

This phenomenological approach, however, does not mean that Celan's poem directly

describes perceptions or "body". Far from such mimetic poetics, Celan's poem is not descriptive

or representational, it is, rather, evocative, and evokes by laying bare the original source of a

piece of reality that reveals its fundamental perspective. In other words, Celan's poem is not to

describe a world seen through an eye, but to see the "eye" itself by showing the darkness and

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[290] An exception, perhaps, is Antti Salminen's 2014 article "On Breathroutes: Paul Celan's Poetics of Breathing", which is interwoven with interpretations that are grounded in Celan's Jewish Heritage.

shadows of its blind spot. This phenomenological depth of Celan's poetry, though presented as an "abyss", nevertheless shows its own synaesthetic features, and an embodied concept of time, which resonates in the Chinese poetics that has been misconceptualized in the "Western" reception of Chinese poetry, i.e. the poetics of "phenomenon", for which Wáng Wéi is a quintessential author.

41 "Pure phenomenon" in Wáng Wéi's poetry and *kōng* (void) as a "counter-word"

For example, Chinese poetry has been read as a kind of "timeless" art. As quoted and criticised by Pauline Yu in her recent article "Hidden in Plain Sight? The Art of Hiding in Chinese Poetry" (2008), Hayden Carruth writes in his poem "Of Distress Being Humiliated by the Classical Chinese Poets": "Your language has no tenses, which is why your poems can never be translated / whole into English; / Your minds are the minds of men who feel and imagine without time" (Carruth 1992: 353). In her criticism of Carruth's misconception of Chinese poetry in general and the temporality in particular, Pauline Yu points out "[...] the language has its ways of indicating tense, that it would be difficult to imagine a Chinese poet who could feel without an acute awareness of them [...]" (Yu 2008: 179). Moreover, Yu cites Wáng Wéi's poem "Luán Jiā Lài" 欒家瀨(Luan's Falls)[291] to illustrate the acute sensibility of "the instant" manifested in Chinese poetry.

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[291] See this poem in *Chapter Two*, section VI.

Yu's study, however, draws from previous scholarship that regards Wáng Wéi's poem as description of "Pure Phenomenon"[292], and she asks "what would a world of Pure Phenomenon be like? It would presumably be one of surface rather than depth, of the transparent and immediate, rather than the opaque and deferred" (Yu 2008: 181). In her article, Yu then points out the "hiding" strategy of the Chinese literary tradition: that a poem could mean more by saying less. Seeing Wáng Wéi's poem "Luán Jiā Lài" as a typical example of evoking "hidden truth" through "plain sight" by means of "simplicity and immediacy" (184), Yu argues, against the traditional Daoist and Buddhist claim (185), for the "super-sufficiency" rather than the "insufficiency" of language.

Yu's criticism of "Pure Phenomena", i.e. seeing phenomena as mere "surface" without "depth", however, is a reflection of the "Western", in particular the Cartesian idea of "phenomenon" that presumes the dichotomy between perception (appearance) and reality (essence). It is also based upon fundamentally dualistic vision of language and silence, as James Liu presents the "paradox of language" in the Chinese tradition, manifested through "asserting in words that words are not necessary" (Liu 1988: 10),[293] and "the poetics of paradox" claiming that poetry is "an attempt to express the inexpressible" (54).[294] Yu's suggestion of the potential

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[292] Typically, Wai-lim Yip states in the "Introduction" of his translation of Wáng Wéi's poems: "In Wang Wei, the scenery *speaks* and *acts*. The poet has become, even before the act of composition, Phenomenon itself and can allow the things in it to emerge as *they are* without being contaminated by intellectuality" (Yip 1972: vi). Yu mentions Wai-lim Yip's static translation of Wáng Wéi's poem that misses the precise sensibility in the original and A.C. Graham's review of Yip's translation, see Yu 2008: 180-181.

[293] Liu refers to a famous parable in the Daoist canon *Zhuāng Zǐ*, which intends to confirm the words are but "the dregs and lees of the ancients", see Liu 1988: 10.

[294] A famous example for the poetics of paradox can be taken from "The treatise on Literature" (*wén fù*《文賦》) written by the Six Dynasty critic Lù Jī 陸機 (261－303), who states that literary writing is similar to "holding a wooden-handled axe to cut another axe handle" (*cāo fǔ fá kē* 操斧伐柯).

power of language in attaining meaning beyond words, however, overlooks the body of language itself, and its very core is but "silence", as Merleau-Ponty states through a phenomenological process of embodiment:

Language is much more like a sort of being than a means, and that is why it can present something to us so well.

[...]

Now if we rid our minds of the idea that our language is the translation or cipher of an original text, we shall see that the idea of *complete* expression is nonsensical, and that all language is indirect or allusive – that it is, if you wish, silence. The relation of meaning to the spoken word can no longer be a point for point correspondence that we always have clearly in mind.

(Merleau-Ponty 1964: 43)

From the vision of language as an intertwining between self and the world, silence can be seen as the core of the body of language, a kind of *Licht* that appears as *Gegenlicht*, as we have experienced in the above analysis of Celan's "embodied" poetics.

Such phenomenological embodiment presents silence as the core of language, as multivalent expressions for which no single meaning can be attached to. It is eloquently reflected in the notion of *kōng* 空 (empty, void) in Wáng Wéi's poems, and indeed, similar to Celan's notion of *Licht*, *kōng* is such a "counter-word" that Wáng Wéi applies to illuminate and to experience the source of "en-*lighten*-ment".

42 "Passing by the Temple of Plentiful Scents": "*kōng tán*" (empty pond), a synaesthetic journey of Not-knowing

Let us start with a poem, in which Wáng Wéi uses *kōng* in its original meaning, an

"empty" space:

《過香積寺》　　　　　　Passing by the Temple of Plentiful Scents[295]

不知香積寺　　　　　　Naught is known of the temple of plentiful scents,

數里入雲峰　　　　　　Passing mile over mile into cloud covered peaks.

古木無人徑　　　　　　Ancient woods, there is no one who walks on these trails,

深山何處鐘　　　　　　Deepest rock, there is nowhere the clang of this bell could arise.

泉聲咽危石　　　　　　Where the crags choke the burbling of cascading creeks

日色冷青松　　　　　　Verdant pines chill the hues of the setting sun's glow.

薄暮空潭曲　　　　　　When the light becomes thin, by a pond's winding void,

安禪制毒龍　　　　　　Peaceful Chán quells the sting of the venomous drake.

(Zhào 1972 Vol.1: 131)

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[295] My translation endeavors to preserve the rhyme and reflect the prosody of the original, thus presenting the result as an actual poem. An alternative translation can be found in Yu 1981:145:

Visiting the Temple of Gathered Fragrance

I do not know the Temple of Gathered Fragrance,　Noise from the spring swallows up lofty rocks;

For several miles, entering cloudy peaks.　The color of the sun chills green pines.

Ancient trees, paths without people;　Toward dusk by the curve of an empty pond,

Deep in the mountains: where is the bell?　Peaceful meditation controls poison dragons.

Marsha Wager reads this poem as a typical example of the "ambiguity" of Chinese language which is artistically mastered by Wáng Wéi: for each line, one could either read the words as an implication of Buddhist transcendence of knowledge, sensation, and the illusory phenomenal world, or one could simply read it as a description of the poet's journey in search of a temple. Tián Xiǎo Fēi, on the other hand, sees the ambiguities and multivalent expressions of the poem as a means of opening "a space" between Wáng Wéi's public and private, i.e. the ordinary and the transcendental life (Tian 1994: 164-165).

It is worthwhile to notice, Wáng Wéi starts his journey with a world of "not knowing" (bù zhī 不知). Indeed, as Pauline Yu points out, in the analogy between a journey into the mountains and a path towards attaining spiritual enlightenment, the truly distinctive significance is Wáng Wéi's "emphasis on the necessity of their occurring spontaneously and in ignorance" (Yu 1977: 73). The poet's attitude of "not-knowing", in fact, directs the journey itself to become a concrete, tangible experience of discovery, rather than simply looking for a destination. Consequently, this attitude of "not-knowing", as Yu emphasizes, "consists in a freedom from mental calculation and a spontaneous appreciation of and reliance on nature" (76).

From the specific phenomenological perspective that we discovered in Celan's poems, for instance, in "FÜR ERIC", we discern that Wáng Wéi's poem "Guò Xiāng Jī Sì" also reveals a unique "synaesthetic" mode manifested in the corporeal motions and movements, which reflects the poet's specific sense of "intertwining" with Nature, through, however, precarious, though not

completely "unbalanced", hindrances and obstacles. For example, involved in this personal non-cognitive mode, the poet "enters" (*rù* 入) into the "white-cloudy peaks" (*yún fēng* 雲峰) with an ambiguity of referring to either the person who climbs to the peak or a temple at the peak, which prompts Wagner to consider Wáng Wéi as "a master of making the most richly ambiguous use of the lack of a specific grammatical subject of Chinese verbs" (Wagner 1975: 115).

In a seemingly pure description of the path in the second couplet, within the vast space of ancient trees and treading on no-one's path, the presence of the body is manifested in the questioning phrase of "where" (*hé chù* 何處) in the fourth line – the human traces on such no-one's path is not only a thin, but a concrete voice that is echoed by the "bell" (*zhōng* 鐘). This embodied vision is, however, even more distinctively manifested in the third couplet where Wáng Wéi seems to merely "describe" the natural scenery on the way of climbing: he applies a multivalent verb "*yè* 咽" (swallow, fill, hoarse) to present the sound of water that touches the "treacherous rock" (*wēi shí* 危石), and an adjective indicating strong feeling of coldness, "*lěng* 冷" to present natural objects such as sunset and pine tree. Moreover, Wáng Wéi uses the word "voice" (*shēng* 聲) and "color" (*sè* 色) to achieve a certain "abstraction", which indicates that the perceptual experiences presented here is not attached to any specific external reference, but a conceptual yet tangible experience. The intermingling of the self and this "unknown" world precisely reflects what Merleau-Ponty emphasizes through his phenomenological analysis of the "flesh" in *The Visible and the Invisible*: "That means that my body is made of the same flesh as the world (it is perceived), and moreover that this flesh of my body is shared by the world, the world *reflects* it, encroaches upon it and it encroaches upon the world ... they are in a relation of transgression or of overlapping" (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 31).

Most properly to illustrate the sense of the "unknown", perhaps, is that, in the last couplet, the place which Wáng Wéi eventually reaches is not any kind of monastery, but an "empty pond" (*kōng tán* 空潭) that is meandering (*qǔ* 曲) in the dusk of "thin" (*bó* 薄) sunset, where a "venomous dragon" (*dú lóng* 毒龍) is lurking, that is to be banned (*zhì* 制). With such a tangible existence, how could one assume that the pond is "empty"? Here, "empty pond" is like the "empty mountain" (*kōng shān* 空山) that we will discuss below: an oxymoron that, though it implies a certain Chán Buddhist attitude of detachment, nevertheless, by itself, in this specific context, reveals a subtle connection with Celan's notion of *Gegenlicht*, i.e. a "negation" that affirms invisible possibilities. The subtle and sensuous traces of such negation are in fact latent in almost every line through the words that indicate the nature of "not knowing" and obstacles, and eventually reach a place of "Out-of Place" (*U-topia*). Wáng Wéi creates such a place, where what might be considered as the source of "light" for a spiritual enlightenment is perceptually "dark", as implied by the unfathomable depth of this "empty pond". The inherent darkness of *kōng* suggests the *potentia* that we have discovered in Celan's notion of abyss, which requires to be "conquered", even by force, and the poem, from its own cultural background, suggests that Chán is a proper approach. But the phenomenological depth that is crystalized in the word *kōng* perhaps even transcends the specific cultural milieu in which the word has originated, and renders it to be heard at "the other side" of mankind, as our comparison intends to achieve.

43   "In Mountains": *kōng cuì* (empty green)

For example, like Celan's synaesthetic approach in his poem FADENSONNEN, where he combines light with sound into a new category, *Lichtton*, Wáng Wéi is masterful in creating a similar effect through the inter-sensorial conjunction of the notion of *kōng* and "color", which

embodies an unspeakable effect of "light". This is manifested in one of Wáng Wéi's most well known quatrains:

山中	In Mountains
荊溪白石出	White rocks jut out from brambled creek,
天寒紅葉稀	Cold sky, sparse are the reddish leaves.
山路元無雨	This foot path, no, it isn't rain –
空翠溼人衣。	This empty green soaks through one's coat and sleeves.

(Zhào 1972 Vol.1: 271)

The traditional Chinese critics regarded this poem as a typical manifestation of "heavenly taste" (*tiān qù* 天趣), and representative of Wáng Wéi's unique aesthetic between painting and poetry.[296] Wagner interprets this poem as "one of Wang Wei's most purely imagistic poems", which reflects "a momentary experience [...] in terms of color, form, and sensation" (Wagner

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[296] See the comments from the famous Sòng 宋 dynasty critic and scholar Sū Shì 蘇軾 (1037-1101): "When one savors Mo-chieh's poems, there is painting in the poetry; When one looks at Mo-chieh's pictures, there is poetry in the painting"(Wagner 1977: 111).

1975: 46).[297] But she insists that Wáng Wéi's use of light and color, albeit that of a painter, "is concerned with representing not only the concrete natural world but also the transcendent or metaphysical realm" (Wagner 1977: 111).

In addition to the sensuous perceptions that are presented in the first and second lines: the "white rocks" (白石) that jut out and the "reddish leaves" (紅葉) that become rare as the autumn season ends, Wáng Wéi surprisingly applies *kōng* to modify a "bluish-green, emerald" color (*cuì* 翠), and states, although there is no rain, such "green emptiness" soaks the person's clothing. Wagner translates the phrase as "the sky's green", indicating "sky's foliage" or "greenery in the sky" (112),[298] whereas Wai-lim Yip renders it as "Skyward greenery" (Yip 1972: 85), suggesting dew on the high trees in the mountain. I translate it not as a literal reference to foliage, but simply juxtapose the words, green, empty, as an immersion into the abundant fertility at the river bank that becomes tangible, soaking. Regarding this unusual combination, Wagner emphasizes its metaphysical connotations:

> It is significant that the words which govern this ambiguous merging are those of emptiness, or the Void, and a natural color (green), both of which suggest the abstract and intangible as well as the concrete and the visual. Thus, transcendent connotations stand in tension with the stark visual imagery of the poem. Again, images of vivid physical sensations metaphorically convey metaphysical implications. (112)

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[297] For her detailed exegesis of this poem, see Wagner 1975: 45-47.

[298] Likewise, Shan Chou translates the phrase *kōng cuì* as "cloudless blue" (Chou: 119).

Such metaphorical implications are generally associated with a Buddhist influence, and Shan Chou emphasizes this by quoting this quatrain: "the Buddhist influence is present in exactly those of the nature poems which show no overt signs of Buddhism", which Chou qualifies as "simple and elusive" (Chou 1982: 118), according to which, he suggests a "secularized" perspective to deal with the immanent Buddhist influence in Wáng Wéi's poetry (120).

Interestingly, as far as I am aware of, no previous critic has ever pointed out that such combination "*kōng cuì*" (空翠) is in fact a "neologism", hidden in its deceptive simplicity and lucidity, as if it had always existed in the Chinese language, which is otherwise highly resistant to novel combinations of nouns. This type of language reveals a similar "construction" as Celan's term *Licht-ton* or *Faden-sonnen*, in the sense that both poets create their own "concept" through articulating original, lived, synaesthetic experiences, an idiosyncratic combination of conceptual perceptions, as Merleau-Ponty states when he mentions the nature of the artistic creation of his favorite artist Paul Cézanne: "the artist launches his work just as man once launched the first word, not knowing whether it will be anything more than a shout" (Merleau-Ponty 1993: 69).

Although, we should not overlook that in Wáng Wéi's case, such an existential "shout" is subtly articulated through a "quiet" voice, nor should we deny its special connection with Chán, a "religion" that could be, and must be practiced in every-day seemingly "mundane" life, the phenomenological basis of Wáng Wéi's poem "In Mountains", once again, shows that the source of color and light of the poem is rooted in the poem's embodied spirit that is intertwined with the Nature, however, based upon an "empty" world: such existential "abyss" is deeply embedded in Wáng Wéi's poem through a veil of subtle silence, perhaps based upon an aesthetics of

indirectness or "hiding",[299] but one still could discern this primordial depth through sensing the hidden body beneath the layers soaked simply by sheer greenness.

44 "Five Songs of Fú Nán" (Number Three): the oxymoron of *kōng mǎn* (empty full)

A more evident example of Wáng Wéi's use of self-contradictory constructions associated with *kōng* in between affirmation and negation, similar to Celan's *Gegenlicht* lies in his another striking "neologism": *kōng mǎn* 空滿, literally, "empty full", for example, in one of songs that he composed during his early life as a courtier:

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[299] For the aesthetics of "hiding" in Chinese poetics, see Yu 2008.

扶南曲歌詞五首（之三）   Five Songs of Fú Nán (Number Three)[300]

香氣傳空滿   The air though fragrant is an empty space

妝華影箔通   and crimson lips flash shadows through the screen

歌聞天仗外   and songs reach out beyond the royal guards,

舞出御樓中   dance past the courtyard, to be seen.

日暮歸何處   Where do they go to when the night draws near?

華間長樂宮。   Amid the blooms, halls of eternal cheer.

(Zhào 1972 vol.1: 10)

This is one of the series of songs that Wáng Wéi composed according to a specific melody

that originates from India (Zhao 1972 vol.1: 10). Wáng Wéi composed five poems for this

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[300] For an alternative translation, see Wagner 1975: 97:

Five Poems Based on Southern Folksongs (#3)

Fragrant air spreads filling the emptiness,   Dances issue from within the imperial tower.

Elaborate flowers reflect through the curtains.   At sunset, where will they return?

Songs heard beyond the palace guard,   Among the flowers, the Palace of Everlasting Joy.

particular music that reflects the sensuous feelings, derived from his acquaintance with the life of nobility. The neologism "*kōng mǎn*" 空滿 of the first line carries abundant ambiguities, for which Wagner points out at least three possibilities: "Fragrant air spreads filling the emptiness"; "Fragrant air spreading empties the fullness"; and "Fragrant air spreads fully in vain", which she considers deliver "the theme of transitory, sensuous joys and perceptions," which is "reinforced both by the imagery which follows and by the irony of the final line: the name of the palaces stands in tension with the floral image of fading sensuality and impermanence" (Wagner 1975: 98). In my translation, I imply the striking contrast between "empty" and "full" through a subtle word "though", which may not be equivalent to the Chinese original, but transposes the idea into another poetic language.

In his essay "A Dialogue on Language" in *On the Way To Language*, Heidegger refers to the Japanese concept "*iki*",[301] which is derived from the delicate sensuous life of courtesans in Edo Japan, to illustrate his conviction that it is impossible for Western language to carry the essential ideas that are rooted in East Asian life, since Westerns and East Asians are living in completely different language houses. Does an attempt at translating Wáng Wéi's neologism "*kōng mǎn*" reinforce or defy Heidegger's famous claim? Do the impossibilities– or rather the hindrances and obstacles, or even the abyss between the languages precisely provide the possibilities of communication through its own "depth"?

The ambiguity of "*kōng mǎn*" that is rooted in Wáng Wéi's personal perceptions, sensibilities and life experiences may indeed be difficult to translate into another language, or

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[301] For a detailed account of the transpositional meanings of "*iki*" through translating it into European languages, see Shûzô 1997: 27-35.

even into any language; nevertheless, we find here the now familiar sense of "loss of the world" that is immanent in Celan's concept of *Gegenlicht*. However, such "loss" does not simply leave a "barren" place, but breaks an opening to a journey of new discovery through rendering the "impossibility" visible, audible and tangible. In Celan's manifestation in the poem "Einmal", it is a procedure of breaking through the impossible balancing between "*ichten*" and "*nichten*"; for Wáng Wéi, it is a unique sense of "emptiness within fullness" that elicits a pondering on the "returning sun" that fundamentally questions, and therefore, sheds "twilight" on the shadows of an apparent sensuous "happiness" and bliss that seems to be so "full".

45   A phenomenological duet: the dialectic between light and shadow, *Licht* and *kōng*

The comparison between Celan and WangWei's poetics, respectively centered on *Licht* and *kōng*, therefore, brings out a phenomenological duet – between the counterparts that do not have a "relationship" in the conventional sense, i.e. any influence on each other whatsoever. Here, again, phenomenology plays a double role, as both method and content.

On one hand, both *Licht* in Celan's and *kōng* in Wáng Wéi's poems indicate how, far from meaningless constructions, the darkness of *Gegenlicht*, and the emptiness of *kōng* opens an immense horizon for that which is embodied in the poems perceived as phenomena, in particular through their non-metaphorical yet synaesthetic language. In this case, Celan and Wáng Wéi's poems are the epitomes of this phenomenological openness. On the other hand, through their poems, one not only can perceive the "world" from another side, i.e. a side that is normally shaded by greyness, darkness and emptiness, but also discern the non-obvious convergence that facilitates the encounter of their poems which is, in fact, based upon an intellectual insight that is prior to any historical, biographical or formal and structural analysis.

Such dialectic interplay between light and shadow, void and fullness are brought out not only through Celan's poem "IN DEN FLÜSSEN" and Wáng Wéi's poem "Lù Zhài" respectively, but through their encounter; the dialectic embodied in *Licht* and *kōng* mutually illuminates each other from the other side, and evokes the vast potentials of seemingly impossible dialogue, not only depicted in the poem itself, but in its realization through the process of comparative reading.

46 "IN DEN FLÜSSEN" ("IN THE RIVERS")

IN DEN FLÜSSEN nördlich der Zukunft	IN THE RIVERS north of the future
werf ich das Netz aus, das du	I cast the net, that you
zögernd beschwerst	haltingly weight
mit von Steinen geschriebenen	with the shadows the stones have been
Schatten.	writing.

(GW II, 14)

46.1 Previous readings of the poem

Previous scholarship on this poem has recognized that its oscillation between "hope" and "pain", whose grey-dark colour may be influenced by the poet's wife's art of etching (Felstiner

2000: 279-280).[302] Hans-Günther Huch emphasizes the interplay between light and shadow and sees the poem centred on Heidegger's notion of *Gegenwart* that combines both past and future. For Huch, however, this poem is "at the most outside edge of understanding" (*am äußersten Rand des Verstehens*, Huch 2002: 43). Moreover, in an essay of 1977 entitled "Are The Poets Falling Silent" (*Verstummen die Dichter*?) Gadamer suggests that Celan's "IN THE RIVERS" was representative of that time's true poetry, because it showed "a discretion beyond words" (*eine unbeschreibliche Diskretion*, Gadamer 1992: 74), a phrase Gadamer borrowed from Rilke. Indeed, such inexpressible attitude is manifested through a distinctive motional "balancing" embodied in the poem's interior rhythm, which is integrated with the central object "*Netz*" (net), as we can perceive through the following configuration of the poem's "textual landscape":

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[302] Indeed, the wording in Celan's poems (such as "etching") and the subject matter such as "stone", as well as the black and grey colors that he prefers might very well be associated with the aesthetics of the graphic art of his wife Gisèle Celan-Lestrange. In his letters to Nelly Sachs dated on April 1, 1968, Celan explicitly expresses deep appreciation and seeks possible support for his wife's art exhibitions in Sweden, see Celan and Sachs 1995: 63-64.

46.2   A textual landscape: an impossible dialogue in a place of Non-where
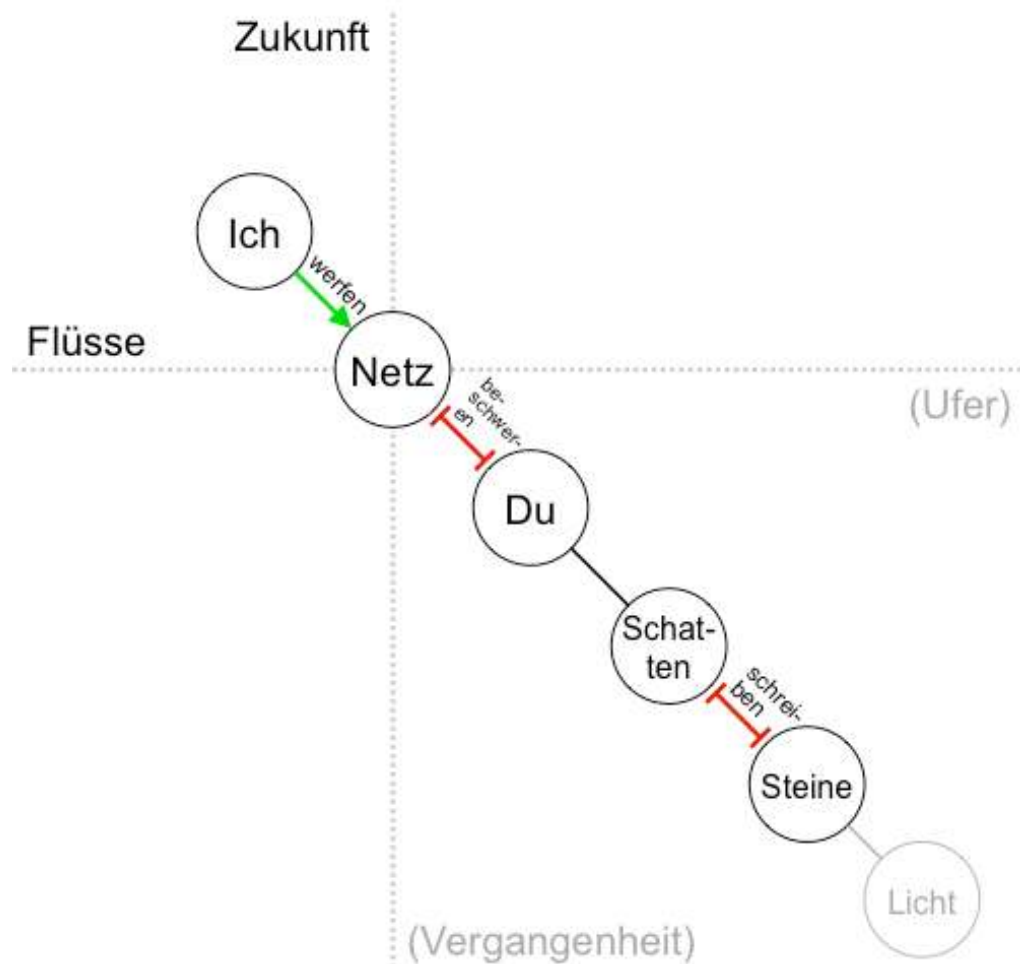
Figure 13. Poetic Landscape of "IN DEN FLÜSSEN". Symbols as before, the object *Licht* (light) is shown in grey since it is not explicit in the poem but implied through the shadows. Like in the preceding map, the sense of reading is from top to bottom; as well, it coincides with a dynamic of where a fundamentally positive proposition (casting the net i.e. obtaining sustenance despite the cold and barren surrounding) nevertheless leads into a domain of burden (*beschweren*) and of failed entailments (writing stones).

Here, the "landscape" reveals a rather sharp binary opposition between past and future. Even though the relationship between them is ostensibly "dialogical", the element of sheer contrast is strengthened by the triangular link between *ich*, *du* and the things mentioned. In fact the intangible future seems far more remote than it appears to be. The remoteness of Celan's "northern" future becomes particularly striking if we contrast the effect of substituting

"*nördlich*" with the other cardinal points; "*südlich der Zukunft*" (south of the future) suggests fruitfulness or abundance; "*östlich der Zukunft*" (east of the future) evokes the rising light of dawn; "*westlich*" (west of) perhaps carries a sense of onward travel. Such contrasts make it very clear that "north", though not literally interpretable here, is semantically precise.[303]

"*Zögernd*" in the third line reflects an indeterminate or cautious attitude within this dialogue, whereas the shadows – possibly the shadows of the past – acquire weight simply by their association with the stones, which write them as material memory, weighty, solid, indelible, and absorbent of implied light – possibly the light of reason. In their factual materiality the stones are a counterpoint to the unknowable rivers flowing towards the future. In this textual landscape of Celan, as readers, we might well focus on the central word *Netz*, one purpose of which is apparently to entangle us at the poem's rhythmic and conceptual pivot. Any literal "en-*light*-enment" would need to pass through the net, but the *Du* contributes only shadows. The tension between the future of the *ich* and the present, stone-hard shadows across this pivot is tangible, yet the refusal of interpretability leaves a void, a tempting void that we are being seduced to occupy with ourselves.

46.3   Metric pattern: establishing through breaking

The weighing and balancing, however, is most significantly revealed in the poem's internal rhythm, as shown in figure 2:

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[303] Most interpreters suggest "*nördlich*" refers to futile places. For example, Huch writes: " We associate North with something cold, icy, it lies close to the North pole..." (*Wir verbinden mit dem Wort Norden etwas Kaltes, Eisiges, es liegt in der Nähe des Nordpols...*Huch 2002: 44). But such interpretation intends to replace the multivalent implications with a single possibility, which, however, shows its own limitation.

Figure 14. Metric Pattern of "IN DEN FLÜSSEN". In this depiction of the metric pattern, I follow Celan's line breaks; duplicated partial feet in light grey (*mit von, Schatten*) indicate that these segments remain strongly connected for rhythmic and semantic reasons.

This poem, like the ones analysed in the previous chapters, comes quite close to regular dactyls, and it starts and ends with silence, in both cases implied by a "missing" syllable. In the first line, the potential dactylic rhythm is interrupted by the *caesura* after "*Flüssen*" and the line break after "*Zukunft*", at which point readers may well pause, confronted with the breath-taking landscape of the unknown future. Yet that future, remote and inaccessible, is hardly very promising, as its open metric ending suggests. Through this uncertainty, this moment of hesitation, Celan reduces the expected accent on "*werf*", essentially generating a foot of three unstressed syllables (*werf ich das*). Likewise, the "*du*" at the end of the second line, though syntactically emphasized, is hindered from being accented – as the metre would suggest – by the compulsory German prosody of "*zögernd*" ([ˈtsøːgɚnd̥]) – "hesitantly" – in the following line, which keeps the "*du*" within the foot, forming a syncopated pair with *das*. Through these interventions Celan crafts a metrical balance around the "*Netz*", a symmetry of feet that creates

an even "weight" on both sides. Though the dancingly dactylic pace is strongly present regardless of the line breaks, and actually becomes more intense in the fourth line, Celan uses the opportunity of fragmentation to generate, in the final line, an extraordinary sense of weight. "*Schatten*" can be experienced as veritably "dropping" into a line of its own. And because that final line ends with an incomplete dactyl – a foot with a one-syllable "rest" – it creates a lingering silence, which can perhaps feel as hard and weighty as the stones themselves.

The poem's metre is not arbitrary but most carefully constructed. In most cases the accented syllables are quantitatively reinforced: "*Flüssen*", "*nördlich*", "*Zukunft*", "*zögernd*", "*beschwerst*", "*Steinen*" "*geschriebenen*". Only "*Netz*" and "*Schatten*" are different, in that here the accent "conflicts" with the quantity, which according to Robert Pinsky's general theory of poetic prosody, is an "interference pattern" that creates inner tensions (Pinsky 1998: 19). Celan's "*Schatten*", as the poem's very last word, and as a line all on its own, may well be a focus here. But the poem's fulcrum is "*Netz*", and the metrical pattern which Celan has created around it suggests the balanced kinetics of "casting" that net. The underlying metrical pattern and its variations are not simply rhetorical devices but suggest a "relationship". And at the end of the poem's second line the *du*, highlighted by the enjambement, yet unaccented, seems to point to an implied question. It is as if Celan were inviting readers to wonder: Who is this *du*? Is it a real counterpart of *ich*?

46.4   Internal rhyme: balance and cohension

Moreover, the canonical form of the German verb used in the poem's second line would be *werfe*, not "*werf*". Poets often elide a terminal "*e*" for metrical reasons, and this particular example can underline that, for Celan, musicality is in fact a major consideration. But in his view, verbal music is not just decoration, not just an accidental by-product of semantic choices.

On the contrary, it is an existential poetic reality, in the sense that readers are supposed to hear the voices behind or beyond the poem's actual words.

Take, for instance, the question of rhymes. Although, in this poem, Celan does not appeal to a conventional rhyming scheme, rhyme is not absent, but simply not obvious. So the poem ends with a prepositional phrase, "*von Steinen geschriebenen/ Schatten*", which is an intensely continuous rhyming structure, with both assonance and consonance, and resonating with the poem's very beginning: "*In den Flüssen*". This internal scheme is not a superficial embellishment but belongs to an art of unification. The rhyming syllables of the poem's final phrase generate the almost tangible weight of a distinct voice. They amount to a musical composition of "verbal tissues"[304] which arrestingly echo the opening line, even though the actual words seem to resist comprehension. Similarly, the consonance in the verbs "*werf*" (*Ich*) and "*beschwerst*" (*du*), and in the relative clause "(*ich*) *das Netz aus, das (du)*", as well as the permutation of the vowel and consonant from "*nördlich der Zukunft*" (*Ich*) into "*zögernd*" (*du*), suggest a temporary and topological conversation between *ich* and *du*, a postulated relationship woven by "*das Netz*", and developing in some primordial time, in a somewhere that is also non-where (*U-topia*).

46.5   Verbal image: *das Netz* (the net)

Unlike many of Celan's other poems, this one contains neither neologisms nor Latinate vocabulary. As in the quatrains of Wáng Wéi, the language of "IN DEN FLÜSSEN" is profoundly simple. The meaning, however, is impenetrably ambiguous. The entire poem consists of just a

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[304] I borrow this phrase from Peter Szondi's description of Celan's translation of Shakespeare's Sonnet 105, Szondi 2003: 37.

single sentence which in standard German grammar and word order would read: "*Ich werfe in den Flüssen nördlich der Zukunft das Netz aus, das du zögernd mit von Steinen geschriebenen Schatten beschwerst.*" Celan has moved, as it were, the two prepositional phrases "*in den Flüssen nördlich der Zukunft*" and "*mit von Steinen geschriebenen Schatten*" to the very beginning and very end of the sentence, arranging a syntactic symmetry, as if they were both parentheses, modifying *ich* and *du* respectively, and with *das Netz* at the centre. But what is *das Netz*? No word could be plainer or more ordinary. But does it refer to a fishing net? And if so, what kind of fishing net, and why does it need to be weighed down, if not by the fish? The ambiguity here, as also in Celan's other poems, and as Peter Szondi points out as a general feature of Celan's poetics, "is neither a defect nor purely a stylistic trait" but "determines the structure of the poetic text itself" (Szondi 2003: 120).[305]

46.6   Ambiguity: *Nördlich der Zukunft* (north of the future) etc.

Ambiguity first arises from the plural dative case in "*IN DEN FLÜSSEN nördlich der Zukunft*", referring to a location which could either be in the rivers or in the region (*nördlich der Zukunft*) where rivers flow. Here the dative in the prepositional structure creates multiple layers of interpretation: perhaps *ich* habitually stands in the rivers and casts the net; or perhaps *ich* inhabits the region of rivers while casting a net from the shore, or simply towards *du*. But where, then, is *du*? In the rivers? On the shore? Or even in the net? Could *du* be the fish that was caught? When the net is cast, does *du* weigh it down with its own self? The poem is situated in "*nördlich der Zukunft*", a concept rather than a place, and a concept that is inconceivable – in

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[305] Amy Colin reads the "net" in Celan's poem as an emblem of "language":"'In the rivers north of the future,' the poet has thrown his tightly interwoven net of poetic language in which he hopes to catch songs beyond humankind", which she considers as an example of the autonomy of language: language writes itself (Colin 1991: 154). But such reading, again, by pinning down a metaphorical "meaning", destroys the structural ambiguity of the poem.

Gadamer's words, a "combination whose meaning cannot be delivered by the senses"(1973: 37).[306] The complexity and ambiguity of the *Ich-Du* relationship is already entailed by the poem's very first mention of the landscape.

If one follows Gadamer and interprets the poem's fishing motif as involving a particular type of fishing, an activity that requires a cooperative balancing between two people,[307] one may think of seine net fishing, with a net vertically "standing" in the water, with the floating top and the bottom being drawn together in order to encircle the fish. However, a seine net is more likely to be "installed" (*aufstellen, auslegen*) than to be "cast".[308] The particular activity surrounding the net is also ambiguous: either *ich* casts the net and *du* weights it down with the "shadows" that are in the net; or *du* uses the "shadows" to weight it in order to balance the net. Gadamer insists on the latter, and suggests that we should read "*zögernd*" as an indication of a meticulous and entirely physical balancing act – an effort to enable the net to "stand" in the water – rather than a cautious, doubting frame of mind[309] – an interpretation in line with the etymology of *zögernd*, which is derived from "*ziehen*" (to pull), "*sich von einem Ort zum anderen bewegen*" (to move

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[306] *die sinnlich uneinlösbare Fügung*

[307] Gadamer (1973: 36) explains the meticulous activity of weighing and balancing a seine net so that it will "stand".

[308] The German expression "*ein Netz auswerfen*" can certainly be applied to the act of placing a seine net. But to take the expression literally would rather evoke a throw net, in which case the hesitant activity of weighting would be temporally separate from the casting. Both German alternatives that do not convey the resolute physical act of throwing, namely "*stell' ich ein Netz auf*" and "*leg' ich ein Netz aus*" could have been accomodated in the poem's prosodic pattern, suggesting that the temporal separation is in fact intentional.

[309] "What is described here, is very likely the weight of the net. Whoever weights the net, should not do too much or too little, not too much, so that the net does not sink, and not too little, so that it does not drift to the surface. The net must, as the fisherman says: 'stand'. From here certainly derives the hesitation of weighting." (*Was beschrieben wird, ist vielmehr das Beschweren des Netzes. Wer das Netz beschwert, darf nicht zuviel tun und nicht zuwenig, nicht zuviel, damit das Netz nicht absinkt, und nicht zuwenig, damit es nicht obenhin treibt. Das Netz muß, wie der Fischer sagt 'Stehen'. Von hier bestimmt sich das Zögern des Beschwerens. Gadamer 1973: 36*).

from one place to another) or "*wiederholt hin und her ziehen*" (repetitively to pull to and fro).[310]

The distinction between weighting the net in preparation, weighting the net with catch, or even

overtaxing its usefulness with an unwanted weight, is subtle, but has an important consequence.

Neither preparing a net nor burdening it could coincide with casting it, and Celan's use of the

present-tense form "*werf*" contributes to a sense of dislocation in time. The efforts of *ich* and *du*

with the net are ambiguous and counter-temporal, and quite deliberately so. We know that Celan

initially constructed a defined sequence of casting the net and weighting it down, because the

verb connected with the *ich* was in the simple past – "*warf*" – unlike the verbal tense connected

with the *du* – "*beschwerst*" (Celan 2000: 13). In changing the simple-past "*warf*" to the present-

tense "*werf*", and by situating the activities of casting and weighting simultaneously, Celan

opened up a whole range of possible "anti-semantic" interpretations, triggered by the failed

entailment of the two activities, suggesting an immensely complicated and multi-layered

relationship between *ich* and *du*.

46.7   Shadow: *Gegenlicht*

As a balancing counterpart of the opening line, the final prepositional phrase "*mit von*

Steinen geschriebenen / Schatten" intensifies the ambiguity. How is it even possible to think of

weighty "shadows"? We can perhaps assume that some source of light makes the stones cast

shadows, and that the stones, as it were, provide the shadows with weight. And although the

phrasing strongly resists such attempts at comprehensible interpretation, a German reader may

find that the word *Schatten* suggests, for *du*, a sense of the past (*cf.* "*Schatten der*

Vergangenheit" ("shadows of the past")) in contrast with, for *ich,* "*nördlich der Zukunft*" ("north

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[310] See *Duden Etymology Dictionary*.

of the future"). If so, this could suggest that *ich* and *du* "re-act" to each other from different points of a conceptual time: that *ich* casts the net in the "*nördlich der Zukunft*", and that *du* weights it down with the shadow of the past, whereas *zögernd* precisely implies a subtle conceptual congruence and distance across the boundaries of time. *Netz*, as a common object shared by *ich* and *du*, thus becomes a connection as well as a separation: a "dialogue" that is based upon division.

The above "histological" analysis of the flesh of Celan's language reveals how infinite possibilities of relationships between *I* and *you* could be established upon a "non-dialogical" basis, through various counter-communicational modes typically manifested in Celan's "hermeticism" that rejects to be "understood" in a stereotypical way. It is, in fact, not only "possible", but also important to discover such non-relational relationship in modern poetry and arts: Celan's poems, according to Andrew Zawacki, who regards such "impossible dialogue" as a phenomenon that is common to both Paul Celan, Michael Palmer and Maurice Blanchot, are "attuned to the nuances of a relation in which speaker and addressee relate precisely by division" (Zawacki 2004: 120), and for Celan, "the condition of the poem is an itinerary, and as the poem approaches the 'altogether other', the other retains his alterity by not completing the advent it intimates" (ibid.).

This "impossible" dialogical relationship constructed in Celan's poetry deeply influences Emmanuel Levinas' theory on "alterity", based upon Celan's poem "Lob der Ferne" (Praise of Distance), where Celan expresses: "*Ich bin du, wenn ich ich bin*" (GWI: 33).[311] According to

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[311] See chapter four "substitutes" of *Otherwise than Being*, which is developed from Celan's poem "*Lob der Ferne*" (Praise of Distance). For a detailed account on Celan and Levinas, see Hatley 2011.

Levinas, such radical alterity implies infinite possibilities and refuses to reduce such infinity to any totality or presupposed unity. By insisting on the very otherness that cannot be assimilated into the self, as Lawrence Hass explains: "the Other is never 'present', never 'here', never 'given', but always transcending me, beyond any image or presentation" (Hass 2008: 113), the alterity may simply mean "I am never you" [...]. Moreover, James Hatley suggests to use "discourse", instead of "dialogue" to present the radical alterity that Levinas emphasizes through Celan's poetics: "Discourse and not dialogue is called for here – *discursus*, in its Latin root, a running to and fro that only later comes to be characterized as a movement peculiar to speech, as opposed to the more settled *dialogos*, from the start 'speech,' in its Greek root, located between reciprocal interlocutors" (Hatley 2011: 91).

In Celan's poem "IN DEN FLÜSSEN", the alterity of "discourse" is manifested in the image of shadows: the shadows of stones. Indeed, as Huch points out, this word "*Schatten*" carries the most weight of meaning of the entire poem (Huch 2002: 44). Moreover, Gadamer states the potential of such shadows: "completely independent of the sentence structure of this poem, what 'shadows' means becomes directly present in the word itself. This arduous word always makes present as well that which casts the shadow" (Gadamer 1992: 74-75). According to Gadamer, "shadows" could only be illuminated by the "light", but in Celan's case, it is this multivalent *Gegenlicht* that creates the "shadows".

46.8 The possibilities of impossible dialogue: "*Vieldeutigkeit*" (Polysemy) through comparison

The poem, therefore, illustrates Celan's notion of *Gegenlicht*, which is quintessentially distinct from the mere negation of "light". Shadows are, in fact, the possibilities that are immanent of the very nature of "luminosity". For example, Merleau-Ponty considers that our

vision of "light" signifies the nature of "the true" that is formulated through a certain rhythm of colors and shades,[312] for which he uses the German word "*Vieldeutigkeit*" (Polysemy). However, he also emphasizes, "the polysemy [...] is not a shadow to eliminate true light. The true cannot be defined as coincidence and outside of all difference [*écart*] in relation to the true..." (Merleau-Ponty 1988: 40). In this sense, a word that has the capacity of having multiple meanings does not mean that there is one primary among them has to be chosen as the meaning's centre, rather that "polysemy" indicates a notion of *Gegenlicht'*— in this sense Merleau-Ponty developed Robert Delaunay's idea – light is not simply a 'straight ray' in the Cartesian sense, but has "flesh" and "voice", as "'rhythmic simultaneity' as vibration, pulse, and measure" (Johnson 2010: 109).[313]

However, Celan here creates an oxymoron, the weighty "shadow" through the very activity of "balancing", and the words such as "*werf*", "*zögernd*", and "*beschwerst*" indicate concrete, tangible bodily movements. Through the combination of the "body" and the alterity—the impossible dialogical relations, Celan's "phenomenological" poetics illuminates both Merleau-Ponty and Levinas's approaches that shows the potential of "*ad infinitum*" of alterity without appealing to any artificial "totality" whereas "the same"—the basis of any dialogue, is grounded in earthly creation, through a piece of *Handwerk* and a moment of *Atemwende*, an encounter, as

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[312] Merleau-Ponty was inspired by the writing of Robert Delaunay, whose essay entitled "Light" (1912) reads: "It is the voice that the Light causes to be heard and of which Hermes Trismegistus speaks in his Pimander. 'Soon' – one reads in the Pimander – 'the shadows will descend... and from them came an inarticulate cry which seems to be the Voice of light.' See Robert and Sonia Delaunay 1978: 85-86, also quoted in Johnson 2010: 108.

[313] Johnson provides an interesting analysis of the "rhythm" of light, according to Merleau-Ponty's account. See Johnson 2010: 104-110.

an irreducible existence of "flesh", or what may be called "a shared mortality",[314] as we have seen in the motions of casting and weighting the net in this poem

Such reading sheds a new light on interpreting the significant role of "shadows" in Celan's poems, which is not, as most critics took for granted, simply "lifeless". And the darkness in Celan's poem that is associated with *Gegenlicht*, is also, not simply a hopeless expression of despair. On the contrary, similar to Wáng Wéi's painting and poetry, by showing the traces of life, Celan reveals the true "flesh" through a handshake, and leaves abundant possibilities to be sought "in between" the counter-relational relationships.

Celan's poem "IN DEN FLÜSSEN" presents a mode of dialogue that is at the same time impossible and deeply rooted in earthly phenomena, expressed through the shadows. Investigating such a dialogical mode fundamentally reveals the other side of phenomenon that illuminates the condition of dialogue, and the complexity of the immanent Other. However, the potential of such impossible dialogue would still remain hypothetical without an encounter. In fact, a similar phenomenological investigation on the "void" that is en-lighten-ed by *Gegenlicht* is also an as yet unrecognized feature of Wáng Wéi's poetics, which is obscured by casting his poems simply into a Buddhist framework. Encountering Wáng Wéi's quatrain "Lù Zhài" at this particular site, under the phenomenological guidance that we have received from analyzing Celan's poem "IN DEN FLÜSSEN", I intend to unpack the "impossibilities" and "hermeticism" of Wáng Wéi's arguably best known poem, "Lù Zhài" (鹿柴, Deer Grove), in order to show how Wáng Wéi's simple, lucid language achieves a similar effect of creating an open horizon of

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[314] I borrowed this phrase from Lawrence Hass, for his lucid account on Levinas' criticism of "totality" in prevailing philosophy, and a comparison with Merleau-Ponty's notion "Flesh", see Hass 2008: 112-122.

meaning through a seemingly impossible dialogue. But in this case, this dialogue is more specified in an inquiry on cross-cultural translation, and the translations of this specific poem provide a unique chance to investigate the very translatability that contributes to our inquiry on the condition of comparison.

47   "Lù Zhài" ("Deer Grove")

鹿柴   Deer Grove

空山不見人   On empty hill no one is seen

但聞人語響   Barely a sound of someone's murmured words

返景入深林   Sunlight[315] returns, breaks through the deepest woods

復照青苔上   Once more a light on mossy green

(Zhào 1972 Vol.1: 243)

47.1   Previous reception of the poem: especially, translation

This poem has been widely translated into Western languages. Eliot Weinberger and Octavio Paz published a compilation of *Nineteen Ways of Looking at Wang Wei* in 1987, which

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[315] The Chinese character *jǐng* 景 (light) can also mean *yǐng* 影 (shadow). Here, I follow its more common meaning for this particular context.

collects and comments on 21 versions of the poem's English and French translations.[316] Since

this publication, Wilis and Tony Barnstones, cooperating with Xu Haixin, published yet another

attempt. There are, also, scholarly "translations" by Wai-Lim Yip, Marsha Wagner and Pauline

Yu, among which Burton Watson's translation is considered among the best. Compared to the

frequency of its translations, the study of the poem is much rarer, examples appeared in Wagner

and Yu's early studies that focus on Wáng Wéi's Zen Buddhist influence reflected in "empty

mountain" (Wagner 1975: 105-106) and his "persistent affirmation of the limits of sight" (Yu

1980: 167). In a comparative reading from the perspective that we have developed through

exploring the poetics of "impossible dialogue", the following analysis of Wáng Wéi's poem "Lù

Zhài" further inquires into the unique polysemy of the notion *kōng*, which formulates a

phenomenological counterpart with the interplay between light and shadow in the poem that

illuminates the "world". In particular, the impossible dialogicity of this poem is especially

manifested in its history of being translated into Western languages, which shows the potential of

such impossible, cross-cultural dialogue, through an investigation on the very idea of

translatability, which in fact effectively displays the complexity of the phenomenon with a

"returning" light.

47.2   A textual landscape of impossibilities: en-*lighten*-ment through *kōng*

Similar to Wáng Wéi's other two poems discussed in the previous chapters, the textual

landscape of "Deer Grove" involves relationships that are not a dichotomy, but complementary

categories within a poetic cosmos:

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[316] In the "Epilogue" of the book, Octavio Paz adds two more translations.
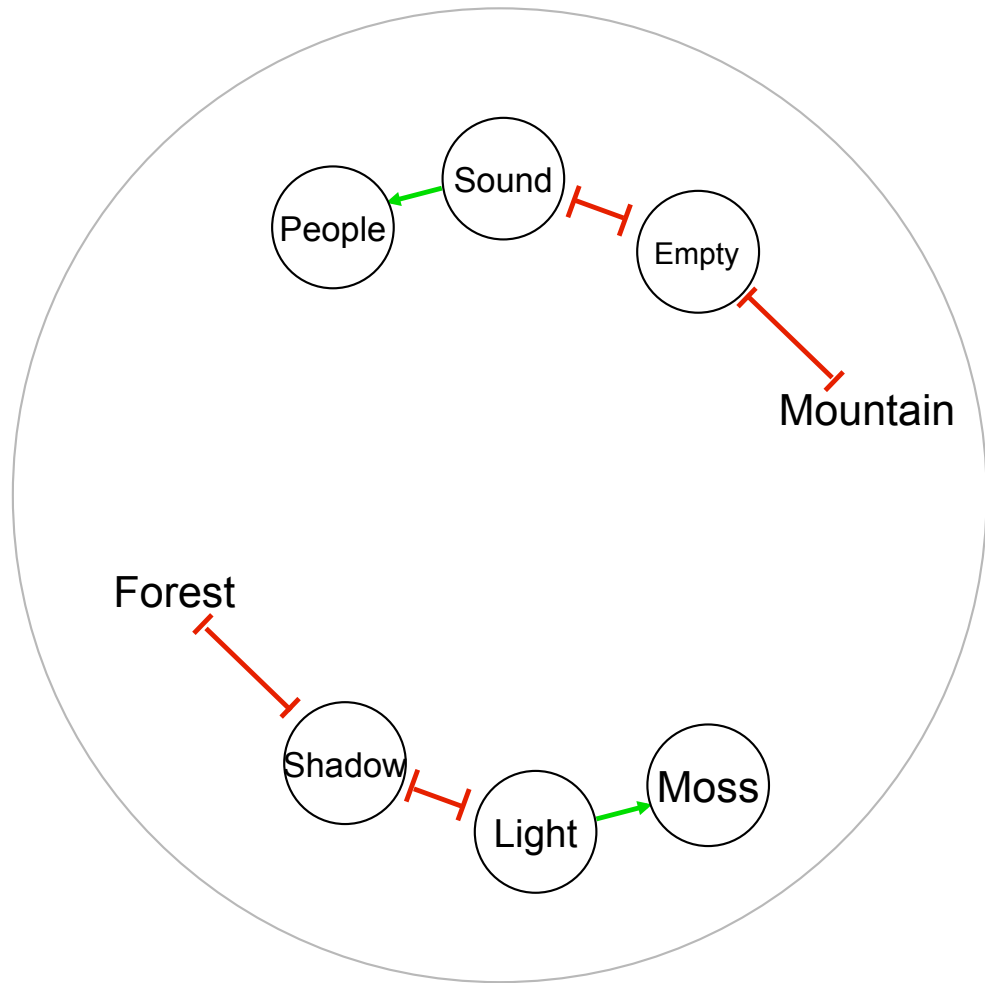
Figure 15. Poetic Landscape of "Lù Zhài". This textual landscape conceptualizes the elements and relationships of the poem. The dashed line between the mountain and forest spatial domain indicates complementarity, not dichotomy. This principle of compatible counterparts is reflected in the centrosymmetric arrangement of living entities (moss-persons), physical phenomena (light-sound), logical entailments (shadow-emptiness), whereas the green arrow indicates a supporting relationship between moss and light, respectively persons and sound; red lines indicate contradictions or failed entailments.

Thus the poem's textual landscape reveals the potential interactions between mountain and forest, silence and sound, nature and person, shadow and light, but set in a series of contrasts: the lightest emptiness vs. the heaviest mass of mountain; the silence surrounding the mountain *vs.* people's voices in the mountain; the returning sunset *vs.* the deep dark forest; the life of green moss *vs.* the absence of human being. Neither these contrasts, nor the intrinsic impersonality of

the poetic voice, are perceived as hindrance to silent dialogue. They are rather its very precondition. Readers' attention passes from the empty mountain, echoing with human voices, to the deep forest and its silent growth of life, during a literally "en-lightening" sunset: a tranquil yet vital microcosmos that reflects Chinese aesthetics and a philosophy of "blandness" (*dàn* 淡),[317] the ultimate taste of all tastes,[318] while also questioning any literal meaning that may at first seem to be hinted at by its simple language. Here, once again, the deceptive simplicity of Wáng Wéi's language invents a poetics that is attuned to the ultimate mystery of every-day life and resists to be pinned down by a single perspective.[319] By questioning the ultimate meaning of the words, the poem subtly interrupts the proceeding of dialogue, or any possible unity with nature that is taken for granted through Wáng Wéi's apparently simple wording.

47.3   Ambiguity: *kōng shān* (*empty mountain*) etc.

For example, the extraordinary contra-position in the phrase *empty mountain* (*kōng shān* 空山) oscillates between "emptiness" and all the weight and mass of "mountain". As Wagner points out, in any literal sense an "empty mountain" is inconceivable (Wagner 1975: 105): how

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[317] The Chinese word *dàn* 淡 could mean "insipid; tasteless, flavourless, dull, lonely etc", its German equivalent is "*geschmackloss, fade; blaß, wässerig, einsam* etc." (Kubin 2001: 29). The character is difficult to translate, since *dàn* 淡 cannot simply be taken as lack of any distinctive flavor. For a recent detailed study on the Chinese aesthetics of "blandness", see Jullien 2004.

[318] For this Chinese characteristic "taste", François Jullien writes: "Isn't what had been judged 'insipid' from a speculative standpoint (that is, the Hegelian standpoint) thus revealed as the most savory? We see here how a characterization that seemed at first blush decidedly bland (and therefore unworthy of our extended consideration) can give rise to the richest variations and the farthest-reaching applications. Now meaning can never again be conceived as closed and fixed but remains open and accessible [...]" (Jullien 2004: 33).

[319] Scholars in general relate Wáng Wéi's stylistic "simplicity" and "blandness" to his predecessor, the Jìn 晉 dynasty poet Táo Qiǎn 陶潛 (365–427). However, reading their poems closely tells different connotations of "simplicity" and "blandness" that are due to the two poets' different poetics.

could one imagine a mountain to be "empty"? *Kōng shān* is such an oxymoron that adds one more layer of polysemy immanent in the notion of *kōng*. Indeed, the extraordinary combination lurking in the "common" language *kōng shān* questions the prevailing understanding of void and uniquely presents the poet's personal perception based upon his sensitivity towards "*kōng*" within the mountains. One might be tempted to say that the phrase *empty mountain* refers to the Buddhist idea that the distinction between the lightest emptiness and the most massive weight is actually an illusion, but indeed, a void mountain could simply be the poet's accurate perception that reflects and intertwines with his mind.

Or – given that the phrases *empty mountain* (*kōng shān* 空山) and *returning light* (*fǎn jǐng* 返景) are both in couplet-initial position – is there some kind of semantic relationship between them? Well, if there is, it – whatever it may be – resists unambiguous readings: the subtle interactions between the light of sunset, the shadows among the trees and the green moss beneath, formulate the core of the poet's own silent conversation with nature, yet the lingering taste and the impossible meaning of the words invites readers' participation in the poet's questioning and exploring of the conceptual yet tangible "void" that is associated with both "emptiness" and "mountain".

Similar to Wáng Wéi's other poems, tranquillity here is a ruse that masks conflicts and contradictions. Why are there human voices on a mountain that is said to be empty? How does light enter a forest that is deep, dark and wild? And where is the poet himself in all this? Is he on the mountain? Is he in the forest? Or is he not there at all? Could he be simply living in a world of his own imagination? He seems to be present everywhere and anywhere, but also nowhere– a "*U-topia*" that is as remote as Celan's "*nördlich der Zukunft*". Such impersonality, indeed, reflects an ambiguous relationship between mankind as a part of the natural world and mankind

as separate from nature. On the one hand, there is an unmistakable harmonious congruity; on the other hand, that which is outside the words remains inaccessible, and creates a hidden "impossibility" of this "natural" dialogical relationship between man and Nature.Thinly concealed, then, beneath a literal level which may at first seem quite accessible (this poem is read by children in Chinese primary school), Wáng Wéi's invitation to readers is to be maximally receptive and maximally creative. His polysemic images of natural scenes – the "empty mountain", "returning light (and/or shadow)", "green moss", as well as the acoustic effect of "murmurs" – cannot be resolved unambiguously.

Light presented through shadows, sound presented through silence, human traces presented through "empty mountains"— such possibilities of the impossible are crystallized in the central theme of the poem: *kōng*, which, here, in particular points to a spiritual space however rooted in the very nearness of the presence. The human whispers define the surrounding silence of the mountains, and in fact it is *not* the "whispers" that are heard so much as the very silence and emptiness, which, through the returning sunset, sheds light on the green moss, whose "greenness" is not only transcendental, as it might be through a Buddhist interpretation, but also literally perceptible.[320] Indeed, such greenness which could be perceived with abundant hues and shades when situated in the organic environment of the deep forests in the mountains, recalls Graham Parkes' description of the landscape in a Japanese rock garden: "The moss, together with the lichen that clothes the rocks in varying thickness, offers a remarkable array of colors:

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[320] The "green" colour of the moss, in Chinese *qīng* 青, normally interpreted as "bluish green", as James Seaton interprets the color *qīng* from the possibility of a spectrum and multiple dimensions: "It can be any color in the blue-green range of the spectrum, and in poetry it is usually used in the description of mountain scenery and associated with colors ranging from bright blues and greens to their most muted tones, including black and the 'color' of clear water in motion" (Seaton 2000: 131).

browns, dark, grays, mauves, oranges, and many shades of sometimes iridescent green" (Berthier and Parkes 2000: 86).[321]

47.4   Shadow: *fǎn jǐng* (*returning light*)

Interestingly ambiguous is also the returning light with its own shadow, and both meanings are "jointly" reflected in the single Chinese character 景 with two different meanings in classical Chinese, "sunlight" and "shadow", today pronounced *jǐng/yǐng* respectively. Indeed, through Wáng Wéi's perception, light and shadow are formulated in an organic inseparable intertwining, which in fact reflects the black and white aesthetics that dominates his innovative "inkwash" (*shuǐ mò* 水墨) painting. This "light", embodied with its own shadows, is in fact also a unique form of *Gegenlicht*, which is shown here as "returning light"– a light that is dim and fragile, a piece of "twilight", yet most eloquently illuminates the colourful and alive shades and shadows of the "green moss", which does not only gives the depth of the landscape, but to the life itself, which is "alive".

Such aesthetics of light and shadows is in fact most powerfully developed later in the traditional Japanese architecture and Japanese aesthetics. One of the powerful presentations of this aesthetics of shadows is Jun'ichirō Tanizaki's essay "In Praise of Shadows", where, for example, he presents the traditional Japanese aesthetic that is centered on "shadows" through the traditional Japanese architectures and life style (Tanizaki 1977: 17-20). In the Chinese tradition, Wáng Wéi's poetic approach to "shadows" significantly deviates from his renowned predecessor

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[321] In fact, Wáng Wéi's sense of "colour" becomes one of the quintessential "Chinese" influences that Ezra Pound adopted to his epic- poetic composition: The Cantos. For a study on Wáng Wéi's influence on Pound, see Zhaoming Qian 1993, especially page 273 for the influence of "color and form".

Táo Yuān Míng 陶淵明 (365－427), who wrote a sequence of three poems – "Body", "Shadow" and "Soul" titled "Xíng Yǐng Shén" 《形影神》 – of which the first is:

《形贈影》	Body to Shadow[322]
天地長不沒，山川無改時。	Heaven and earth go on forever; mountains and rivers remain unchanged.
草木得常理，霜露榮悴之。	The plants follow nature's own course, being withered by frost and revived by dew.
謂人最靈智，獨復不如茲。	Man is said to be the wisest of all, yet he knows not such simple laws.
適見在世中，奄去靡歸期。	For a passing moment he is seen here, once he is gone he is seen no more.
奚覺無一人，親識豈相思。	He seems to have cleared the world of one too many, of whom his friends will have a clouded memory.
但餘平生物，舉目情淒洏。	The things he once handled still stand, thus causing sad, warm tears to follow.
我無騰化術，必爾不復疑。	This substance of mine commands no magic; things are what they are; so question not.
願君取吾言，得酒莫苟辭。	I wish you would take my words to heart, and drink, while offered, and say not 'nay'.

Contrary to Wáng Wéi's sensibility to the color and texture of the phenomenon "shadow", Táo Yuān Míng presents "shadow" as a metaphor of the transience of life, which needs to be transcended through a particular attitude to life, and for him (as for many poets and scholars after him), "drinking" is one of the ways to achieve such transcendence. But for Wáng Wéi, shadow is

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[322] Translation is taken from Fāng 1981: 168-170.

not simply a metaphor for some abstract metaphysical meaning: it is rather a metonymy of the very existence of *Gegenlicht* that illuminates a piece of the phenomenal world.

47.5 Metrical pattern: reconstructing the canonical

In addition to the simple words, the meter of the poem (Figure 16) also lures the empty, the void and the unspeakable to speak itself, and can be heard only by attentive ears, maintaining, as it still does, its silent poise and refusing to be appropriated.
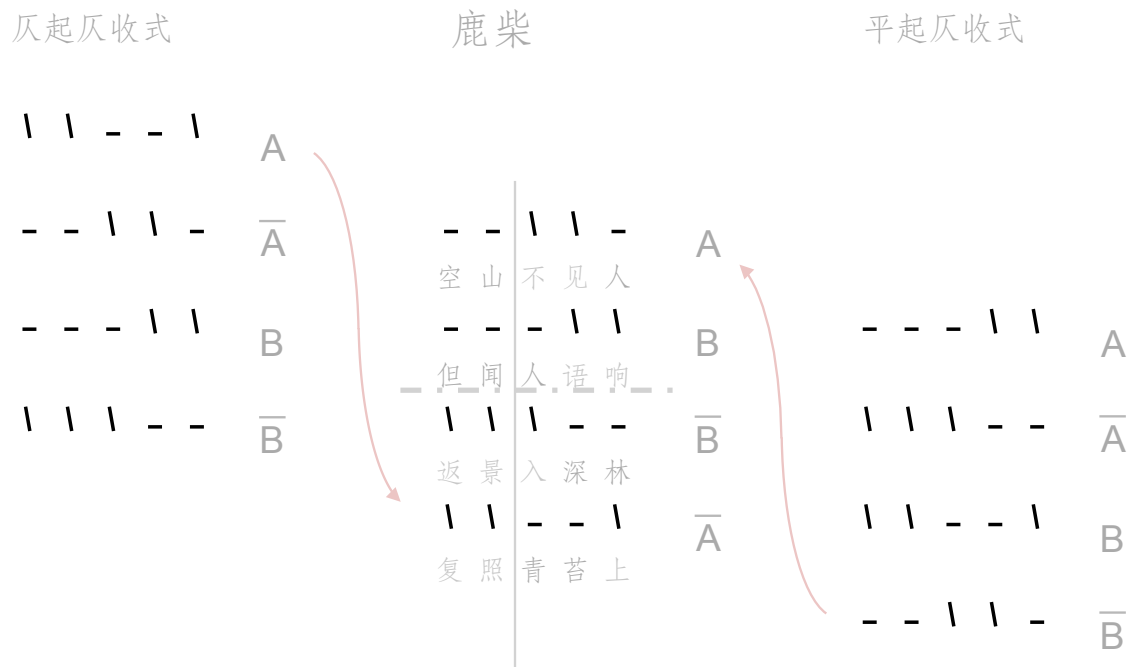
Figure 16. Metric Pattern of "Lù Zhài". Quatrain canonical meters are compared to "Lù Zhài" at the centre. The meter of level and deflected tone is shown with horizontal and slanted lines respectively above each character. An axis of anti-symmetry is drawn after the second line making this a form with inherent reflection. Relationships between metric lines and their inversion are labeled with characters and bars: A/Ā and B/B̄ (note that these are meters, not rhymes). Canonicalized forms of the meter are shown to the left and right. They both can be transformed into the form of "Lù Zhài" by permuting a single line. Caesuras fall after every second character, indicated with a vertical line.

Two features which all three patterns have in common are a *caesura* after the second syllable of every line, and the fact that the first two syllables of every line have the same tonal quality. But in order to arrive at the actual meter of "Deer Grove" from either of the canonized patterns, one line has to be moved, as it were, in the direction I have indicated by the arrows. Another structural feature of "Deer Grove" is that, instead of the canonical patterns' paired couplets, Wáng Wéi splits his poem with an axis of anti-symmetry after line 2, as I have marked in Figure 4. Lines 1-2 and lines 3-4 are each other's chiastic reflection, as I have indicated with the letters "A" and "B" plus the bars. At the lexical and syntactical levels too, Wáng Wéi's symmetries between even and odd lines are much stronger than those within the canonical couplet pairs. Likewise, his rhymes fall on both even and odd lines, and involve not only long level tones but deflected tones as well: "*rén* 人" with "*lín* 林",[323] and "*xiǎng* 響" with "*shàng* 上".

Marsha Wagner has suggested that Wáng Wéi, by rearranging the order of lines in one of the canonical patterns (the left-hand pattern in Figure 4) from 1-2-3-4 to 4-1-2-3, in fact produces a "twisted quatrain" (*ǎo jué* 拗絕), deliberately bending the set form in order to create an effect that is "more circular", and more suitable to his poetic purpose (1975: 108).[324] And indeed, his poem's formally achieved impressions of mirroring and self-reflection are in striking congruence with the meaning of the words. Wáng Wéi's poetics here, rather than being fully constrained by traditional formal considerations, is also a poetics intrinsic to this particular poem. For example,

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[323] "人" (rén) and "林" (lín) appear less of a rhyme to the modern reader, but the pronunciation in classic Chinese was closer.

[324] Such "bending" would have been hardly permissible, but here Wáng Wéi writes in the "ancient quatrain" (*gǔ jué* 古絕) form that is distinguished by its relatively "free" style. After Wáng Wéi, following the strict requirements of the imperial exams, Chinese literati composed by consulting "rhyme books" (*yùn shū* 韻書) for prosody (Wáng Lì 2003: 4-5).

whereas a canonically regular quatrain would require an alternation within couplets between "full words" and "empty words"[325] lexically and syntactically arranged "in an absolutely symmetrical pattern" (Chéng 1982: 54), Wáng Wéi, in both his odd and even lines, has more flexible patterning, with symmetry before the *caesuras*, but with subtle post-caesural variations. By using empty words in different line positions, such as "not" (*bù* 不) in the middle of the first line ("*full/full/empty/full/full*"), "but "(*dà*n 但) at the beginning of the second line ("*empty/full/full/full/full*"), and "again" (*fù* 復) [326] and "on" (*shàng* 上) at beginning and end of the last line respectively ("*empty/full/full/full/empty*"), he, once again, implies lurking tensions within this painterly poem's visual and imaginative serenity.

Amongst all the tranquillity, such words, so placed, are slightly startling and disturbing. Táng poems are usually very carefully composed, and "Deer Grove" is no exception. Yet here the be-all and end-all it is not a strictly regulated symmetry, but precisely such de-fossilizing small surprises, which so pointedly carry a contrast between the seemingly quiet world of nature and a potential restlessness. The metric and the syntactic structure of Wáng Wéi's poem thus suggests a vital, pregnant, and living silence, in accordance with the polysemy of *kōng*, which is anything but sterile.

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[325] For the definitions of "full words" and "empty words", see Chapter One.

[326] In terms of semantics, these "empty words" are not truly "empty". For example, Jerome Seaton points out the possible connection between *fù* 復 and the twenty fourth hexagram (*fù guà* 復卦) in the *Book of Change*, which indicates a piece of cosmology that is dependent upon a special alternation of *yīng* 陰 and *yáng* 陽, where the symbol of *yáng* appears at the bottom, as if the "returning light". For a detailed analysis, see Seaton 2000: 132.

47.6   The possibilities of impossible dialogue: translation and comparison

Translation, perhaps, is the best example that reflects the potentials and possibilities that are unfolded through a seemingly non-dialogical relationship, especially since here we confront an encounter between two languages that do not have relations. Wolfgang Kubin describes his Chinese-German translational practise as creating "the voice of shadows" (*Stimme des Schattens*).[327] According to Kubin, who claims that he who only speaks his mother tongue does not "know" his mother tongue, translation "is no longer about a simple forging of the words, but about a spiritual comprehension, because after all we have arrived here in the philosophical, aesthetic, and mystic realm" (Kubin 2001: 31).[328]

Such invitation and challenge are very urgent for anyone who tries to translate "Deer Grove" into another language. This much is clear from Weinberger and Paz' compilation – a mini-history, in its way, of the western reception of ancient Chinese poetry. Confronted with Wáng Wéi's masked, rather than naked strangeness, a translator has to go beyond the stage of representing literal-lexical meanings. The aim must be to find kinds of transposition that preserve the poem's ambiguity and internal tension, while still recreating its flowing musicality, and the harmonious, paradoxical "insipid" (*dàn* 淡) aesthetics of the relationships intimated between

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[327] Kubin quotes Gadamer's phrase "Wunder der Muttersprache" (wonder of mother tongue), but also emphasizes the significance of the encounter (*Begegnung*) between mother tongue and other languages by quoting Schuldt: "He who only masters one language, masters no language" (*wer nur eine Sprache beherrsche, gar keine Sprache beherrsche*) see Kubin 2001: 27-28.

[328] "*Es geht nicht mehr um ein einfaches Erschließen von Worten, sondern um ein geistiges Ergründen, denn schließlich sind wir hier im philosophischen, im ästhetischen, im mystischen Bereich angelangt.*"

man and nature.[329] Translation, in this respect, is an approach that shows the complexity and

thickness of "the same", i.e. the multivalent aspects of the phenomenon in the original language,

which is based upon the idea of comparison that we have explored so far.

In my own translation as printed above, I have chosen four iambic feet – in reference to

the metre of English hymns – in order to translate the quatrain's first and last lines, and one

dactyl plus four trochees for the second and third lines, so recreating the mirror effect that the

original's metric pattern so skilfully intensifies. As in the original, *caesuras* are aligned after the

first two feet of each line, and rhymes carry the "reflection" in the original ABBA scheme. In

order to translate the original's ambiguity and conceptual contradiction, I have chosen the

singular form "empty hill" rather than the plural. What gave me most food for thought was the

ambiguity of *enter* (*rù* / 入) in the third line, which has been translated in many different ways.

Even if we assume light, or sunset, "enters" the deep forest only in a metaphorical sense, what is

the significance of such a metaphor? James J. Y. Liu translates the third line as "The reflected

sunlight pierces the deep forest" (in Weinberger and Paz 1987: 20), which gives a radical and

very striking impression of the sunset's sheer force. But the light is perhaps even stronger in the

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[329] For a flavour of the translations of this poem, consider:

–	On the empty mountains, no one can be seen,/but human voices are heard to resound./ The reflected sunlight pierces the deep forest/ and falls again upon the mossy ground.(James Liu, 20)
Deer Fence	Empty hills, no one in sight,/ only the sound of someone talking;/ late sunlight enters the deep wood,/ shining over the green moss again. (Burton Watson, 24)
Deer Enclosure	Empty mountain: no man is seen, / but voices of men are heard. / sun's reflection reaches into the woods / and shines upon the green moss. (Wai-lim Yip, 26)
Deer Park	Hills empty, no one to be seen / we hear only voices echoed – / with light coming back into the deep wood / the top of the green moss is lit again.(G. W. Robinson 28)
The Form of the Deer	So lone seem the hills; there is no one in sight there. / But whence is the echo of voices I hear? / The rays of the sunset pierce slanting the forest. / And in their reflection green mosses appear.

<div align="right">(W. J. B. Fletcher, 8)</div>

French version by G. Margouliès (Margouliès 1948: 373): "*Le soleil qui pénètre au fond de la forêt*" ("The sun that penetrates to the depths of the forest"), which arguably conveys something closer to the rational spirit of the European Enlightenment than to the peaceful contemplation of a poet in eighth century China. Octavio Paz, drawing on his own experience of the Buddhist notion of "illumination", came to believe that the light in "Deer Grove" comes "from the Western Paradise" (Weinberger and Paz 1987: 33). So having first written "*Por los ramajes la luz rompe*" ("Through the branches the light breaks" 30), he later changed this to "*La luz poniente rompe entre las ramas*" ("The western light breaks through the branches" 33). This disambiguation, albeit supported by Wáng Wéi's supposedly Buddhist background, is thus confined by that presumed "religious" perspective, and thereby limits the reach of the original poem's abundant polysemy created by the "language" itself. Yet if detached from any specific religious symbolism, a translation of "*rù*" 入 as "to break through", when associated with the "returning light", does, I hope, convey something of the line's tangible yet impenetrable connotations – the quatrain's most significant line of all, it seems to me.

The debates about how to translate Wáng Wéi's quatrains will probably (and hopefully) never cease. Even after presenting their collection of twenty-one possible translations, Eliot Weinberger and Octavio Paz (1987: 51) then embarked on yet another dispute, this time about the poem's last word. Does *on* (*shàng* 上) really mean "above, top, up, on"? Or does it mean to "rise" or "ascend", an ancient meaning lost to modern Chinese? It is the charm of Wáng Wéi's intrinsic "counter-dialogical" poetics that a definite answer will never be possible. There can only be questions, and it is more important to question the questions themselves, as also with the poetry of Paul Celan.

Such attitude of "questioning" is what Celan explicitly states in the *Meridian* speech to be an attitude of "*radikale In-Frage-Stellung*" (radical questioning), which he considers to be the path of poetry: "A radical questioning that must be directed back to all of today's poetry, when it will further question?" [330] It is also such questioning that unfolds the potentials of such seemingly impossible dialogues between cultures and authors whose relationships are not pre-given. Comparing Celan's poem "IN DEN FLÜSSEN" with Wáng Wéi's poem "Lù Zhài" is to illuminate a new perspective on the very source of light, i.e. the complexity of luminosity, for us to see, *conceptually*, the possibilities of seemingly impossible dialogue. Translation, from this perspective, is a means to, *tangibly*, reveal the potentials from such impossibility, to play out the dialectic between light and shadow, and to illuminate the other side of the phenomenon. In this sense, translation is a concrete way to present the condition of comparison, and to illustrate the "thickness" of "the same".

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[330] "*[...] Eine In-Frage-Stellung, zu der alle heutige Dichtung zurück muß, wenn sie weiterfragen will?*" (GWIII: 193)

Conclusion
Comparison: A *U-topia* of Not-knowing

48   A phenomenological approach of comparison vs. the traditional "comparative method"

This project inquires on the condition of comparison through a comparative process. If comparison is a method to establish meaningful relationships,[331] the condition of comparison is not an abstract conviction of equality, but the concrete experience of *Begegnung* (en-counter), meeting with adversaries. The ground of comparison is not comprised by the similarities and differences that are seen as pre-given facts, but a complexity of "the same", or the "thickness" of "the same", perceived through encounter. Such an approach to comparison is phenomenological, as it applies Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of body to establish a new methodological approach to comparison instead of adopting the much criticized "comparative method" which would be based upon a postulated abstract universality, and appropriated by a colonial impulse. This phenomenological approach, therefore, perceives comparison as a phenomenon that constitutes fresh meanings, rather than simply a means to achieve a certain goal. Comparison is, therefore, a living and lived experience between literary texts and establishes relationships that have previously been considered impossible.

Such a phenomenological approach has relevance for current debates in literary criticism, in particular in the field of Celan studies. Seeing the poem as a phenomenon that lives its own life that is detached from the author – as Celan himself insisted, and as other critics such as Szondi and Gadamer followed, – means not taking the author's biographical and historical

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[331] See, for example: "[...] the job of the comparatist is to invent new relations among literary works (and relations with things that have not been previously classed among literary works)" (Saussy 2011: 60).

information as the necessary (pre-) condition to understand the poem, but to participate with the poem in an open horizon that requires encountering the Other. Comparison is a way to the Other, to accept the Other with an attentive listening, no matter how strange, exotic and uncanny it might be.

On the other hand, this phenomenological method does not reject historical or formal analysis of the poem; it emphasizes an intuitive comprehension of the internal logic of the poem, which in turn suggests perspectives that guide the application of historical and formal approaches. Through discerning the way(s) of seeing the phenomenon rather than taking the phenomenon as representation of some external reality, literary criticism, in particular comparative study, does not substitute historical, cultural and linguistic influences as the major focus for a most careful reading of the poem itself, but chooses them as a means of preventing errors, as background information that contributes to the complexity of the phenomenon in a supportive way.

The poem itself is always bigger than the phenomenon appears, which implies that the opportunities of meaningful encounter are bounded only by our willingness to engage with the text. Such encounter is certainly not arbitrary or "anything goes", it is determined by specific *Ort* (site) where encounter takes place, a spacilized temporality that is characterized as *Gegenwart* (here and now). Thus every poem is seen as a piece of *Handwerk* (work of the hand), their encounter is due to an awareness of such temporality. The consequence of such encounter is *Licht* (light), which does not focus on the result of enlightenment, but seen as a process of en-lighten-ing. It is based upon discerning the source of light, a *Gegenlicht* (backlight) that illuminates the perspective from which a certain phenomenon is to be seen. *Gegenlicht* also shows the greyness of shadows, the possibilities of the impossible dialogues, which suggests

comparison, manifested in particular through translations, is a way to unfold such potentials from the impossible.

49 *Begegnung*, *Ort* and *Licht*: contrapuntal dialogues between Paul Celan and Wáng Wéi

These significant concepts for a phenomenological comparison such as *Begegnung*, *Ort* and *Licht* are self-referentially reflected in the themes of Celan's poems "Du Darfst", "Mit den Verfolgten", and "In den Flüssen", respectively. Through an encounter between "Du Darfst" and "Niǎo Mǐng Jiàn", "Mit den Verfolgten" and "Xīn Yí Wū", "In den Flüssen" and "Lù Zhài", we can also correspondingly discover these themes in Wáng Wéi's poems through a contrapuntal dialogue. And above all, both Celan and Wáng Wéi's non-metaphorical approach to poetic language is a basic motif that facilitates such encounter. If this "non-metaphorical" feature is the common poetic feature that both poets share albeit without cultural and historical influences on each other whatsoever, their differences are perceived as necessary threads that are woven into a tapestry that shows the complexity or the thickness of "the same". Such sameness is not an abstract quality as a "common denominator", but having the "thickness" as a living being. This "same" is a gathering without sacrificing the uncanny features of the Other, and it is a form of comparison that is deeply embedded in the basic pattern of living beings. According to Merleau-Ponty, such primordial comparison is how we see the world as a living body, through a "binocular" vision, which cannot be simply doubled through two monocular ones.

50 Translation and comparison: a phenomenological approach to Wáng Wéi's poem "Luán Jiā Lài" ("Luán's Falls")

Translation is a significant means that we have already applied in the previous chapters. In previous chapters, we have "translated" Celan's concepts such as "*Geheimnis der Begegnung*"

(secret of encounter), "*Handwerk*", "*das Morgen-Gestern*" into the key elements of Wáng Wéi's

"tiān jī" 天機 (divine secret), "*Huà Xué Mì Jué*" 《畫學祕訣》 ("The Secret Ways of

Painting"), and "shén lóng" 神龍 (divine dragon), respectively. In discussing how to reveal the

potential of the impossible dialogue through *Gegenlicht*, we not only analysed the dialectic of

light and shadow in Wáng Wéi's poem "Lù Zhài", but also discussed the translations of this

poem.

In fact, translation, when it is motivated by a phenomenological approach of comparison,

in particular renders the multivalent effect of comparison visible and tangible, especially when it

is shown through our innovative visual grammar of the textual landscape. Let us now turn to the

poem that I briefly mentioned in Chapter 2, which has evoked scholarly interests on the debates

about the question of "pure phenomenon" in Chinese aesthetics:

颯颯秋雨中   A rustling, swirling autumn rain,

淺淺石溜瀉   cascades and spills on slippery stone

跳波自相濺   and skipping wavelets spurt and splash,

白鷺驚復下   startling an egret, rushing on.

(Zhào 1972 vol. I: 247)

The poem has been the focus of recent scholarship in the English-speaking world. For example, according to Marsha Wagner, the entire scene is as if woven by a contrast of the "horizontal" spontaneously clashing waves and the "vertical" sudden movement of the white egret, with the rain and streams in the background, as she translates:

Rapids by the Luan Home

Swish, swish, the wind in the autumn rain,

Lightly, lightly, the stream slides over stones.

Leaping waves suddenly splash against each other:

A white egret is startled, and then descends again.

(Wagner 1975: 43)

Similarly, Stephen Owen considers "an authenticity of unmediated perception" (Owen 1981: 31) that arises prior to cognitive knowledge, which conceals and reveals some "hidden" truth that is veiled by Wáng Wéi's stylistic simplicity, as Owen observes: "what was said was no longer necessarily all that was meant, and the surface mood might not be the real mood" (39). For him, "Luán Jiā Lài" represents the kind of poems "that are visually complete but intellectually incomplete, which tease the reader to decipher some hidden truth" (ibid.). Such is his translation:

Rapids by the Luan Trees

The moaning of wind in autumn rain,

Swift water trickling over stones.

Leaping waves strike one another —

A white egret startles up, comes down again.

(Owen 1981: 39)

Wai-lim Yip, on the other hand, points out the merit of Wáng Wéi's poetry as being able to present "Pure Phenomena": "In Wang Wei, the scenery speaks and acts. The poet has become, even before the act of composition, Phenomenon itself and can allow the things in it to emerge as they are without being contaminated by intellectuality" (Yip 1972: vi). Pauline Yu in her recent study, however, questions the "depth" of Yip's categorization of "pure phenomenon": "what would a world of Pure Phenomenon be like? It would presumably be one of surface rather than depth, of the transparent and immediate, rather than the opaque and deferred" (Yu 2008: 181). And her translation of "Luán Jiā Lài" reads:

Rapids by the Luan Home

Gusting winds in the autumn rain:

Shallow ripples trickle over rocks.

Leaping waves naturally splash each other:

A white egret, startled, descends again.

(Yu 2008: 180)

It is noticeable that such reception and translation of Wáng Wéi's poem "Luán Jiā Lài" is a shift from the critical focus of the Chinese tradition that perceives Wáng Wéi as the poetic voice

of the Chán-Buddhist spirit. However, both Yu's criticism of "Pure Phenomenon" and Owen's

concept of "unmediated perception" regard phenomena as mere "surface" without "depth",

which is, in fact, a reflection of the "Western", in particular the Cartesian notion of

"phenomenon" that presumes a dichotomy between perception (appearance) and reality

(essence), the quintessential target of the phenomenological movement in twentieth century,

initiated by Edmund Husserl, and developed through Martin Heidegger and especially Maurice

Merleau-Ponty.
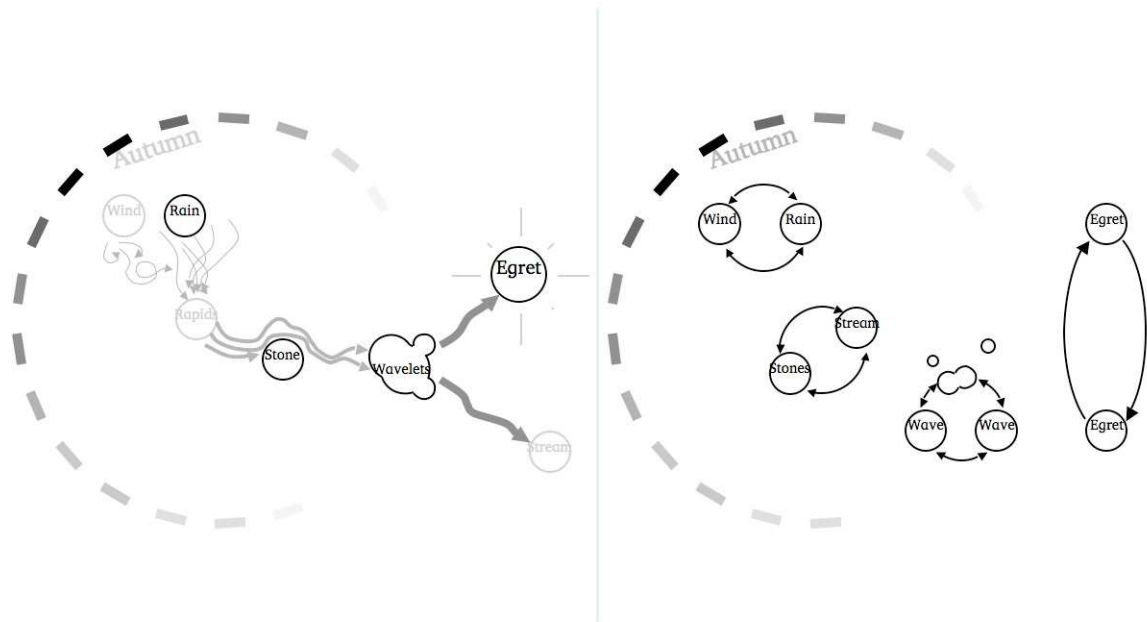
Figure 17. Juxtaposed Poetic Landscapes of the translations of "Luán Jiā Lài". The left figure presents the sequential features of my translation, and the right figure presents isolated episodes suggested by the previous translations. Both are valid readings.

Here I have applied this visual grammar to my translation, and to a consensus of the

previous translations. Whereas my translation seeks a unity of the flow of the stream from falling

as rain to rushing beyond perception, previous efforts rather take the lines of the poem as disconnected episodic events and emphasize their contrasts.

Contrary to the horizontal and vertical commotions of the wavelets (跳波) and the egret (白鷺), as previous translations have suggested, my interpretation sees the egret as an embodied poetic expression of the splashing wavelets that is integrated within the rain and the cascades, which signifies the internal life of the waters.

This interpretation is based on a specific understanding of the subject of 瀉 in the second line, and that of 下 in the last line. Although the Chinese grammatical word order seems to indicate the egret as the common subject for both "startling" (驚) and "down" (下); conceptually, the "skipping wavelets" (跳波) and the startled egret together function as complementary parts of one integrated vision, and suggest that 下 may refer to the falling of rain or cascades as well, not only to the egret. Thus I shift the subject in the English translation entirely to the water – "rushing on"–, leaving the egret in an almost peripheral, but all the more present role as the object of being startled by the water's pulse. Therefore, rather than the previous "A white egret startles up, comes down again", I translate: "startling an egret, rushing on".

All comparison is translation, and translation is also comparison. The same phenomenological principles apply. Here we have a striking example where the literal, grammatical translation into English falls short of the overall sensibility of the Chinese original. But if we focus on the phenomenon, not just the words, we may recognize this and adjust. In this sense we achieve Walter Benjamin's idea of "intention toward language" (*Intention auf die Sprache*). Peter Szondi points out how Celan followed this principle in his translation of Shakespeare's sonnet 105: "The concept of *significatio* pertains to the structure of language, to a

relationship whose two members...should not be assigned fixed names..." (Szondi 2003: 5). In other words, translations should not simply transpose lexical definitions of "names" between the two languages, but render the original poetic ambiguity all the more tangible, and through their co-existence with the original contribute to the phenomenon.

Far from denying the merits of previous translations, I am thus able to take advantage of the opportunities of translation. The comparison of the above two visions of the same scene makes a counterpointed superposition possible, which can be seen through the following textual landscape:
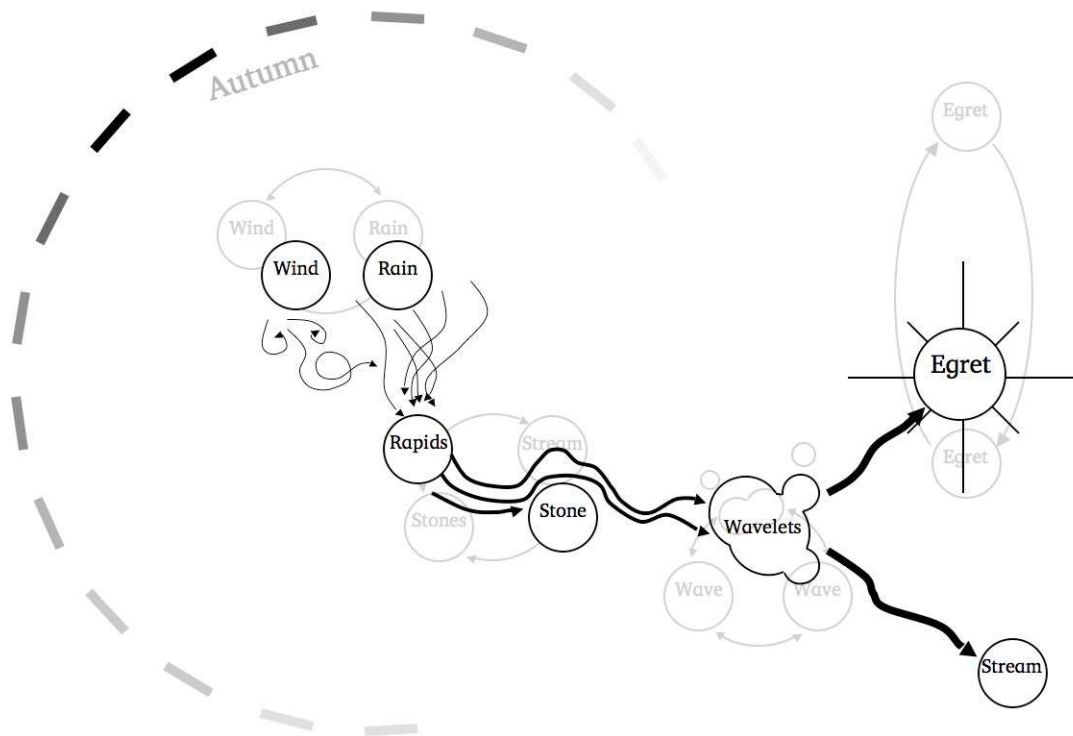

Figure 18. Poetic Landscape of the superposition of my and previous translations.

The landscapes render the phenomenological depth of Wáng Wéi's poem visible by simultaneously preserving the multiple dimensional possibilities suggested by the polyvalent

poetic language of the Chinese original. Such practise, however, is not simply to add a new variety of translation – a visual translation – to the existing ones, but provides a concrete example of how translation / comparison may not only conserve the profound meaning of the original, but also add to the phenomenon through its encounters with the incommensurable Other. Translation, in this sense, offers an instance of encounter that fundamentally challenges Heidegger's claim that "language is the house of Being", by which he insists that East Asian and Western cultures live in entirely different houses without the possibility of a true understanding (Heidegger 1959: 5). Rather it is an invitation for both readers and translators to not only move into the house of the Other, but to redecorate the houses, and to unfold inexhaustible meanings through comparing their own notes.

51   Comparison in "in-difference": a *U-topia*

After all, the condition of comparison that we have explored above is to present "the same" among the incommensurables' *In-difference*. As we have shown in the *Introduction*, by insisting on a distance from the author's biographical details, Szondi implies an intuitive grasp of such *In-difference* that is inherent in the poem ("DU LIEGST") "itself". The poem, although triggered by a visit to Berlin in winter and the historical event of the murder of Rosa Luxemburg und Karl Liebknecht, nevertheless transcends this kind of historical contingencies and reaches a site where one can deeply resonate with such sensibility of *In-difference* from an entirely different cultural milieu and various personal circumstances. On the other hand, according to Hamacher's interpretation of Celan's poem "TODTNAUBERG", Celan's poem illuminates a place of *U-topia*, the groundless ground of poetry and thinking, a place of non-where but deeply rooted in "here and now", a "*Waldwasen*" (woodmarsh), where each individual, like the "*Orchis*" (orchid) in "TODTNAUBERG", is juxtaposed in *in-difference*.

The phenomenological approach of comparison is not to take "difference" as the only norm of classification, thus it is not established upon a realm of "*heterotopia*", rather, it is on a *U-topia*, in its most original sense: out-of place, a non-where, a groundless ground that creates possibilities out of the impossible. Such *U-topia* reveals the site of encounter as a transformational place; a place where meaning grows and a place that is rooted in the earthly soil of ordinary life, but cannot be located or mapped, since it is infused into the transient *Augenblick* or *Gegenwart*. Comparison illuminates the significance of this specific idea of *U-topia*, in particular through establishing relationships from seemingly impossible dialogue.

52   A *U-topia* of Not-knowing: Wáng Wéi's "Táo Yuán Xíng" ("Song of Peach Blossom Spring")

Interestingly, such an idea of *U-topia* is also manifested in Wáng Wéi's poem "Táo Yuán Xíng" 《桃源行》 ("Song of Peach Blossom Spring"), which can be read as a counterpart of Celan's "TODTNAUBERG".

《桃源行》	Song of Peach Blossom Spring[332]
漁舟逐水愛山春，兩岸桃花夾去津。	The fisherman's boat follows the water; he loves spring in the mountains. On both banks peach flowers enclose the distant ford.
坐看紅樹不知遠，行盡青溪忽視人	Sitting he looks at the red trees, not knowing the distance. Traveling to the green creek's end he does not see men.
山口潛行始隈隩，山開曠望旋平陸。	At the mountain valley a hidden path begins to twist and turn. As the mountain opens, a broad view: suddenly flat land.

---

[332] Translation of this poem is taken from Yu 1977: 74.

遙看一處攢雲樹，近入千家散花竹。

From afar he looks at a whole expanse of gathered clouds and trees; He nears and enters— a thousand homes, scattered flowers and bamboos.

樵客初傳漢姓名，居人未改秦衣服。

Woodcutters have just passed on the name of the Han dynasty. The residents have not yet altered Ch'in dynasty clothes.

居人共住武陵源，還從物外起田園。

The residents lived together at Wu-ling Spring, And yet from beyond this world started fields and gardens.

月明松下房櫳靜，日出雲中雞犬喧。

The moon shines beneath the pines: houses and windows at peace. The sun rises within the clouds; cocks and dogs clamor.

驚聞俗客爭來集，競引還家問都邑。

Startled to hear of the worldly guest, they rush and come together, vying to bring him to their homes to ask about the cities.

平明閭巷掃花開，薄暮漁樵乘水入。

At dawn on the village lanes, they sweep the flowers away. Toward night fishermen and wood cutter enter along the water.

初因避地去人間，及至成仙遂不還。

At first to escape the place of troubles they left the midst of men. Then, it's heard, they became immortal and so did not return.

峽裏誰知有人事，世中遙望空雲山。

Amid these gorges who knows of the existence of human affairs? Within the world from afar they gaze at empty cloudy mountains.

不疑靈境難聞見，塵心未盡思鄉縣。

Not suspecting this ethereal realm is hard to hear of and see, is dusty heart has not yet ceased to think of his native district.

出洞無論隔山水，辭家終擬長遊衍。	He goes out of the grotto, not considering the barrier of mountains and waters, then leaves his family, finally planning along leisurely journey.
自謂經過舊不迷，安知峰壑今來變。	He tells himself that what he passed through before cannot be lost. How can he know that peaks and valleys when he comes today have changed?
當時只記入山深，青溪幾曲到雲林。	Of that time all he remembers is entering mountains deep. How many times does the green creek arrive at a cloudy forest?
春來遍是桃花水，不辨仙源何處尋。	When spring comes, everywhere are peach-flowered waters; Not distinguishing the fairy spring, where can he seek?

At first glance, Wáng Wéi's poem is derived from a short narrative and a long poem by Táo Yuān Míng 陶淵明 (365-427) which bear the same title, and describe a political utopia, a realm of reclusive people who have been enjoying their peaceful, undisturbed life without even knowing the changes of the dynasties. And in Chinese vocabulary, "Táo Huā Yuán" 桃花源 (The Peach Blossom Spring) is a synonym of "Utopia", in the sense of an ideal, imaginative place where people could freely enjoy a peaceful long life without disturbance from an oppressive government.

Wáng Wéi's poem, however, does not truly focus on the traditional idealism implied through "Táo Huā Yuán", but presented as an "unknown" journey, and a place of "non-where" – a place of "Not-knowing", a searching journey for a place of "emptiness". Pauline Yu, seeing this cognitive "ignorance" as the quintessential signature of Wáng Wéi's poetry, points out that the poem "focuses on the nature of the actual search, rather than the characteristics of its destination" (Yu 1977: 76), and she further analyses:

Only because he embarks on a journey whose distance, route and outcome he does not

know does the fisherman arrive at the Peach Blossom Spring. He proceeds without

conscious intention and in total harmony with nature... Each new element of the scene

appears as a sudden surprise. And this ignorance is absolutely essential; because it consists

in a freedom from mental calculation and a spontaneous appreciation of and reliance on

nature, it leads him to a true moment of intuitive recognition, a vision of purity. (ibid.)

Yu's interpretation of "Ignorance" in Wáng Wéi's poem suggests the fundamental difference

between Wáng Wéi's poem and Táo Yuān Míng's account of a political utopia, which

encourages a possible reading of "Táo Yuán Xíng" that transcends the previous definition of

Utopia. Indeed, in Wáng Wéi's poem, we could experience his doubt, his vision, his encounter

with nature and people, and his failure of tracing down "spring". The "utopia", for Wáng Wéi, is

not a "remote" place that cannot be approached; it is rather directly beneath one's inquiring feet.

On the other hand, it is a tangible "emptiness", as reflected in the verses such as: "Sitting he

looks at the red trees, not knowing the distance. Traveling to the green creek's end he does not

see men." (坐看紅樹不知遠，行盡青溪忽視人), and "Amid these gorges who knows of the

existence of human affairs? Within the world from afar they gaze at empty cloudy

mountains."(峽裏誰知有人事，世中遙望空雲山). In particular, at the end of the journey, the

seeker realizes that the source of the *U-topia* is somewhere with-in and with-out the water of

peach flowers: "When spring comes, everywhere are peach-flowered waters; Not distinguishing

the fairy spring, where can he seek?" (春來遍是桃花水，不辨仙源何處尋). This source, the

ground of human beings, as Wáng Wéi poetically presents, is not anywhere else to be found, but

only resides in the water of "peach flower": *táo huā shuǐ* 桃花水.

Wáng Wéi's poem "Táo Huā Yuán" epitomizes our journey of looking for the condition of comparison, a *U-topia* that is illuminated through a phenomenological-comparative perspective. After all, we are not less confused than at our beginning, but "confused on a higher level and about more important things".

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