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# The transition from poetic text to visual art: writing nature and calligraphy in Lawrence Ferlinghetti's, Lew Welch's and Philip Whalen's work

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Université Paul Valéry Montpellier 3  
Master 1 Etudes Anglophones

# The Transition from Poetic Text to Visual Art

Writing nature and calligraphy in Lawrence Ferlinghetti's, Lew Welch's  
and Philip Whalen's work



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# **The Transition from Poetic Text to Visual Art**

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## Introduction

“Do we want a civilization that will move toward some more intimate relation with the natural world, or do we want one that will continue to detach and isolate itself from both a dependence upon and a sympathy with that community of which we were originally a part?” (Buell, p. 218)

Poetry is a literary genre in which language is malleable in various ways and my dissertation verifies this. This work focuses on three poets of the Beat Generation, chosen after reading many different poems by authors of that period such as Gary Snyder, Allen Ginsberg, Kenneth Patchen, Diane Di Prima. The Beat generation is a period in which poets wished to introduce structural differences in writing and thinking processes as well as in the lay-out of their poetry on the page. Choosing to work on the Beat's nature poetry was a way of challenging the Western view on nature. Indeed, poems on nature have been written and been present in different forms in most eras and literary movements: the Romantics talked about nature and used it as a subject, the Beats did too, in a very different way. The Beats usually rejected the city and wanted to get back to a state of communion with nature; they refused industrialisation and technology too. Meditation is another element they write about in their poetry and it seems to be a way for them to achieve this return. Beat poets from the West Coast mostly, were concerned about environmental issues and ecology from early on and it could be interesting to enquire how they saw and talked about nature, and what were the tools or methods they used to focus on the environment.

The three poets under study are Lew Welch (1926-1971), Lawrence Ferlinghetti (1919-) and Philip Whalen (1923-2002). They are all American poets and were part of the West Coast Beat poets and thus, all are very nature-oriented and very interested in East Asian culture, calligraphy, Japanese haiku, and poems often accompanied by drawings. Lew Welch and Philip Whalen met in Reed College, in Oregon when they both were students. Welch had been a teacher at this University apart from being a poet. He had a few publications and his fellow poets and fans praised his poetry but he did not become the most famous of the Beats. Welch had a difficult life, battling alcoholism and depression and when his relationship with Magda Cregg ended, in 1971, he left a suicide note and

walked into the woods and his body was never found. Ferlinghetti, still alive at one hundred years old, has achieved great things in his life and one of the most remarkable was the creation of City Lights editions, as well as the bookshop of the same name, in order to be able to keep his publishing venture afloat. City Lights was of a great help in order to propagate the Beat poets' poetry. Finally, Whalen, unlike Welch, became a famous poet. From 1943 to 1946 he was in the army but did not have a job that took him too much time; so he was able to focus on developing his poetry and his style. He was able to find time for writing after leaving the army thanks to odd jobs he had on the West Coast which did not take up all his time either. He lived in Japan for around ten years and then went back to the U.S. He had been practising Zen Buddhism for a long time already but became a Zen Buddhist monk in 1973. This spiritual interest can be found in his poetry.

Thanks to further readings, I narrowed down my topic to handwritten poems rather than typed ones. It is unusual to see such poems published. Indeed, since the invention of the printed word, books have been printed i.e. produced and reproduced by printing presses; this has become the standard way of publication. Poetry was and still is for the most part, printed either aligned along the left margin or centred on the page. It was also versified, with regular rhythm and rhyme patterns for centuries. But over time, the poets who wanted to, managed to break free from the rules of the genre and poetry became what poets, in our case the Beats, made of it. Something not always regular, not always rhymed, not always aligned along the left margin of the page. They wanted to say something else, to express something new. They had had enough of, and were challenging, the conformism of the 50's in the USA through their poetry.

The last thing that I took into consideration to narrow down the subject even further is that the last layer of meaning to be considered about these handwritten poems is that the handwriting brings a visual dimension to the poetry. The text becomes visual thanks to the calligraphy, the different types of handwritings that are used and to the way the poems, and eventually the drawings, occupy the pages and de-neutralize them.

Poetry has always been considered as an art of writing but not enough as an artistic or even as a plastic or graphic art. In calligraphed poetry, language and words do not just have one meaning, they become a material object, they live on the page and give further meaning, a more profound or intense dimension to the work. They have an impact on the viewer-reader. Handwritten poetry becomes more than just poetry, it becomes art, maybe even abstract or conceptual art. Nowadays,

the act of writing itself is seen more as a tool than a craft and visual poetry and calligraphy restore this dimension of craft to the act of writing. Overall, we will study the transition from poetic text to visual text through the lens of reconnection to nature and calligraphy in the poetry of the Beat poets Lew Welch, Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Philip Whalen.

We may wonder what calligraphy adds to poetry, and wonder why the three Beat poets managed to connect calligraphy, as well as their poems, to nature?

In the first chapter we will see how reinvesting nature is made possible thanks to handwritten poetry, the second chapter will be focused on the merging of Eastern and Western cultures and in the third chapter, we will look at how written poetry can turn into visual art thanks to calligraphy.

To answer this study's questions, I will be using the poems by Welch, Ferlinghetti and Whalen that I have selected; for critical literature, I am listing here the main books that I will be using. The first one is the first volume "Eastern Culture" of Blyth's anthology, *Haiku*. This first volume focuses on Eastern culture, and explains what Haiku poems are and how they work, but it also teaches us about Buddhism and Zen practice in relation to Haiku. I will also be using Buell's *Environmental Imagination* which is oriented onto American nature literature and gives an eco-criticism of the world. He is also pointing at nature writing from a Western point of view; but also *Par-delà nature et culture* by Philippe Descola which observes Eastern and other cultures' views on nature compared to Westerners' understanding of their natural surroundings.

# Chapter 1. Reinvesting nature through handwritten poetry

“Environmental crisis involves a crisis of the imagination the amelioration of which depends on finding better ways of imagining nature and humanity’s relation to it.” (Buell, p. 2)

We will start here by examining the influence of Eastern culture, mostly Japanese culture, on Welch, Ferlinghetti and Whalen and see that the relationship to nature these poets have is different than the standard relation with it people in the West may have. We will see how nature is tackled as a theme in their poems and we’ll wonder why writing about nature may be a way to reconnect with it. In a first part we will explore the influence of Japanese culture on these poets’ works and the explicit and implicit ways they use when writing about nature, then we will focus on the role that place and the environment play in the poets’ “mission” to reconnect with nature and get people to realize the existence of this connection between humans and nature and finally we will look at the significance of writing and publishing calligraphed poetry and their understanding of poetic language.

## A. Nature as a theme: explicit and implicit ways of writing about nature

Before analysing what is explicit and what is implicit in the works of Welch, Whalen and Ferlinghetti, a definition of what nature is, is needed. “Nature” comes from the Latin ‘natura’<sup>1</sup> which means “birth, origin”. We often regard “Nature” as what is not man-made, the fauna and flora, seasons, inert things such as rocks, and places (although places may be more commonly considered as the environment, the landscape, rather than “what is not man-made”.) Interestingly enough, the word “nature” is also used to designate what constitutes the human being as a whole, often via the phrase “human nature.” It can then be defined as “the inherent character [...] of human beings; the sum of traits, characteristics and predispositions attributed to or associated with human beings.”<sup>2</sup>

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1 OED: <https://www-oed-com.www.ezp.biu-montpellier.fr/view/Entry/125353?rskey=6UOvn9&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>

2 OED: <https://www-oed-com.www.ezp.biu-montpellier.fr/view/Entry/274634?redirectedFrom=human+nature#eid>

In *Love Is No Stone On The Moon*, Ferlinghetti uses words such as “droppeth his teeth [...] and drops his jaw,” “molars.” Words that refer to parts of the natural world, since they are bones. Moreover, the poem is handwritten on paper already printed, which can be considered palimpsest-like<sup>3</sup>, but with no intention of erasing the previous text, and on pages 4 and 5, sketches of skulls and pictures of jaws are printed under the poem. Ferlinghetti shows the reader human beings’ most natural part, that is to say their bodies. The “human nature” he describes is what humans are made of, at the most basic level, that is to say their bones. These different definitions and understandings of the word “Nature” suggest the intrinsic relationship that exists between humans and nature even though Westerners tend to try and detach themselves from it, maybe because of centuries of rejection of their “animal instincts”. Welch, Whalen and Ferlinghetti have developed an interest in Eastern cultures and we will see how this has shaped their poetry and their views on the relationship to nature.

The most straightforward way for anyone, including poets, to write about nature is to mention the word “nature” itself. This is something that we can find for example in Whalen’s poem “Lecture Notes GSS Berkeley”: “a phenomenon of nature.” (Whalen, p. 398) A drawn flower is also part of this poem. (see Illustration 7)

In a slightly more subtle way, the poet may use the lexical field of nature in order to tackle the subject. That is something that is commonly found in the works of Welch, Ferlinghetti and Whalen. One cannot really avoid using vocabulary related to nature when talking about it. Cooper wrote: “Scarce a poet of any fame among us, [...] who has not at least some graceful verse, some glowing image connected with the season.” (Buell, p. 228) This quote emphasises the idea that it is virtually impossible not to talk about nature or to refer to it some way or another, especially for a poet. Indeed, the natural world surrounds humans daily and a lot of things that we say in language refer to the natural world. Moreover, because the three poets’ work is mostly inspired by Eastern culture and Japanese poetic genres, they are even more inclined to write about nature. Ferlinghetti in *Back Roads to Far Places* makes no mystery of his Japanese inspiration. First of all, he mentions Japan on the second page: “an arrow from Japan” and later on he talks about “Mount Tamal-Fuji” and there are many caricatures of the haiku poet Bashô in this work. The words that come up most frequently in these very short poems that constitute one long poem, are for example “the sun”,

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3 OED: “A parchment or other writing surface on which the original text has been effaced or partially erased, and then overwritten by another” <<https://www.oed-com.www.ezp.biu-montpellier.fr/view/Entry/136319?rskey=eOO9kn&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>>

“winterbirds”, “mynah birds”, different kinds of “fish”, “the sky”, “the wind”: mostly things that have a link with the four elements: fire, water, earth and air.

Lew Welch in “Wobbly Rock” is also greatly influenced by Japan and Eastern culture in general. For instance, in the second part of his poem he mentions the “Ryoanji” garden and he explains in *How I Work as a Poet* that “You look at the snow, and you think – it’s like frosting on a cake, and then you see a nice yin-yang circle, and you get to a nice empty mind.” (Welch, 1983, p. 79) What this quote means is that there is a circle of equilibrium here because the frosting on the cake was imagined thanks to the snow and when one sees snow, they<sup>4</sup> think of the frosting on the cake. The element of nature that inspired something used in everyday life is now dependent on it; people can’t see one of the two elements without thinking of the other and this again makes another connection between nature and human beings. “Wobbly Rock” is full of references to nature and in part six, a very short segment of the poem reads: “Wind water/ Wave rock/ Sea sand.” (Welch, 1973, p. 59) In this passage, Lew Welch creates associations between two words on each line, associations that remind one of the sea and of this wobbly rock the poet is sitting on. The “wave rock” line may also remind the reader of the sea rocking someone, like someone rocking in a chair. This pun on “rocking” actually continues until the end of the poem, and the last line confirms this hypothesis: “I am/ Rocked by the sea.” (Welch, 1973, p. 59) The “rocking” also implicitly evokes the ebb and flow of the sea. Welch’s poem may also remind one of Walt Whitman’s: “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking”, a poem which tells the story of how his poetic calling came to him “on Paumanok's gray beach”: “My own songs awaked from that hour,/ And with them the key, the word up from the waves/ [...] The sea whisper'd me.” The sea is a place of inspiration for both poets and it plays a mother-like role, as if it was a representation of Mother Nature. This natural phenomenon seems to be a recurrent theme in Beat poetry. Ferlinghetti talks about “Bixby Beach” in *Back Roads to Far Places*, which echoes Allen Ginsberg’s poem *Bixby Canyon Ocean Path Word Breeze*<sup>5</sup>, inspired by the same beach, a poem which is laid out as if it was reproducing the ebb and flow of the sea. The first part of “Wobbly Rock” also looks like a wave in the way it is laid out on the page, it can also represent the movement of the wobbly rock that “moves when hit by the waves.” (Welch, 73, p. 54)

Philip Whalen also has poems that contain the same ideas and that are about nature and cover the subject both explicitly and implicitly. For example, in his typed poem “To The Muse”:

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4 Singular neutral “they”/“them” pronouns will be used through the whole text.

5 See in appendix

“Leaf and branch twist and wave in the breeze  
This pen swings over the page, an equal  
Meaning, neither one intelligible”

(Whalen, p. 316)

nature is present through words such as “leaf,” “branch,” “wave,” “breeze” on the first line of the poem which can all be linked to an element, fire excepted. The second line is closely linked to the first one. The “branch” from the first line is what is used to make paper, so the “page” from line two and the “breeze” can be associated with the “pen [that] swings.” In this extract, Whalen connects the process of writing to nature and even reminds the reader of the raw material used to create the tools.

The theme of the sea, can also be found in *Back Roads To Far Places* with the water element and fishes. Indeed, one part of the poem reads:

“O listen  
to the sound of the sea  
my son  
There is a fish in us who hears the ocean’s  
long withdrawing Om  
And echoes it”

(*Back Roads To Far Places*, n. pag.)

This part of the poem sounds very spiritual with the apparition of the “Om”, which is a sign of the influence of Eastern culture on Ferlinghetti; but also shows a connection between man and nature. On line 4 this “fish in us” that Ferlinghetti talks about makes it sound like the fish and the human being are one same entity, which creates a deep connection between the two. Buell says that “seasonal representations tease us toward awareness of ourselves as environmental beings.” (Buell, p. 251) That is true but it can be extended to anything that is related to nature that makes people remember and see the environment surrounding them with new eyes.

Ferlinghetti merges the human body with nature. Here it is as if the spirit of a fish was inside every human and enabled them to better communicate with nature. They “echo” what they hear from the sea, which can be understood as being the “Om” or something else that is not mentioned in the poem.

In *Back Roads to Far Places* for example, Ferlinghetti writes things such as “the mind also rises” which links this mind to the sun and so humans to nature. He does the same with the eighth poem of *Love Is No Stone on the Moon*: “Be/ like a/ white bird/ in the snow.” (Ferlinghetti, 1971, p. 7)

Indeed here he is suggesting to his addressee that they act like a bird in the snow whatever that means. This appears as a sort of reversed personification but it is actually more than that since these poems reconnect human beings with nature, with animals and their own animal instincts. It is reminiscent of the totemic animals that can be found in Native American cultures. But it also illustrates Eastern culture and what Descola has to say about it: “L’environnement doit ici être pris au pied de la lettre: il est ce qui relie et constitue les humains comme expressions multiples d’un ensemble qui les dépasse...”<sup>6</sup> (Descola, p. 55) This quote sums up the idea of humans and nature being deeply connected to one another but it also brings in the spiritual dimension that is found in *Back Roads to Far Places* for example. This spiritual dimension shall be dealt with in greater detail in the next chapter.

## **B. About place and the environment**

The ideas expressed by Descola in the quote above can also be found in *Environmental Imagination*. Indeed Buell says “the bond between the human and non-human estates is expressed through the imagery of relationship.” (p. 180) If such is the case, what also matters in the relationship to nature is the sense of place or the notions of place and space.

Acknowledging place, the environment, observation and appreciation of the surrounding landscapes and nature seems to be a disposition unfamiliar to many people who are not poets. They do not seem to see the world in detail. In the movie *Poetry* by Lee Chang-Dong, the poet who gives poetry classes explains that one needs to “see things well” and “to see the beauty of things that are in front of you” which means that for him, observation is the key to writing poetry. It may be reductive but

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6 Translation: “The environment must be understood literally here: it is what links and defines human beings as multiple expressions of a whole that they cannot yet comprehend.”

it is nonetheless largely a true statement. For example, Welch explains in *How I Work As a Poet* that when he wrote “Wobbly Rock” “he had left his first wife, and [he] went out to this rock at Muir Beach and [he] sat down there to think everything over.” (Welch, 1983, p. 76) He explains that he went into nature, to a natural place, in order to recollect his thoughts. The poem goes to the essential too. It starts with the line “It’s a real rock” (Welch, 1973, p. 59) and Welch keeps describing exactly what he sees: “Resting on actual sand at the surf’s edge:/ Muir Beach, California [...]/ Hard common stone/ Size of the largest haystack/ It moves when hit by the waves/ Actually shudders [...]/ Yields and then comes back to it:/ Wobbly tons.” (Welch, 1973, p. 59) As Gary Snyder argues “it is not enough [...] just to ‘love nature’ or to want to ‘be in harmony with Gaia.’ Our relation to the natural world takes place in a place, and it must be grounded in information and experience.” (Buell, p. 217) That is exactly what Lew Welch does in this poem, he gives information on the place he is in/at. The second part begins with him saying that “Sitting here you look below to other rocks/ Precisely placed as rocks of Ryoanji”: he goes on to depict what the famous Japanese garden looks like while comparing it with this wobbly rock he is sitting on. To emphasize what I said on Lew Welch’s poem going to the essential, he himself writes: “I believe poetry must be grounded in the most absolute ordinariness before it can take off truly.” (*I Remain*, vol. 1, p. 160)

A quote from *Environmental Imagination* illustrates the fact that Western and Eastern cultures’ relationships to nature are really different and that Western Culture is quite distant from what Welch, Whalen and Ferlinghetti accomplish in their poetry: “It is hard not to care more about individuals than about people, hard not to care more about people than about the natural environment.” (Buell, p. 167) Indeed, the three Beat poets care about reconnecting individuals to nature rather than caring only about “people” or only about “the natural environment”. They are themselves intensely connected to nature. For example, Ferlinghetti writes:

“Ah how my life runs on  
into the Real  
back roads  
to far places  
lost in the traces”

(*Back Roads To Far Places*, n. pag.)

The poet is saying in this passage from *Back Roads To Far Places*, that he has taken back roads which in a physical sense designates small roads in the hinterland, secondary roads that led him to far places, certainly the countryside or some more natural place, escaping the city; exactly like Welch sitting on his rock on Muir Beach. “Le japonais établit également une opposition entre ‘sato’, ‘le lieu habité’, et ‘yama’ ‘la montagne’, celle-ci étant moins perçue comme une élévation du relief contrastant avec la plaine que comme l’archétype de l’espace inhabité, comparable en cela au sens premier du mot “désert” en français.”<sup>7</sup> (Descola, p. 75) This quote explains that the mountain is seen in Japanese as the uninhabited world, an equivalent of the desert for Westerners. This difference seems to be the same in the poem by Ferlinghetti, who also was inspired by Haiku poems. It seems when talking about back roads that they are deserted, that no one is present there and this is partly why we may call this “escaping from the city”. Escaping the city, to get into nature, far from people, somewhere where one cannot be seen but also somewhere to reconnect with nature, one way or another. In part four of “Wobbly Rock,” a line also evokes the deep connection people have with nature and their environment and that these three poets believe in: “(by the curve of his body I know he leans against the tug of his fishingline: there is no separation).”(Welch, 1973, p. 57) There is no separation between the fisherman and his fishingline and by extension, there is no separation between him and the ocean and its fauna.

The fourth part of “Wobbly Rock” also shows the notion of ecocentrism<sup>8</sup> to appear in the poem. The concept emerged in the 50’s, slightly before the Beat Generation. Weirdly enough, Welch assimilates people with elements present in nature as we saw previously and then criticizes what they do to their environment. “Did it mean nothing to you Animal that turn this/ Planet to a smokey rock?” (Welch, 1973, p. 57) He is also using the word “Animal” here to talk about humans, which is quite ironical since animals are not the ones that pollute and destroy the environment. However this use of “Animal” may be based on a societal point of view rather than Lew Welch’s. He is addressing people at the level they consider animals to be, that is, lower than themselves. He wonders how to “remind [them] of [their] gentleness.” (Welch, 1973, p. 57) But then he also compares them to swallows “Like swallows you were, gathering.” (Welch, 1973, p. 57) He

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7 Translation: “Japanese also establishes an opposition between ‘sato’, ‘the inhabited place’, and ‘yama’ ‘the mountain’, the latter being perceived rather as the archetype of uninhabited space which can be compared in that way to the primary meaning of the word ‘desert’ in French, than as a rise of the relief/topography contrasting with the plain.”

8 This term is opposed to anthropocentrism, which means it designates a system of values centred on nature rather than on humans.

criticizes people for polluting the planet and calls them “Animals” and then “swallows” and so assimilates them to nature. This may be a way for the poet to raise consciousness by reminding people that they are part of the ecosystem and not strangers in nature. That is not something that seems to appear in Whalen’s or Ferlinghetti’s work, although “the fish in us,” (*Back Roads To Far Places*, n. pag) in human beings, can be a means here again for the poet to get people to see that they are not alone in this world and that the landscapes, the nature and animals surrounding them are also alive and living.

### C. Calligraphed poetry and language as a central concern

Whalen focuses on a more material aspect of writing poetry, on the page being a space where writing and nature meet. It is the case in most of his poems. In an interview with David Meltzer, we learn that most of his poems were written in notebooks and that he then wrote them on the typewriter and that at some point, McClure<sup>9</sup> told him: “You shouldn’t do that. You should get ’em to print it the way you wrote it, because it’s beautiful.” (Jacket magazine, web) McClure told him he should get his handwritten poems published as such. Whalen also has many typed poems emphasizing this idea of materiality: “This pen swings over the page.” (p. 316) He evokes here the process of writing, the materiality of handwriting, with a pen that he says “swings over” a sheet of paper. This materiality becomes obvious in poems written with a fountain pen, as on page 285. The poet made mistakes and scratches are present in the poem. If some may find this unaesthetic, Whalen manages to blend some of them with the drawing that is described in the poem itself:

“More light seems to fall on the crest  
the hill (or the sky there is a lighter  
blue ?) [...]  
Hills and distances. The hills  
have many trees”

(Whalen, p. 285)

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9 Michael McClure: (1932 –) is an “American poet, playwright, essayist, educator and novelist” who was part of the Beat Generation. He was friends with Philip Whalen and many other Beat poets. - LION: <<https://search-proquest-com.www.ezp.biu-montpellier.fr/lion/docview/2137926889/DE4193FEFD414561PQ/1?accountid=12542>>

Then the poem keeps evoking “squirrels, chipmunks”, different types of birds, the “snow underfoot” and flowers. The scratches, the fact that it is handwritten are all different ways to capture the natural essence of writing; it looks like a more organic, authentic way of writing poetry. To revert to this idea of materiality in poetry, that is something Ferlinghetti does as well; he mentions his “Japanese pen,” made out of “bamboo shoot” (*Back Roads To Far Places*, n. pag.) and then the poet explains how his pen works and how it writes poetry. It is nearly as if the pen was writing and not himself:

“does not scatter  
drops of black blood  
when shaken”

(*Back Roads To Far Places*, n. pag.)

The pen is personified as if it was even more than an extension of the poet, as if it was the poet himself “bleeding” on the paper. This also illustrates the organic side of writing poetry and writing about nature, with nature, since the poet’s tool for writing comes from nature. The pen is personified to the extent that it:

“tells its story”

and

“put its foot down  
right in the snow  
before it will  
walk off.....”

(*Back Roads To Far Places*, n. pag.)

The snow here is also a metaphor for the page, as if the pen was a man walking in the snow during a journey. This last element also reminds one of the mountain, a very present and important symbol in Japanese culture.

Welch evokes the importance of language in *How I Work as A Poet*, more specifically, he says that “Language is speech” and that the poets can “only use primary materials.” (Welch, 1983, p. 30) It seems that Whalen agrees with that. Welch says that to write poetry one has “to write as if [they]

were talking, and to it knowing perfectly well [they] are not talking, [they] are writing.” (Welch, 1983, p. 31) “Speech [...] is totally organic.” (Welch, 1983, p. 36) “Wobbly Rock” has something very oralized, very direct, like a stream of consciousness he would just have spoken out/aloud. The parentheses in parts 1, 2 and 5 of the poem convey a feeling of words being added, that might not seem to be the most important when written but that would be easily and quickly added while speaking. We can also have this feeling in Whalen’s poems (see Illustration 1): it seems like the words are aligned one after the other exactly like when someone is talking:

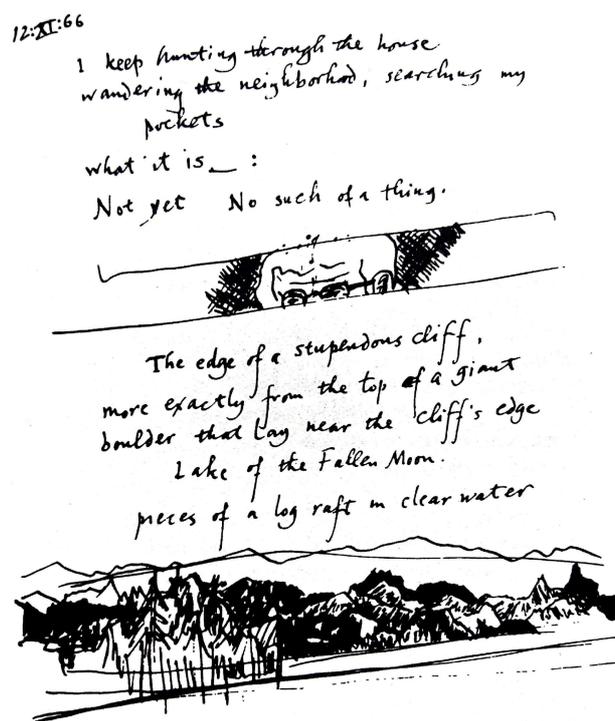


Illustration 1: "I keep hunting the house" (Whalen, p. 523)

For example in this poem words like “what it is” and “more exactly” seem to be oral language more than written language. The organisation of the sentences, which seem not always to have a direct link to one another, looks like a haiku-inspired style, with a juxtaposition of ideas that creates an image when they are brought together even if they do not seem to go together at first.

“Poetry is that language which when written does not reach from margin to margin.” (Welch, 1983, p. 61) The first meaning of this quote specifies that poetry is different from prose. But one can also understand, mostly when studying these three poets, that the layout of the poems is not necessarily linear. Indeed, Welch, Ferlinghetti and Whalen’s poems are far from a linear approach to poetry. Both typed and handwritten poems have varying layouts on the page but not in a

haphazard manner. Whalen explains that “The poem doesn’t exist on account of its meaning [...] and it wasn’t composed to fit a plan.” (Whalen, p. 838) Whalen does not really mean that the meaning of the poem is not important but that the layout as well as the writing style or calligraphy are of prime importance too. As we said earlier, some of the passages are written so as to create forms or to remind us of nature such as the ocean’s ebb and flow. Ferlinghetti’s poem *Back Roads to Far Places* is written as he tells us on the first page with a “Japanese pen”. Consequentially, his style of writing is influenced by this pen but also influenced by Japanese style calligraphy. He does not use logograms, he writes in Latin script, but exaggerates the amplitude of the scrolls ending the loops of his letters, such as “f’s and g’s,” lengthening them in a way that reproduces the movement of the brush in Japanese calligraphy. It conveys the idea of a smooth but dynamic movement. Whalen, who was very interested in calligraphy, tends to do the same with such letters. He even developed his own style of calligraphy with time.

These three poets’ styles of writing are rather autobiographical. Even if it does not show from the start of the poems in some cases, or not through an entire poem, there is always a moment where the autobiographical dimension appears. In Welch’s poem it is very subtle. He uses the pronoun “you” in the second part of “Wobbly Rock” and in part three uses “I” but then however, the sentences are italicized: “*I have been in many shapes before I attained congenial form*” (Welch, 1973, p. 56) for example. The italics may materialise an inner thought of the “you” rather than designate the poet himself. It seems that the words “me,” (Welch, 1973, p. 56) “I” (Welch, 1973, pp. 57, 59) and “us,” (Welch, 1973, p. 58) which are *not* in italics are more likely to point at the poet. Therefore, the poet blends autobiography and universal address in his poem. Both Ferlinghetti and Whalen also use an “I” that seems to be the poet, since they often address someone else for example Ferlinghetti addresses “my son” which sounds as if it could stand for any reader, and Whalen has many poems addressed to other poets or people he knows such as “Roy Harris.” (Whalen, p. 285)

As a conclusion, nature is dealt with in many different ways by these poets. It can be treated as a theme, but as we have seen, it is not always a theme. It can be present in the poets’ work in less obvious, more implicit ways. The link between nature and humans, which is much more obvious for Eastern cultures, is of the utmost interest to these Western poets that try to make lines move and try to show through their poetry the deep connection between humans and non-humans, between

humans and their natural environment. Poetry written in longhand and poetry with a speech-like quality are deemed by Lew Welch to be “organic”, and thus, it is definitely meant by these poets to be a way to maintain this connection with the natural.

## Chapter 2: Merging Eastern and Western cultures

“Rendre raison des différentes manières d’habiter le monde et de lui donner un sens” (Descola, p. 534)<sup>10</sup> is what we will do in this second part. Indeed, we will explore the differences that lie between Western and Eastern cultures and the ways they experience the world and relate to nature and how the Beat poets have tended to reduce this East West dichotomy, bridging the gap by inspiring themselves from Eastern cultures in their writing. The focus will be on American Haiku and haiku<sup>11</sup> poems which are a traditional Japanese form of poetry in a first part, then we will investigate another way of reconnecting to nature thanks to the *I Ching* hexagrams and finally, we will talk about Chinese characters that blend writing and drawing and we will introduce the ‘Zen’ practice.

### A. American Haiku

“Il est difficile de repérer [...] au Japon une dichotomie du sauvage et du domestique analogue à celle que l’Occident a forgée.” (Descola, p. 75)<sup>12</sup> As indicated previously, in the Western world, nature is easily reduced to animals or regarded as a sum of beings or things that cannot think in the same way as humans do. According to the latter, they should therefore be ranked as species that cannot compare with human beings ; a conclusion which places nature in general lower than Man. Often when it comes to consciousness, Man feels a need to assert its self-attributed superiority and thus creates this dichotomy between himself and nature. Such is not the case in Japanese culture as it is said in the quote above. Haiku poems are a good illustration of this affirmation.

“A haiku is not a poem, it is not literature; it is a hand beckoning, a door half-opened, a mirror wiped clean.”(Blyth, p. 272) This quote must not be understood literally. Haiku is, of course, a type

10 Translation: “Accounting for the different ways to live in this world and endow it with meaning”

11 I will use the word “haiku” which is both singular and plural in Japanese. Moreover I won’t be using the word ‘haikai’ since “haikai renga [are] witty chain poems” (Blyth, 372) and slightly different from haiku” (Blyth, 373)

12 Translation: “It is difficult in Japanese culture to identify a dichotomy between the untamed wild and what is tamed/ the domestic, analogous to the one forged by Westerners.”

of poem; what Blyth wants to emphasize is that its essence is very expressive, as haiku is anchored in everyday life observations and is meant as “a way of returning to nature” (Blyth, p. 272) Part of this accuracy in the observation of nature lay in the fact that, as Blyth explains it, “there is almost always a season word in haiku” (Blyth, p. 382), and “up to recent years, haiku was simply the poetry of the seasons.” (Blyth, p. 383). Words that designated seasons were very codified and precise, so much so that it enabled “poets to speak to one another open secrets to which the unpoetical reader [was] not initiate[d].” (Blyth, p. 382) Haiku poems have changed over time: they still include references to nature but not necessarily to seasons. Blyth also gives the main structure and definition of a haiku, which is: “the beginning of a chain of poetical thoughts and images [with] a 5,7,5 sequence.” (Blyth, p. 373) Japanese haiku are normally written in kanji, logographic Chinese characters also used by Japanese people which are written the same but usually pronounced differently. They are used alongside hiragana and katakana which are Japanese syllabic characters.

The Beat poets who were inspired by Japanese poetry and traditions began to write haiku in English. They followed the concept of Japanese haiku but adapted it to English. These are often called American haiku and Jack Kerouac, another Beat poet and writer, claims to have been its creator. Indeed, he said “Then I’ll invent/ The American Haiku type:/ The simple rhyming triolet:–/ Seventeen syllables?/ No, as I say, American Pops:–/ Simple 3-line poems.” (Kerouac, 1965) Traditionally, Haiku have a 5/7/5 sequence which adds up to 17 syllables. In American haiku, the usual 5/7/5 structure cannot be respected in English so the layout of the haiku will usually not be the same as in Japanese. Moreover, the letters used when printing or writing in longhand American haiku are obviously not Japanese kanji. Welch, Ferlinghetti and Whalen write in English, in a Western Germanic language. The influence of haiku, led the poets Welch, Ferlinghetti and Whalen to write short, powerful texts about nature and to connect to it by juxtaposing images as haiku do but not necessarily respecting the exact same rhythm as explained earlier. Ferlinghetti’s poem ‘Suicide Haiku’ that can be found in *The North West Ecolog* illustrates very well what American haiku may look like. Haiku poems are also usually written in the present tense and this traditional feature is present in that particular poem:



## SUICIDE HAIKU

MAN FISHING  
in shrinking gene pool  
hooks last gene—  
Jumps in

43

Illustration 2: "Suicide Haiku" (Ferlinghetti, pp. 42-43)

It was inspired by a haiku written by the well-known haiku writer, Matsuo Bashô.

Bashô's haiku reads:

"The old pond !  
A frog jumps in, —  
The sound of the water"  
(Blyth, p. 373)

We can notice that Bashô's poem in translation does number seventeen syllables which is rarely the case because translating from Japanese into English does not mean one will arrive at the same number of syllables. Ferlinghetti's has eighteen syllables which is very close but not the exact number. The "jumps in" that can be found in Bashô's haiku is also in Ferlinghetti's; so is the dash. The poem is entitled "Suicide Haiku" and the story seems to be about the human species jumping into its own gene pool. It seems that humanity has come to the end of its evolution. The "gene pool" is "shrinking" (l.2) and the man fishing catches the "last" (l.3) one. The ideas of end and of death are very present. The fact that it is about death and that the man jumps is an association of words suggesting suicide, by jumping into the void, into that "shrinking gene pool" (l.2). The drawing on the left page is a heron drawn in Chinese ink. It is linked to the poem and may remind one of haiku which often, if not always, comes along with a drawing. The link between the two seems to be through the fisherman. Indeed, herons fish in ponds and pools. The heron could be a synecdoche for nature, representing a tiny part of it, or a way of transforming the man into the bird. Finally, there is

a play on words with “pool” which here has a particular meaning attached to ‘gene’ about the group of genes that defines a human being and a pool which is also a small body of water. This can appear as another way of creating a link between man and nature through writing.

Blyth, in *Haiku*, provides much more information to explain what haiku poems are, what their purposes are and how they work. The first thing he says about haiku is that “Haiku is a kind of *satori*, or enlightenment, in which we see into the life of things. [...] Haiku is the apprehension of a thing by a realization of our own original and essential unity with it, the word ‘realization’ having the literal meaning of ‘making real’ in ourselves.” (Blyth, Preface, p. vii)

If we take the first part of the definition “see into the life of things” it is worth noting how

01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09
10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36
37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45
46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54
55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63
64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72

Illustration 3: Table of the 64 Hexagrams

Ferlinghetti does this literally in his poem ‘Suicide Haiku’, talking to the reader about the genes which are the essence of life in human beings and actually living beings (Ferlinghetti, 78, pp. 42-43). He makes the reader aware of his own genetic pool, and makes genes look like fishes in a pool. Could this be an echo of the passage of his long poem *Back Roads to Far Towns After Bashô*, in which he writes “So listen to the sound of the sea my son/ There is a fish in us that hears the ocean’s/ long withdrawing Om/ And echoes it” (Ferlinghetti, 70, p. 13)? In ‘Suicide Haiku’, the man jumps into his own gene pool, he swims in it metaphorically but he could also turn into a fish as the second poem suggests that “there is a fish in us.” A fish “that hears the [...] ocean” and the “Om” is a metaphor associating water and spirituality. Ferlinghetti merges human beings and nature through a spiritual dimension. The presence of the “Om” and the spiritual character of the quote also seem to imply that people all have the ability to meditate. It connects humans to nature – by extension of the human mind –, implying that people can hear some things like animals, and even share a language with them. All of the above goes to show that haiku writing enables people to communicate and be in communion with nature.

## **B. Another way of reconnecting with nature, creatively and spiritually: the Chinese oracle**

Another form of writing, of writing poetry and also a way to reconnect to nature is through hexagrams. Lew Welch uses this Chinese oracle in one of his poems which also includes an explanatory drawing of how hexagrams work, in order for the reader to understand the poem, although one can argue that the drawings of these hexagrams make a poem by themselves. Thus, the poem and the drawing are closely related. The poem is typed but the doodle is drawn by hand. But first, a definition, if not an explanation of what hexagrams are, is needed in order to give the reader a chance to understand. The definition from the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) is as follows : “In Chinese literature, one of the sixty-four figures, consisting each of six parallel (whole or divided) lines, which form the basis of the ‘Yih-king’ or *I Ching* or ‘Book of Changes’.”<sup>13</sup> ‘The Book of Changes’ is to be used as an “introspective tool” (School of Wisdom, web) to answer a question one may have about something related to themselves. It was “invented by the Chinese to help a person reach their creative state by proper alignment of their inner and outer attitude”<sup>14</sup> The style of hexagrams can remind us of Chinese characters which are rather square-shaped too. Hexagrams work with mathematics. They function on a binary system which reduces chance: indeed there are only 64 hexagrams. Each hexagram is made up of two trigrams. There are eight different trigrams in all so that those can combine in only 64 different ways. Hexagrams are related to celestial and earthly phenomena. In a hexagram, you find an upper and a lower trigram. The lines themselves are either Yin when the line is cut in two in the middle and Yang when it is a plain line. In Chinese philosophy, Yin and Yang are the “two opposing cosmic forces into which creative energy divides and whose fusion in physical matter brings the phenomenal world into being.” Yin represents “the feminine or negative principle (characterized by dark, wetness, cold, passivity, disintegration, etc.)”, and is characterized by the colour black, whereas Yang is “the masculine or positive principle (characterized by light, warmth, dryness, activity, etc.)”<sup>15</sup>, and characterized by the colour white. The divination starts with the person throwing three coins six times to determine

13 OED definition of hexagram: <<http://www.oed.com.www.ezp.biu-montpellier.fr/view/Entry/86591?redirectedFrom=hexagram#eid>>

14 Source on the explanation of the I Ching: <<http://www.ichingwisdom.com/hexagrams.html>>

15 Definitions from the OED : Yin <<https://www-oed-com.www.ezp.biu-montpellier.fr/view/Entry/231870?rskey=Fv1J6n&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>> and Yang <<https://www-oed-com.www.ezp.biu-montpellier.fr/view/Entry/231163#eid13700031>>

what each line of the first hexagram will be. According to this first hexagram and the throws of coins, the hexagram might or might not change. If the person gets three tails with their coins they<sup>16</sup> obtain a Yin line but which will change to a Yang line in the final hexagram, if they get two tails and one head the Yin line does not change, if they get two heads and one tail, the Yang line does not change and finally, if they get three heads the Yang line changes into a Yin line. This changing or unchanging hexagram is still the final version, the final hexagram from which the person will get the answer to their question.

I will illustrate this theoretical explanation with Lew Welch's poem and doodle 'The Wanderer' that can be found at the end of *Ring of Bone*. The doodle shows four hexagrams he obtained by throwing the coins. Luckily, he obtained in his first draw, hexagram 56 as his first hexagram which then turned into hexagram 39 and in his second draw he got hexagram 2 which turned into hexagram 55. Hexagrams 55 and 56 are next to one another on the wheel of hexagrams and are also the opposite of one another in their drawing, though not in their meaning. Lew Welch was then able to invent a story, which is in the poem about this hexagram 56, also known as "the Wanderer". The Wanderer is commonly thought of as a person, and Lew Welch creates a character in his story who is a wanderer in order to make it embody the concept of this hexagram 56. As the concept is linked to a fictional human, at the end of the poem, Lew Welch can turn the poem into something autobiographical, which we could not have guessed at the start of it. The story also explains how hexagrams work, while showing the connection between nature, spirituality, reality and humans. Welch writes, "there was fire on the mountain." (l.1) This explains the upper and lower trigrams that compose the hexagram of the wanderer. The upper trigram symbolizes fire while the lower one symbolizes the mountains and the wanderer travels "to the right, an Easterly direction." (l.3) The poem then says that the wanderer didn't follow the course of "his sign," the sun, and went in the other direction and travelled "all the 64 spokes of the *Great Wheel* –" (l.10-11) Indeed, hexagrams can be placed on a chart (see Illustration 3) or arranged around a wheel and on that last one, hexagram 56 is to the right of hexagram 55 and is its reverse. Welch wonders if "Perhaps he was only born upside down" (l.26-27) in the poem and the doodle.

Welch writes in his poem that if the wanderer had followed the course of the Sun to the west, his wandering would have "ended in a single step." (l.22) There is an echo between stanza three in which this is mentioned, and stanza five which is autobiographical and in which Lew Welch applies

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<sup>16</sup> As indicated previously I am using a 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural pronoun (they/them) to refer to a neutral singular 3<sup>rd</sup> person.

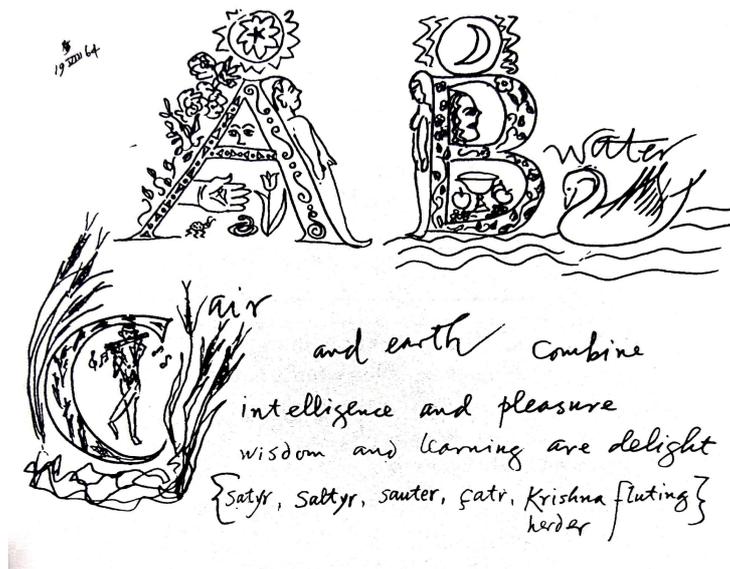


Illustration 4: "[air and earth combine]" (Whalen, p. 373)

the wandering to himself, ending the poem in stanza seven by saying that it took him “so much time, to see.” (l.39-40) At the end of the poem, Welch reveals that this poem is also autobiographical. He is addressing “Magda” who was his wife as we learn it in *I Remain*, two volumes which gather his correspondence with different people he knew. The “abundance and fullness” (l.35) Welch mentions are the result of the wanderer’s travels: he finally reaches abundance on hexagram 55. He applies these hexagrams to his own life and story and makes something very personal out of all the topographic, geographic and natural elements previously mentioned and connects to them. The story of the wanderer becomes his own story and was from the beginning.

In using hexagrams to write his poem, Welch totally follows the first purpose of the hexagrams which I mentioned earlier, and which is to be more creative. He used this medium as his path towards creation. He distorted the first aim of hexagrams, changing it into a new one; all the same, he was being faithful to the purpose of hexagrams in renewing their use.

Lew Welch uses italics in this poem for the words “Easterly”, “Westerly” and “left.” These are words relating to geographical space and to directions to follow in that space. These words are emphasized because they are the core of the idea the poet wants to convey, which is that if the wanderer had gone left he would have reached abundance instantly and would have avoided torments and a long journey all around the wheel of hexagrams: if he – Lew Welch – had done this

too, he would have “seen” earlier. Through this poem, Lew Welch brings together Western and Eastern views on life for example, joining rather linear notions of East-West and left-right axes to a more circular one, such as the Great Wheel of hexagrams. Movements are central in this poem. Hexagrams result from multiple movements. Trigrams move up and down but there is also a non-linear movement, a law called ‘synchronicity’ by Carl Jung<sup>17</sup>. This law of synchronicity which is about the relationship between unconscious and physical reality and the *I Ching* is about finding balance between organization and chaos where the *I Ching* helps bridging “the finite and the infinite.” The purpose is also a search for equilibrium between the Yin and the Yang as we saw with the lines in the hexagrams. This actually is what the wanderer does as he walks away from wandering to find abundance. He then is no longer at a loss.

The poem shows that these symbols made of binary lines, and which rely on the equilibrium of Yin and Yang can be poems in themselves thanks to all the symbolism they withhold. Hexagrams also help people understand things or get answers and this could be a sort of meditation process. It is at least a way to enhance one’s creativity and open oneself to new paths to explore. The symbols are guides for inspiring people and help them find the answers within themselves as to what to do about something they are not sure about.

The strong connection between the poem and the hexagram doodle can be linked to haiku poems in which the drawing and the Japanese characters merge together and become part of one another. In Welch’s work, the doodle and the poem share the same title ‘The Wanderer’ which is one more way of merging them together. The Chinese oracle brings people back to the source, that is to say, to the natural world, non human-made; making them aware of their surrounding environment. There is this drawing-poem relationship that was previously mentioned in Welch’s poem “The Wanderer” but it is also anchored in reality, in space and time in a liminal way. Indeed it connects a distant past with the present; nowadays reality can be linked to this oracle which is valid in all eras and which uses nature as a metaphor to symbolize people’s hardships and the journey they should take to resolve their problems or reach their goals.

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<sup>17</sup> See note 14, p. 26

### **C. Haiku and its link with drawing, Asian characters and the art of condensing writing and drawing, with an introduction to Zen**

The link between poem and drawing or doodle that can be found both in Welch's and Ferlinghetti's works, respectively, 'The Wanderer' and 'Suicide Haiku', takes us back to traditional Japanese haiku that often appeared with a drawing. The haiku and drawing were interdependent, part of one another. More than just completing each other, they made one work of art by being together. They were and are one entity as one came with the other. Of course people can write haiku poems without a corresponding drawing, but it does not offer the same thing as if the drawing was there with the haiku. They are inseparable to some extent, just like the Yin and the Yang.

Environmental poet and non-fiction writer Merrill Gilfillan writes this about traditional haiku writing and the words and ideas on nature one may find in these poems: "And to scratch a geopoetical line or two on the given sky above the hills or mountains as in the old Chinese paintings with calligraphy on the clods: Poetry as ingredient of landscape, catalyst and protean accompaniment."<sup>18</sup> (Gilfillan, web) But he is also referring in this quote to the drawings that come with the poems and that would also represent traditional Japan. And, as we saw previously, this largely inspired Ferlinghetti and Welch. Moreover, the drawings or doodles are realised with the same pen as the one used to write the poem. At least this is true for Ferlinghetti, since Welch's poem "The Wanderer" is a typed poem. Philip Whalen also writes and doodles with the same pen. It is attested at the end of one of Whalen's poems "The sketches in hand-ground Chinese ink are also the work of the Author." (Whalen, p. 227) For example in a poem such as "air and earth combine," it is visible that the same pen was used. (See Illustration 4) The thickness of the lines is the same between what is written and what is doodled, the type of line is the same. They are plain black lines, they are not interrupted between point A and point B. Moreover in this poem the merge between writing and drawing is even more present since Whalen has illuminated the three capital letters A, B and C present in the poem. The letters do not start paragraphs but the symbols drawn in them seem to link them, one way or another to the elements that are mentioned: "air and earth." (Whalen, p. 373) The illuminated "A" could have been linked to air because the word starts with an "a," but it seems that, with letter "B", they are connected to earth. Indeed, there are plants and

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<sup>18</sup> Merrill Gilfillan, *Old River New River, A Miscellany?* Northfield, MN: Re Dragonfly Press, 2019. 26.

vegetables as well as animals that can be identified in those two letters. Letter “C” with its satyr playing flute is most likely to be associated with air since the flute is a wind instrument.

This idea of merging drawing and writing can be found in Chinese and Japanese calligraphy itself and is explained by Fenollosa in his essay *The Chinese Character as A Medium for Poetry*. This type of calligraphy is very suitable for poetry because the characters merge several images, often of natural elements, together into one sign in order to create meaning. This may contribute to the compacting of ideas so as to create poetry using a very limited number of symbols in these languages. It is very easy for Westerners to see Asian characters as symbols, the combination of which generates new symbols, new meanings and new words. But Westerners also tend to forget that, even if Asian and Western languages do not come from the same language families<sup>19</sup>, and that Western languages have less meaning attached to their alphabets, they are also a system of symbols or signs and they transcribe the sounds that are created with speech. The meaning lies in the letters gathered together, unlike Chinese and Japanese characters that work from simplified drawings of a concept or an idea, as in a sort of pictogram. In the end, every writing system uses symbols to translate spoken ideas, concepts or sounds. Whether it is in Chinese or in English or any other language and alphabet, people transpose into words only what they can conceptualize and how they have learnt to apprehend the world. The question of the reason why most Western countries chose alphabetical writing systems (as opposed to more pictorial ones) is one that we are aware of but it exceeds the limits of the present research. All this to say that there is also a tradition of calligraphy, or artistic writing, in Western languages, it is simply not the same type and style as Chinese or Japanese calligraphy which are also different from one another.

Writing poems in longhand for Welch, Whalen and Ferlinghetti, connects their work to the tradition of Japanese calligraphy, with ink and writing by hand. Even if Western writing might not seem as artistic as Asian calligraphy, these poets are driven by a wish to imitate, understand and appropriate in their unique ways the legacy of traditional haiku writers such as Bashô, who inspired them.

Through their poems, inspired from Japanese culture which is so centred on nature, these authors try to reconnect through nature thanks to diverse techniques used in traditional Japan, such as haiku which is a poem of nature, calligraphy and handwriting using Chinese ink and spiritual oracles which are inherently linked to nature. Philippe Descola explains in *Par-delà nature et culture* that

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<sup>19</sup> Japanese takes its source in Altaic languages and has also taken a lot of elements from Chinese, a Sino-Tibetan language whereas English issues from Proto Indo-European languages.

“il n’y a pas de place dans la pensée japonaise pour une objectivation réflexive de la nature, un retrait de l’homme par rapport à ce qui l’entoure.”<sup>9</sup> (Descola, p. 55) This quote encapsulates practically all that has been said on the relationship Asian cultures entertain with nature, which is that there is no gap between humans and nature and that everything is linked.

This idea is also illustrated through meditation and Zen in Asian culture. Descola also gives an example of this in his book: “au Japon [...] la vie monastique ne s’inscrit pas dans la montagne pour la transformer, mais pour y éprouver, grâce à la marche et à la contemplation des sites, cette fusion avec la dimension sensible du paysage [...]”<sup>20</sup> (Descola, p. 77) This clearly describes a form of meditation or at least of communion with nature by being in nature.

This goes to show that if for Westerners the concept of nature is separate from people and their lives and actions, it is really not the case in Japan. In Japanese, the term “shizen” only expresses one of the meanings of the word ‘nature’ in Western culture, which is the one closest to the notion of “physis” (Descola, p. 55) in Greek and designates the nature of a being. However, that being is not understood as separate from the rest of nature. “[...] the whole of Japanese art and literature are aimed at the same infinity as that of the Western world of the last five centuries, but not through space, not through the horizon. It is the infinite grasped in the hand, before the eyes, in the hammering of a nail, the touch of cold water, the smell of chrysanthemums, the smell of this chrysanthemum.” (Blyth, p. xiii) This quote from Blyth illustrates once again the link between human beings and nature, and the importance of details in nature, mostly to write haiku and to access meditation.

Blyth gives many other thorough explanations of what haiku is and how it can enable meditation thanks to nature. He explains that “Haiku shows us what we knew all the time, but did not know we knew; it shows people that they are poets in so far as they live at all. Here again is the connection between zen and haiku, zen which says, ‘Your ordinary mind, – that is the Way !’” (Blyth, p. x)

Blyth explains that haiku, as well as calligraphy, is a way to meditate. The process of writing is part of the meditation: concentrating oneself on writing well, choosing the right words to convey what one wants to say is a part of it. Haiku is described by Blyth as a way of life, and a way to find life: “When we are grasping the inexpressible meaning of these things, this is life, this is living.” (Blyth, p. xi) The “inexpressible meaning of things” (Blyth, p. xi): his words are simple and

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<sup>20</sup> Translation: “in Japan [...] monastic life does not occur on the mountain in order to transform it, but rather to experience, thanks to walks in nature and the contemplation of the area, this fusion with the sensitive dimension of the landscape [...]”.

factual : he mentions true things that happen in nature such as “The sun shines, snow falls...” (Blyth, p. x) To recognize those truths is the way to “have life more abundantly”, he says.

He then explains the link between haiku and Zen from page ten on. We have seen that Zen relies on meditation and is what monks are striving for and have to find every day of their lives.<sup>21</sup> It seems that through meditation, and in ancient writings, which can be haiku, they are able to find answers to reach the state of Zen.

Whalen, who became a Buddhist monk late in his life was very much influenced by Asian culture, haiku, spirituality and was very much interested in this tradition of Zen, meditation and calligraphy. He says that “writing is writing and meditation is itself” (Whalen, p. xxxvi) which Leslie Scalapino interprets as

“Language can’t be the same as a state that does not rely upon any device and creates no entity, can’t be a state that hasn’t even language to rely upon (which is the characteristic of meditation).”

(Whalen, p. xxxvi)

She then adds that Whalen’s poems are “imitation of mind phenomena akin to one speaking to others [to him and] also akin to one speaking to oneself.” (Whalen, p. xxxvii) This vision of his own poetry seems highly influenced by Gertrude Stein and a story he tells in *Jacket magazine* about one of the Buddhist masters makes it clear:

“Gertrude Stein says poetry is calling the name of something. That’s what we do all the time, actually – call ourselves. There’s the story of the Zen master who every day would call his own name. He’d say, “Zuigan!” And he’d say, “Yes!” “Zuigan! Don’t be misled by other people!” Of course the other people were Zuigan too.”

(Jacket magazine, web)<sup>22</sup>

If Whalen considers that meditation and writing are two different things, because meditation has no proper language and is a practice of the present whereas language is not exactly one since it always already mediates the present, he imitates phenomena of the mind and his poems which are made of lots of juxtapositions look like a stream of thoughts rather than something very organised. This

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21 See note 20 p. 32

22 Jacket magazine: <<http://jacketmagazine.com/11/whalen-writing.html>>

poetry of the mind in connection to nature may be what characterizes his Zen poetry. For example in “[I keep hunting through the house]”, the ternary rhythm at the beginning seems to be just a juxtaposition of different ideas: “I keep hunting through the house/ wandering the neighbourhood, searching my pockets,” (Whalen, p. 523) but while reading, one forges links between these elements and creates a story. One may have the same feeling between this first stanza about searching for something and the second one about the “edge of a [...] cliff” but then if one keeps trying to make sense of this, they might consider that the wandering is connected to this cliff, as if the poet was on a journey either in his mind or a physical one in nature. The last three lines might seem to be very disconnected and connected at the same time: “[...] a giant/ boulder that lay near the cliff’s edge/ Lake of the Fallen Moon./ pieces of a log raft in clear water.” (Whalen, p. 523) Here, the lines seem to be independent and not to be linked to one another; but as for the previous lines, there are links that can be found. From the edge of a cliff, you may see or reach a lake of “clear water”, in which there will be “pieces of a log raft.” The elliptic style that can be found in this poem, may remind the reader of haiku poem style.

To conclude on this part, many things in Eastern culture have enabled the Beat poets to reconnect with nature. Haiku, hexagrams, Japanese writing, drawing, meditation: many elements in this culture are linked to nature, mostly ideas inherited from ancient Japan. In our third chapter, we will return to this link between writing and drawing and see how it is related to the concept of Zen meditation. We will see how writing can be something not only to be read but also to be looked at, when it turns into art.

## **Chapter 3: From the readable to the visual**

At the end of the previous chapter, we focused on Zen and said it relied on meditation and we worked on this more precisely in regards to language and the absence of language in meditation. In this third part, we will first discuss the “phenomena of the mind” in more detail but related to drawing, rather than writing. Of course since the two merge, there will be interesting things to take up on about writing as well but the focus will be drawing in the first part. Then we will introduce the premises, mostly in Whalen’s poems, of writing when it becomes a work of art and finally, we will concentrate on abstract art and see how the written words, used as a tool, enable the poet and artist to create both poems and visual/figural works of art, all in one.

### **A. A connection to Zen practice**

As mentioned previously, the “movement of the brush in Japanese calligraphy” is essential, particularly in “Shodo,” which is one type of traditional Japanese art of calligraphy which means “the path of writing.” As discussed in chapter two, “Zen practice is influenced by meditation,” and calligraphy is influenced by Zen. Indeed, breathing and posture are important factors in this practice. It was mentioned earlier that Whalen considers meditation and writing as two different things; in the same way, many Buddhist monks used calligraphy as a means to meditate.

One essential move in the practice of traditional Japanese calligraphy is the “enso”<sup>23</sup>. “Enso” means “circle” in Japanese. It is a hand-drawn circle, which is “seen as everything from a rice cake to a symbol of infinity.” (Yoshiko Seo, back cover) This symbol can indeed represent enlightenment, the void, the universe, the cycle of life, infinity and many other things. It is “an expression of the mind of the artist who brushes it” (Yoshiko Seo, back cover) and is a spiritual practice. It can be seen as a symbol of emptiness or of wholeness. We find the “enso” Zen circle in Welch’s poem “Step out onto the planet” (Welch, 1973, p. 73) and both ideas of emptiness and wholeness are present in the poem, depending on what people will “find” as the poem suggests.

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<sup>23</sup> Yoshiko Seo, Audrey. Enso: Zen Circles of Enlightenment. Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2007.



Step out onto the Planet.  
Draw a circle a hundred feet round.

Inside the circle are  
300 things nobody understands, and, maybe  
nobody's ever really seen.

How many can you find?

Illustration 5: "Step Out Onto The Planet"  
(Welch, p. 73)

Indeed in (Illustration 5), the poet suggests that in the circle “are 300 things” that “nobody’s ever really seen” (Welch, 1973, p. 73) These quotes then imply that the circle is supposed to be filled with things that are invisible and that may not exist. The strong link to Zen in this poem also comes from the fact that the poem looks like the type of question the former monks would ask the new ones who are trying to be ordained as a monk: “you have to sit up in front and face all the people who are the former *unsuis* and answer whatever questions they ask.” (Jacketmagazine, web) Usually they try to answer through prayers and haiku poems. The “300 things” mentioned by Welch are not supposed to be tangible objects, but answers to find inside oneself. The question “How many can you find ?” sounds like a challenge to the reader, eventually to the future monks, if we keep the logic of the *unsuis* asking them. The enso also appears on the cover of Welch’s collection of poems *Ring of Bone* which also creates an echo with the poem “I Saw Myself” in which Welch talks of himself as a “ring of bone.” (Welch, 1973, p. 77) There is a pun in this poem with the “ring of bone” which can mean both a circle of bones or the sound a bone would make if someone hit it.

We get this second idea at the end of the poem when Welch writes: “ring/ is what a bell does.” (Welch, 1973, p. 77)

To return to Whalen, saying that meditation and writing are different from one another. It is better to turn back to his first steps in calligraphy to try and explain why the poet said this:

“Whalen began to fill up notebooks in his own distinct hand, doodling and drawing his way into poems like an Oriental<sup>24</sup> painter-poet, each word an exercise in attention as he moved the nib of a calligraphy pen – a practice that seems to be his own distinct contribution to Buddhist practice and spontaneous prosody.” (Michael Rothenberg and al., p. 89)

As written in this quote, Whalen started very quickly “doodling and drawing his way into poetry like a [Western] painter-poet”, “in his own distinct hand”. Western calligraphy was his first passion in poetry writing even if he was extremely interested in Eastern culture afterwards. What Whalen may want to express when saying that “writing is writing and meditation is itself”<sup>25</sup> is not that there is no link between both terms, but that, since he developed his own Western calligraphy style early on and writes in English rather than in Japanese, his appreciation of the link there is between Zen and writing in Japanese culture may not be exactly the same as if he was writing in Japanese.

On some pictures from *Continuous Flame* by Rothenberg, he seems as focused as it is said Buddhist monks have to be to achieve a fluid movement when painting calligraphy. In poems such as “[Obsessions]” (Whalen, p. 303) (Illustration 9) one can see that his gesture is not hesitant. The curves and scrolls of both the doodle and the scarce writing there is in this poem are all traced in one go.

One of the poems written by Whalen, in longhand, and that seems to contradict his thoughts on the link between meditation and writing is the poem “[The end of the line]” (Whalen, p. 371) This poem asks a series of questions that lead the reader to reflect on himself, on his inner-self. The purpose seems to be to bring the reader to the present moment through the line “Carefully try to remember what it is that you are doing. “How do you do? How do you like what you do?”

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24 I would use the term “Western” but this was written decades ago.

25 See p. 30 : already quoted

(Whalen, p. 371) All the tenses are in the present simple or present continuous which helps anchoring the poem and the reader in the present moment. Moreover, the poet addresses the reader directly with the pronouns “you” and the fact that the poem is written in longhand accentuates the fact that it is, indeed, the poet himself addressing the reader. The end implies that the reader does not meditate and Whalen asks “are you going to continue in the same wasteful and thoughtless fashion?” This poem seems to be an invitation to meditation, an occasion for the readers to reflect on themselves.

Other poems with doodles express the inspiration taken from meditation. For example, the poem “All of it went on the wrong page” (Whalen, p. 531) This poem seems quite mysterious. In the end one does not know what “went on the wrong page and was “lost”. One does not know what the poet is talking about exactly. If we understand the poem literally, taking the elements as physical objects, the poem could retrace a bad day or a bad journey in somebody’s life. This poem is impersonal. It could be autobiographical about the poet or not at all. The elements listed in the poem look like a day or a journey that was not necessarily the best one in the poet’s life. This “all of it” entity got “creased, bent, dirty”, it fell on the street and got “mud stained, peanut oil, sweat”, the speaker got “sand in his fingernails and “grease in fine cracks of handskin” and apparently received letters “from all the wrong people” and had “an incipient belly-ache.” (Whalen, p. 531) These thoughts can also be understood as metaphorical elements to designate inner issues. Under the poem, Whalen drew a Buddha sitting inside a lotus flower. There is a sign to his left that reads “Oh-oh. Now you’ve done it!” which could be linked to the poem to the extent that these words put on paper look like a way to unload oneself of negative thoughts but also more generally to write in order to recollect thoughts and take some time to reflect on them. In the phrase “you’ve done it!”, the verb “do” is performative, which shows that meditation is a performative act. It indeed needs to be a voluntary practice for it to work.

Overall, Welch and Whalen are trying to reach a stage of “here and now”, where one is totally in the present moment, in their poetry that connects with Zen practice. It is a way to reconnect to nature through a more spiritual dimension that takes its source in Buddhism. They invite their readers to meditate as well or at least show them how it can work. Japanese calligraphy and the exercise of calligraphy inspired from Japanese culture is an ancestral art that engages the body and so, makes people conscious of their place in space, in nature. To some extent it can even bring us back to “the

art of the paleolithic cave drawings” (Buell, p. 221) mentioned by Buell in *The Environmental Imagination* and which were some of the first traces of drawings and of means of written communication.

## **B. Disrupting writing and language: a first key for poetry to transition from a written work to a visual work of art.**

If in the first part we talked about Zen being a way of reconnecting with nature and also drawings and writings as means of communication, we will, in this second part, address the ways disrupting language and writing makes it possible for poetry to start transitioning from a solely written work, to a visual work of art. We will also, in these final two parts, address the way Whalen’s poems occupy the page.

“Ce qui importe à la poésie, c’est la déconstruction présence d’une force autre que la loi de la langue et de la communication dans le discours.”(Lyotard, pp. 324-325)<sup>26</sup> Lyotard explains that deconstruction is the introduction in language of extralinguistic operations that slow down communication. (Lyotard, p. 319) This means that communication is not impossible but that it is more difficult.

Deconstruction of language participates in the creation of a poetry that can more easily be looked at, than read. However, it should often still be understandable. This is something we find in some of Whalen’s poems. For example, in the poem “[The end, of a month of Sundays]” (Whalen, p. 120) the poet writes “Down, down, DOWN” in smaller and smaller script and the text keeps going down in the shape of stairs. This is a visual construction in which the words and their meaning, and the form of the poem complete each other by giving the same definition to one another. We also find this type of poetry which creates an image in Mallarmé’s poem “Un coup de dés.” (Lyotard, pp. 60- 61) It is a typographic poem which represents a throw of dice, as if it had taken place across the page.

Apart from typographic poetry, it seems that intentionally or not, Whalen borrows from different types of writing invented by modernity. In poems such as “air and earth combine,” (Whalen, p. 373)

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26 Translation: What is important for poetry is the deconstruction of a force other/different than rules of language and communication in speech. (Lyotard, pp. 324-325)

“[expansion],” (Whalen, p. 302) “[Lecture notes GSS Berkeley]” (Whalen, p. 398), one cannot but think of automatic writing which is a type of writing in which conscious influence must be as minimal as possible while they are drawing or writing. It was launched by the Surrealist movement and more particularly André Breton. In “air and earth combine,” the words in brackets at the end of the poem seem to function according to that writing process. Whalen writes: “{satyr, saltyr, sauter, çatr, Krishna/Kerder fluting}.” (Whalen, p. 373) What is interesting here is that the last and first word go together and designate the satyr playing flute in the illuminated letter “C” (see Illustration 4) but the words in between seem at first not to be related but actually, apart for the words “k/herder” and “Krishna”, a Hindu god, the terms “saltyr and “çatr” are just words that are linked with “satyr” and which play on sounds and orthography, suggesting other ways the word “satyr” could be written, and its meaning expanded.

In the poems “[Lecture Notes GSS Berkeley]” (Whalen, p. 398) and “[expansion]” (Whalen, p. 302) we essentially find letters floating on the page that seem to be isolated but which are related to a previous word which includes them or not. The method is used in both poems, it seems, as a way of emphasizing the word it is linked to. In “[Lecture Notes GSS Berkeley]” the letter “S” (see Illustration 7) is repeated four times. It could be linked to the word “QUESTION” since it is a poem on attending a lecture and that other questions in the poem arise such as “What I heard?” and “viewpoint or point d’appui” (Whalen, p. 398) The same kind of pattern can be found in “[expansion].” (Whalen, p. 302) Indeed, in this particular poem, the letter “W” is written seven times and unlike the previous poem, the letter comes from a word, the word “When” which is the first word of the sentence “When there’s room enough.” (Whalen, p. 302) It is interesting to notice the link there is in this poem between this sentence and the repeated “W”. The “W”s seem to be spreading upwards, reaching up to the word “EXPANSION,” (see Illustration 6) they are spreading because they have enough space across which stands a word that withholds the concept of getting more space. However, the poem also looks like it is huddled up on itself. There also is the doodle of an eye in “[expansion].” Whalen writes just above the doodle “as it were a bow and arrow” and just underneath it “brow and eyerow” (Whalen, p. 302) Once again the poet creates a pun by combining words and images. Here, it is the “-row” of “arrow” that is attached to “eye-” in order to create a rhyme with brow. In this pun, Whalen cuts words in half and uses these parts with other words, creating new ones. He does exactly what Lew Welch says about Gertrude Stein: “many really good writers found

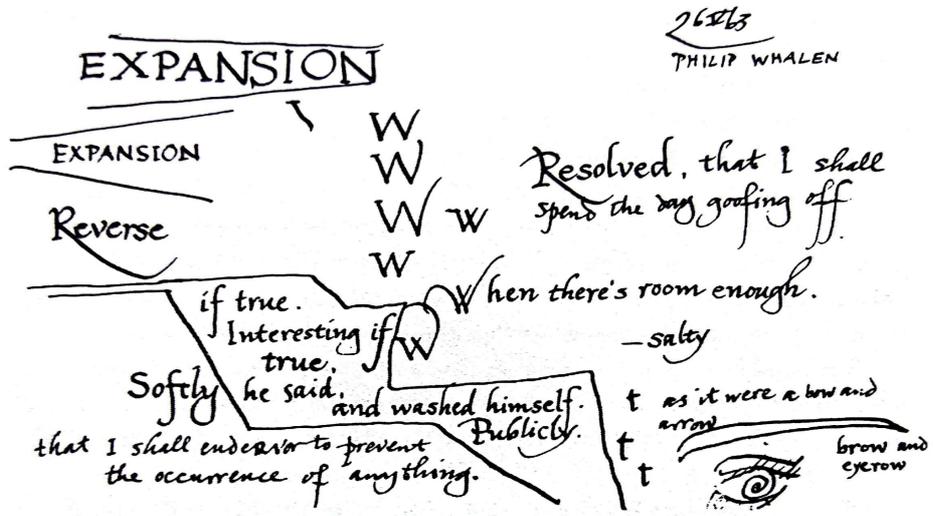


Illustration 6: "[expansion]" (Whalen, p. 302)

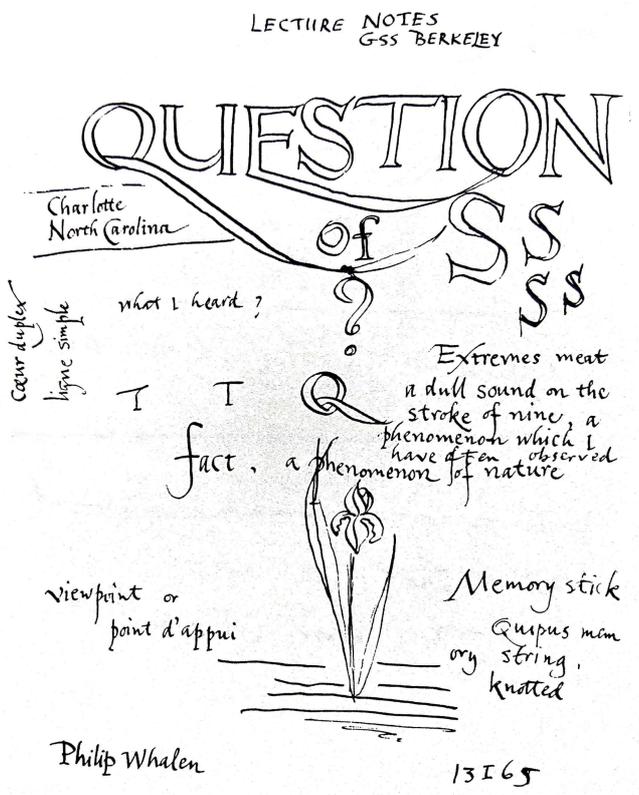


Illustration 7: "Lecture Notes GSS Berkeley"  
(Whalen, p. 398)

in Gertrude Stein the real abstract work. It's as if Gertrude Stein went out there and took this language that we call American speech and tore it apart and put it back together sort of like an abstract painting, and isolated it." (Welch, 1983, p. 57)

Other parts of "[expansion]" (Whalen, p. 302) which do not really seem to connect to one another, read: "if true./ Interesting if/ true./ he said./ and washed himself. Publicly." Such fragments of sentences that seem to be clustered together are not completely detached from the rest of the words present on the page. First of all, it seems that from "we said" one can also read the sentence starting to the left of the word: "he said./ Softly/ that I shall endeavor to prevent the occurrence of anything." (Whalen, p. 302) Another solution with the poem, if one considers that the sentence starting with "If true" is separate from the rest, is to start reading from the upper right-hand corner and read diagonally down to the left hand corner. The poem obtained is then: Resolved, that I shall spend the rest of the evening goofing off/ When there's room enough./ c – salty/ Softly/ that I shall endeavor to prevent the occurrence of anything." (Whalen, p. 302) Here the connection could be done through the words "salty" and "softly" which create an alliteration in "l" and an assonance in "[i]".

### **C. Abstract art : the poetic text merged with its own visual art characteristics**

In the second part we saw different ways of deconstructing language with different writing methods. We will continue with the same idea in this part but focus on even more visual poems. These poems often make the reader-viewer think and reflect on things. The reader-viewer is not passive anymore. And that is true in a number of ways.

Lyotard said "Construire le sens n'est jamais que déconstruire la signification."<sup>27</sup> (Lyotard, p. 19) The technique of collage is suggested in *A Continuous Flame*: "Whalen's most obvious way of composing poems is by juxtaposition, placing passage beside disparate passage, just as in a collage<sup>28</sup>" (Rothenberg, p. 142) A collage is "an abstract form of art in which photographs, pieces of paper, newspaper cuttings, string, etc., are placed in juxtaposition and glued to the pictorial surface; such a work of art." (OED, web)

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27 Translation: "Building sense is only about deconstructing the meaning"

28 OED: <<https://www-oed-com.www.ezp.biu-montpellier.fr/view/Entry/36204?redirectedFrom=Collage#eid>>

This technique seems indeed to apply very well to Whalen's work. For example in "[One Page Poem]" (Whalen, p. 311) big paragraphs are spread out on the page and turned into all possible directions: some paragraphs are turned either to the left or to the right. There also is a sketch used for brainstorming ideas. Moreover, the paragraphs do not seem to have anything to do with one another, one is about "boiled eggs", when another is about the weather which "as good as it ever might be has changed", and the sketch for example is about freedom. This poem can remind people of Marcel Duchamp's<sup>29</sup> work of art *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even or (The Large Glass)* which took him eight years to finish. In this work of art, Duchamp explains all his thinking process for the project of the Bride.

But Whalen does not only juxtapose passage after passage in his poems, he also does so with words or forms. The poem "[Try doing a small thing well]" (Whalen, p. 173) is a real collage of different words written in different styles of calligraphy. In the poem, the words are rapidly circled, apart from the word "AURA" which has a spiky circling, as if it was more important than other words or that it needed to be emphasized. At first glance, this poem may look like a representation of anarchy, but on taking a closer look, it seems that under some of the words one can see doodles: a drawing is created underneath the words or rather, in the background. It looks like there is a field or a pitch with lanes in the top right hand corner. We can also see underneath the word "CREATION", that a car is drawn in the background. The alphabet is written entirely twice, maybe just to practice calligraphy. In *Goofbook*, that Whalen wrote for Jack Kerouac, he said: "A book for Jack, saying whatever I want to say..." (Whalen, 1961, p. 1) Philip Whalen is right, he is the poet so he indeed writes and says what he wishes to. The words in this poem are used more as a material element that can enable him to continue to create. In the poem "[careful and empty]" (Whalen, p.284), Whalen reduces the collage from words to letters. It looks like he was trying to find a signature for himself. One can see the "W" and "P" in the logo-like doodles.

At the complete opposite of these poems which are almost filling in the whole page, a few of them are composed of only a few lines and a few words. For example, "[Time poem]" (Whalen, p. 367) is one of those. This poem which is composed only of the words "Nope. / . . . / It's all still going on out there." makes the reader think about the fact that even if they pause for a moment, the world is

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29 Marcel Duchamp is a French-American artist who started his career, first as a cubist painter in the 1920's but his work was not remarked by anybody and within a few years he started his very well know ready-mades and other conceptual works. French title of his work: La mariée, mise à nu par ses célibataires, même ou (Le Grand Verre)

still turning. The lay-out of the poem is very interesting (see Illustration 8) The word “Nope.” is on its own and then five stars going downwards in a straight line materialize waiting, before the poet concludes that things are still “going on” in the world.

Another poem in the same vein as this one is “[Lightening of the sky]” (Whalen, p. 455) which is just the sentence “Lightning of the sky.” among three drawings of what looks like city skylines. This poem is a very conceptual one. It gives just one sentence and a very vague drawing and leaves the work of art to the appreciation of the viewer-reader.

Another poem that conveys the same idea as the previous one, is the one entitled “[Coca-cola chairs]” which are “pretending to be made from a single piece of wire” (Whalen, p. 229) This poem may remind one of Magritte’s<sup>30</sup> *The Treachery of Images* which says “Ceci n’est pas une pipe” and it is not a pipe indeed; only its representation. The “Coca-cola chairs” because of its title falls under the same type of Surrealist art work. Indeed these are not real “Coca-cola chairs”, only a representation. Moreover, the idea of the “single wire” can also make people think of Duchamp’s ready-made artworks. However, here the chairs are not said to be used in another manner than chairs. These three poems and doodles challenge the viewers’-readers’ preconceived perceptions of reality. They reflect on the world which engages them physically, in reality, through the mind.

Finally, to return to meditation, as it was previously suggested, it can also be considered as an artistic performance in the case of Western art. For instance, Welch’s poem “Walk out onto the planet” (Welch, 1973, p. 73) can also be seen as a performance. Indeed, the poet asks the reader to do certain things (Illustration 5) Welch asks the reader to “Draw a circle a hundred feet round” and inside the circle to find “300 things nobody understands, and, maybe nobody’s ever really seen.” (Welch, 1973, p. 73)

His first instruction is to “Step out onto the Planet” which immediately places the person who is going to do what is asked, in connection with nature. This circle, which is the “enso” as it was explained in sub-part (1 or 2), has to be traced by the performer. It is the perfect place for meditating since it is the circle that Zen Buddhists practising calligraphy *have* to be able to trace. This place where the person will place their circle, will then be a practical place to perform both meditation and art inside a circle, the poem is considered as performative and conceptual art. It may remind people of Mieko Shiomi’s<sup>31</sup> spatial poem events<sup>32</sup>. In the Spatial Poems Events, she printed

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30 Magritte was a Belgian painter from the Surrealist movement. Translation of the title: “La Trahison des Images”

31 Mieko Shiomi is a Japanese artist who was part of the Fluxus movement in the 1950’s-1960’s.

her instructions on various pieces of paper that were in exhibitions all over the world and she received a large number of poems that composed her work of art.

In Whalen's poetry, the performance aspect can be found in a different way. In some poems, he gives directions to the viewer-reader. In the poems "[Strange?]" (Whalen, p. 450) and "[... my FBI, my peace, my war]." (Whalen, p. 230)

The viewer-reader is involved physically, because the poet asks him to do precise things. In the second poem, it is as simple as telling the reader where to start and where to stop reading. There are big doodles of arrows with "START" and "STOP" signs in calligraphy. Thanks to this kind of poem which involves the reader-viewer, they get conscious of their status as spectators of works of arts, but also of their place in the world. The poem "[Strange]" (Whalen, p. 450) is in the same spirit as the previous one. The poem gives instruction in case of fire. Two signs are pointing toward a potential "fire exit". The poem asks an excellent question "why should there be a picture as well as words" which is extremely relevant within the frame of this dissertation. In this particular situation, maybe universal comprehension is the best way of ensuring safety.

To conclude on this third chapter, performing Zen calligraphy or a more Western type of art such as automatic writing, and conceptual art are also ways to reconnect to nature. Going back to the essence of writing and using words as tools to create images, Lew Welch calls words the "primary materials" (Welch, 1983, p. 30) of the poet. Performative art and different ways of disrupting language and writing, all participate in the reconnecting to nature, involving the reader-viewer in the conceptual and meditative works of art, physically and mentally, as well as in the surrounding environment. The lay-out of the page is also a way of disrupting not just language but art. It is no longer figurative but conceptual and abstract and it adds a new dimension to poetry. It shifts from an art exclusively regarded as written and turns it into a combination of poetry and visual art, become one.

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32 Yoshida, Y., *Spatial Poem': Mieko Shiomi's Event Catalogue*, (855), Mizue (Japan), Jun. 76. <<http://ezp.biu-montpellier.fr/docview/1320664460?accountid=12542>>

8: V: 64

TIME POEM

Nope.

- \*
- \*
- \*
- \*
- \*

It's all still going on out there.

Illustration 8: "[Time Poem]" (Whalen, p. 367)



Illustration 9: "[Try doing a small thing well]" (Whalen, p. 173)

## Conclusion

Welch, Whalen and Ferlinghetti, as Beat poets from the West Coast, were interested in nature as a source of poetic inspiration. Not just for the sake of talking about the beauty they could find in nature, but because they had ecological concerns as well. They wanted to show people the deep link human beings have with nature. This link, as we saw, is much more obvious in Eastern cultures, from which their work was inspired. Their desire to highlight the close relationship between human beings and nature within their work seems quite clear. This might have been in an effort to spread their ideals about ecology. Moreover, for Lew Welch, poetry written in longhand as well as speech-like poetry are inherently “organic”. This reinforces the idea that these writers’ poetry is meant as an artistic incentive for Westerners to get back to a more natural mindset and lifestyle. Nature is linked to seasons, and seasons to haiku poems. As a matter of fact, in traditional Japanese haiku, poems were almost invariably about seasons. The topics of haiku evolved in time, notably with American haiku, which Kerouac claims to have invented. These American haiku poems are inspired from traditional haiku, but do not respect the exact rhyme pattern, which is not transposable to English. Overall, many different things from Eastern culture inspired Welch, Ferlinghetti and Whalen. Meditation is another predominant part of this inspiration. It is, in fact, linked to the practice of Zen calligraphy. This practice can be equated to some kind of artistic performance, just like some other types of Western performative art. Performances, automatic writing and conceptual art are used as a means to get people to reconnect to nature. They involve the reader-viewer in the poem either physically or with their minds, which enables people to connect with the space around them, namely the nature surrounding them. All these elements, all at once transcend the poetic text into a work of art, and reconnect both the poets and people to nature. The aim of performance is for the reader-viewer to be active in their understanding and experience of the conveyed message, instead of simply reading about it. In this manner, it is impossible to detach oneself from the subject matter, which is particularly relevant when it comes to nature. The reader-viewer is made to reflect on the essence of being human, which intrinsically means being a part of nature.

This is what calligraphy adds to nature and why Welch, Whalen and Ferlinghetti feel this need to connect it to nature.

This dissertation is not exhaustive. There are many more poems that could be analysed, and some subjects such as ecology, that I did not discuss within the specific theme of my dissertation. I had to narrow the subject down and therefore chose only a few poems out of many.

The theme of calligraphy and handwritten poetry is a theme that I am interested in studying in my future years. Among others, Philip Whalen's anthology and Welch's poems resonated with me, and I would like to analyze them in more detail. I may also keep studying what calligraphy adds to various authors' poetry in different time periods, such as Aldon Lynn Nielsen does in *Black Chant*.

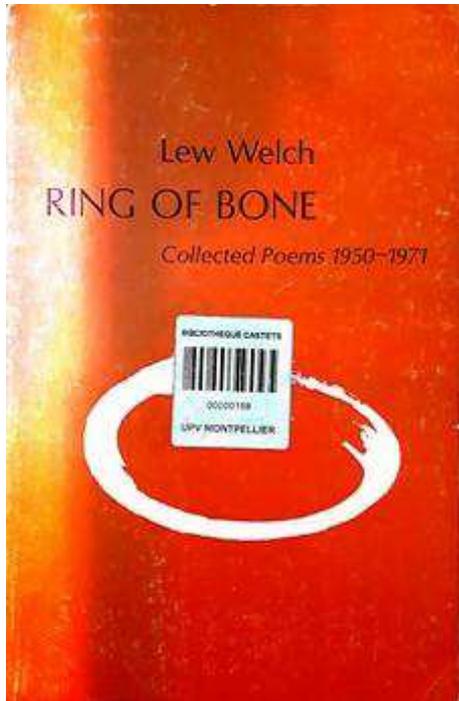
Poems written and published in longhand need to be researched with specific attention; they offer an original source for analysis and research.

## **Appendix**

- **Welch's Poems**
- **Ferlinghetti's Poems**
- **Whalen's Poems**



## Welch's poems



2.  
Sitting here you look below to other rocks  
Precisely placed as rocks of Ryoanji;  
Foam like swept stones

(the mind getting it all confused again:  
"snow like frosting on a cake"  
"rose so beautiful it don't look real")

Isn't there a clear example here—  
Stone garden shown to me by  
Berkeley painter I never met  
A thousand books and somebody else's boatripe ROCKS

(garden)

EYE

(nearly empty despite this clutter-image all  
the opposites cancelling out a  
CIRCULAR process: *Frosting-snow*)

Or think of the monks who made it 4 hundred 50 years ago  
Lugged the boulders from the sea  
Swept to foam original gravelstone from sea

(first saw it, even then, when finally they  
all looked up the  
instant AFTER it was made)

And now all rocks are different and  
All the spaces in between

(which includes about everything)

The instant  
After it is made

p. 55

WOBBLY ROCK

for Gary Snyder

"I think I'll be the Buddha of this place"

and sat himself  
down

1.  
It's a real rock

(believe this first)

Resting on actual sand at the surf's edge:  
Muir Beach, California

(like everything else I have  
somebody showed it to me and I found it by myself)

Hard common stone  
Size of the largest haystack  
It moves when hit by waves  
Actually shudders

(even a good gust of wind will do it  
if you sit real still and keep your mouth shut)

Notched to certain center it  
Yields and then comes back to it:

Wobbly tons

54

3.  
*I have been in many shapes before I attained congenial form*  
All those years on the beach, lifetimes . . .

When I was a boy I used to watch the Pelican:  
It always seemed his wings broke  
And he dropped, like scissors, in the sea . . .  
Night fire flicking the shale cliff  
Balls tight as a cat after the cold swim  
Her young snatch sandy . . .

*I have travelled*  
*I have made a circuit*  
*I have lived in 14 cities*  
*I have been a word in a book*  
*I have been a book originally*

*Dychymig Dychymig*: (riddle me a riddle)

Waves and the sea. If you  
take away the sea

Tell me what it is

p. 56

4.  
Yesterday the weather was nice there were lots of people  
Today it rains, the only other figure is far up the beach

(by the curve of his body I know he leans against the  
tug of his fishingline: there is no separation)

Yesterday they gathered and broke gathered and broke like  
Feeding swallows dipped down to pick up something ran back to  
Show it  
And a young girl with jeans rolled to mid-thigh ran  
Splashing in the rain creek

*"They're all so damned happy—  
why can't they admit it?"*

Easy enough until a little rain shuts beaches down . . .

Did it mean nothing to you Animal that turns this  
Planet to a smokey rock?  
Back among your quarrels  
How can I remind you of your gentleness?

Jeans are washed  
Shells all lost or broken  
Driftwood sits in shadow boxes on a trachouse wall

Like swallows you were, gathering  
Like people I wish for . . .

cannot even tell this to that fisherman

p. 57

5.  
3 of us in a boat the size of a bathtub . . . pitching in  
slow waves . . . fish poles over the side . . . oars

We rounded a point of rock and entered a small cove

Below us:

fronds of kelp  
fish  
crustaceans  
eels

Then us

then rocks at the cliff's base  
starfish  
(hundreds of them sunning themselves)  
final starfish on the highest rock then

Cliff

4 feet up the cliff a flower  
grass  
further up more grass  
grass over the cliff's edge  
branch of pine then

Far up the sky

a hawk

Clutching to our chip we are jittering in a spectrum  
Hung in the film of this narrow band  
Green

to our eyes only

p. 58

6.  
On a trail not far from here  
Walking in meditation  
We entered a dark grove  
And I lost all separation in step with the  
Eucalyptus as the trail walked back beneath me

Does it need to be that dark or is  
Darkness only its occasion  
Finding it by ourselves knowing  
Of course  
Somebody else was there before . . .

I like playing that game  
Standing on a high rock looking way out over it all:

*"I think I'll call it the Pacific"*

Wind water  
Wave rock  
Sea sand

(there is no separation)

Wind that wets my lips is salt  
Sea breaking within me balanced as the  
Sea that floods these rocks. Rock  
Returning to the sea, easily, as  
Sea once rose from it. It  
Is a sea rock

(easily)

I am  
Rocked by the sea

p. 59



*Step out onto the Planet.  
Draw a circle a hundred feet round.*

*Inside the circle are  
300 things nobody understands, and, maybe  
nobody's ever really seen.*

*How many can you find?*

p. 73

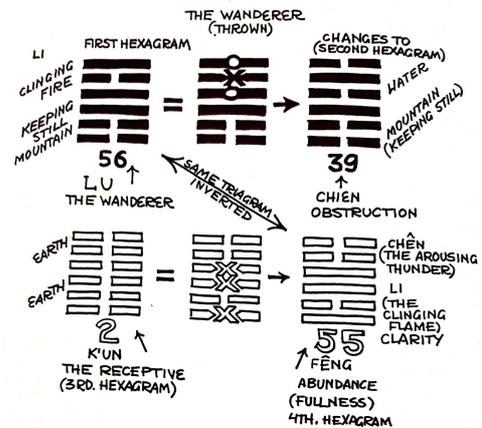
[ I SAW MYSELF ]

I saw myself  
a ring of bone  
in the clear stream  
of all of it

and vowed,  
always to be open to it  
that all of it  
might flow through

and then heard  
"ring of bone" where  
ring is what a

bell does



THE WANDERER

There was fire on the mountain,  
and, seeking to put it out,  
he chose to move to the right —  
an *Easterly* direction, against  
all Nature (for he had not  
noticed that the Sun, his sign,  
moves *Westerly* — and that all  
Men follow the Sun.

Thus the Wanderer walked  
all the 64 spokes of the  
Great Wheel — of course,  
he was fortunate enough,  
or fool enough, to have  
left over many of the  
Stations of The Way.

How strange to think  
that if only he had  
chosen to move to his  
*left* on the Great Wheel, or  
*Westerly*, following the Sun,  
his wandering would have  
ended in a single step —  
his present abundance  
almost instantly known.

Perhaps he was only born  
upside down, or with his  
eyes turned in the wrong  
direction, or crossed or  
something. Who knows?

It's enough to be home,  
at last, Magda, for  
when you found me I  
wasn't even wandering  
anymore, just lost —

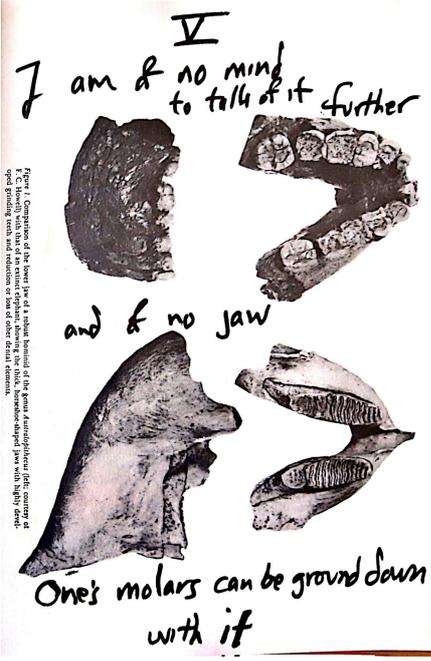
Abundance, fullness, right  
before my eyes. You showed  
it to me.

Forgive me for being so stupid,  
for taking so much time,  
to see.

[October?, 1970]







VI

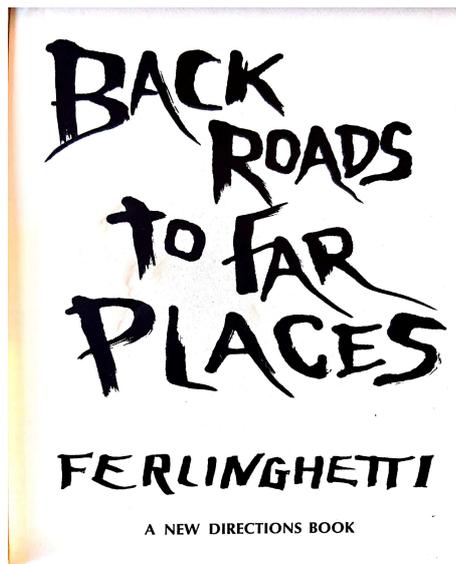
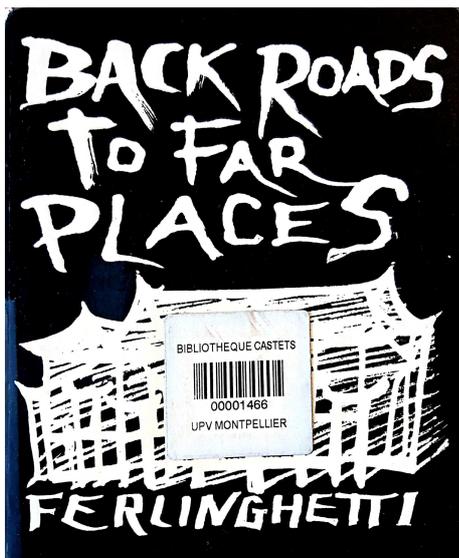
Better to sing of it wildly  
in a tone which implies  
if you weren't singing  
you'd be sighing  
if you weren't laughing  
you'd be crying

VII

Charlie Chaplin  
always wore his hat  
backwards when he backed  
into the meatgrinder

VIII

Be  
like a  
white bird  
in the snow



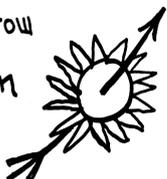
Let my Japanese Pen tell its story 

They say it is made  
of bamboo shoot  
and does not scatter  
drops of black blood  
when shaken

You have to put its foot down  
right in the snow  
before it will  
walk off.

The sun the sun the houses  
of dawn the winterbirds  
full of silence

No smoke rises  
A single fan floats in the sky  
over a boat offshore

I shoot it down  
with an arrow  
from Japan 



Bashō would have liked  
a lake like this  
back roads to far towns  
reflected in it

West  
Tree  
Chest  
Nut  
in foliage

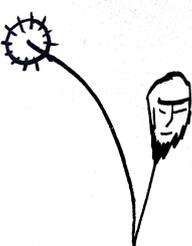
Sun hung in it!

Sun sun  
great god sun  
becomes an oriental  
every day

As morning  
mocks its flowers  
by becoming  
Afternoon

For we have  
our moments of  
ecstasy  
and then  
the bird  
falls into  
the absurd

And when the white furze  
stands up  
on the dandelion stem  
it is time  
to blow



O man in saffron  
in the Golden Gate  
chanting Hare Krishna  
squatting lotus  
among the fern-fronds  
At sundown  
no more Krishna  
The fern-fronds  
unrolled !

Ah day is done  
Day  
is done  
And fish float  
through the trees  
eating the seeds  
of the sun

Black rocks  
like clouds  
of burnt paper  
flowing through  
the skies

We were born  
under the mulberry trees



From which drop  
the mynah birds  
of madness

And the wind <sup>the wind</sup>  
hides itself  
in a hollow tree  
And whistles out  
at me

A million wild green seahorses  
shake out their  
white manes forever  
on the Beach of the  
Small Round Stones



Will the world  
ever change?

on another far strand  
dakinis in bikinis—  
And there was light  
where there  
was flesh

Back on Bixby Beach  
contemplating divine examples  
of free will—  
pollywogs  
willing to lose  
their tails



O listen  
to the sound of the sea  
my son  
There is a fish in us  
who hears the ocean's  
long withdrawing Om  
And echoes it



Looking for food + my father  
I passed my third birthday  
in a deserted kitchen  
scanning cookbooks  
written by men

Later I took up walking  
and took steps  
to rectify  
my earlier asinities  
Only to add to  
my hungers

<sup>Dante</sup>  
And 'in the middle of the journey'  
of my life  
came upon my self  
'in a dark wood'  
And laughed + cried + lived + died  
And understood Nothing

<sup>Sakaki</sup>  
So like Nanao  
in my old age  
I'll be a strange wild  
wandering old man  
thought by some to be a sage  
but also just lost  
in the dense wood  
of the world



4 "Lost poems" from 'BACK ROADS'  
Follow this page - J.F.

O leaf with Rama writ upon it!  
on that 'continent of the spirit'  
just beyond  
the tip of my nose  
I see the dark door

Papyrus and bamboo  
in the window's weather -  
East + West's leaves  
tangled together



Time a traveler  
melting in eternity  
(the mind coming and going)  
Wash out your ears  
with snow!

Sunlight casts its leaves  
upon the wall  
Wind stirs them  
even  
in the closed room

Outside a winter wind -  
Some leaves  
fly by like birds  
beaks  
blown away

High upon Mount Tamal-fuji  
came upon  
a stone vagina -  
Stone phallus stuck in it  
makes earth quake

And in the hills in winter  
took a bath in a hot spring  
thinking of the endless  
muddy roads  
of the Bolinas mesa  
Pulled a plug  
and drained it  
To find the fish with golden eyes

Passing by the roadside image  
of some god  
I fall  
from my  
sacred cow  
into  
Nothingness

Ah how my life runs on  
into the Real  
back roads  
to far places  
lost in the traces

What is that  
strange sense of yearning  
passing  
lighted houses  
at night  
loneliness  
sets its own lamp  
alight

Last night a longing  
a roaring in a sea shell  
a confused murmur  
of birds + men

And bodies  
were boats

Hull of flesh with nine holes  
I float down  
the roaring stream  
And the water  
light



A flutter of wings  
Sound and weeping  
fill the air  
And the quivering  
meat wheel  
turns

Upon that tree of heaven  
that sprang up out of the sea  
and over-arched the skies  
hanging by our teeth  
with no other  
Answer

Yes wake o wake  
for the sun that riseth  
with the rising wind  
will all too soon  
o all too soon  
our turning world consume

O wheel of meat  
made of us  
with no end and no beginning  
(all beings being one)  
turn and turn and turn!

I ask myself just wherein lieth  
that source of inner joy  
while all outside dieth  
in charcoal night

The source is life itself  
The source is sun  
The source is light

But the mind  
the mind also rises  
And still the jetsun shines  
and shines  
And still the sea  
sighs its answer  
its full account  
of Om'

The door to the invisible  
is visible  
The hidden door  
is not hidden  
I walk through it forever  
not seeing it  
I am what I am  
And will be  
what I will be

So passing strange mountains  
And dropping pine needles  
in an envelope  
I send you some of my  
bones



POETRY

LAWRENCE

## FERLINGHETTI

### Back Roads to Far Places

This single long poem of intimately linked verses is not a translation, although the echoes of Japanese poetry and Tibetan Buddhist texts are many. Starting out after Bashō but meeting Milarepa and Dante among others en route, the poet finds his own way, toward a kind of American mantra.

Other Ferlinghetti Paperbooks: *A Coney Island of the Mind* (poems), NDP74, \$1.00; *Her* (novel), NDP88, \$1.50; *The Mexican Night* (travel journal), NDP300, \$1.50; *Unfair Arguments with Existence* (plays), NDP143, \$1.00; *Routines* (plays), NDP187, \$1.00; *The Secret Meaning of Things* (poems), NDP268, \$1.00; *Starting From San Francisco* (poems), NDP220, \$1.00; *Tyrannus Nix?* (political satire), NDP288, \$1.25.

Cover design by the poet

A NEW DIRECTIONS PAPERBOOK NDP312 \$1.50

Whalen's poems

24/25-III-60

Try doing a small thing well.

Handwritten notes and word lists:

F A B C D E F G H I J K L M N  
O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 + OUR  
FATHER WHICH ART IS THOU  
IN HEAVEN, ETC. AMEN  
ORX

OUT CAVE  
ONIX OIE YZ

R. vexation (only a slight one)  
HAYG  
EXTRAVAGANT

artificial pneumothorax

THERE WHERE

DRINK

inside pages

I have nothing for you at this time

WHAM

SENSITIVE GROOVE PRESS

Sensibilities @ ch. 105. delcimo

Other words: AURA, CURE, EXPOSE, TURN OFF, GROOVE PRESS, SENSITIVE, WHAM, DRINK, THERE WHERE, artificial pneumothorax, inside pages, I have nothing for you at this time, Sensibilities @ ch. 105. delcimo.

3/25/59

The end of a month of Sundays  
Hurrah for the church

Handwritten notes and drawings:

LOUD MUSIC NOW

DOWN DOWN DOWN  
NO LIMIT  
NO LOWER LIMIT

feature that!  
[if you will.]

BODHISATVA IN REAR WORLD

Hand-drawn figure of a person with a halo-like headpiece, sitting on a lotus flower.

p. 227

Philip Whalen

← p. 120

Coca-Cola chairs  
ca. 1928, pretending  
to be made from a  
single piece of wire



P.W.  
Sept 4 1961  
San Francisco

p. 229

Handwritten notes and diagrams:

START

STOP

... my FBI, my peace, my war

Alphabetic curves and base?

Abstraction

state of mind & also  
the feeling when you  
keep saying something  
to yourself... it is  
important to me, I'm  
enjoying this stage of effort  
which is a proper action

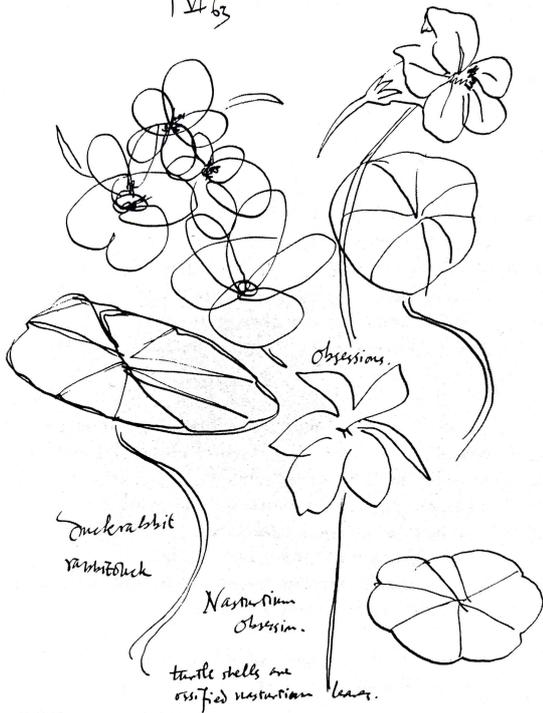
that produces neither a visible  
result nor any internal feelings  
of shame, guilt & boredom —  
although  
we use a polite phrase to  
apologise for indulging in this  
act while in the company of  
other persons,  
"O, I'm sorry, I must  
have been woolgathering —  
what did you say?"

we don't really feel  
sorry or ashamed. We talk  
people about our habit of  
"just  
labring my little mind wandar."

p. 230 →



1 VI 63



p. 303

TO THE MUSE

You're late today,  
 minaudering among the summer fields  
 plunk that little Made-in-Austria Irish harp  
 roll your blue eyes and twiddle your pale braids

(reminiscence of Lillian Gish, Evelyn Thaw, ladies  
 you never heard of, immortal fair)

But here you are, yawning  
 Bored with me. I don't believe you're thinking  
 of anything  
 Yet your fingers are grubby . . .  
 cigarettes, pills . . .  
 You sing in a high voice  
 a few lines  
 indistinctly, not caring, not even amusing yourself  
 "I wonder," she says . . . "Oh,  
 never mind."  
 Smiles at my confusion,  
 my hopeful sudden looking up

\*  
 Leaf and branch twist and wave in the breeze  
 This pen swings over the page, an equal  
 Meaning, neither one intelligible

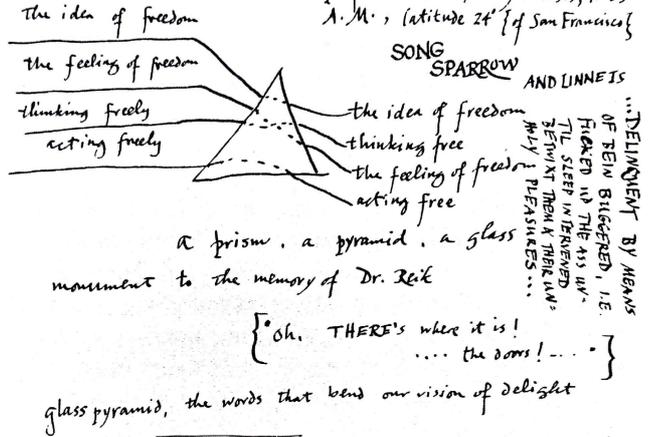
\*  
 Little black dots  
 These represent bees  
 Among the leaves and flowers

p. 316

ONE PAGE POEM

HOPELESS FUCKUP BEATNIK COCKSUCK MOTHERFUCKER  
 NIGGARD BASTARD EAT SHIT RUN RABBITS  
 AND BARK AT THE MOON

Hardboiled egg suspended in a magnetic field -  
 production of morbid secretions in the  
 prefrontal & maxillary sinuses, 11:25  
 A.M., (latitude 24° of San Francisco)



OBOE D'AMORE . a singing reed, a near relative (in  
 time) to Blaise Pascal ... NOUVEAU PETIT  
 SARMSSE ILLUSTRÉ shows what we used  
 to call "cat tails", a marsh plant with a  
 brim velvety - what - seeding head - fruit pod  
 ... ladies gilled them, stood them in Satsuma  
 pots, corner of the hall, top of the piano,  
~~tramped~~ aesthetically arranged behind the  
 hand colored photograph of ~~somebody~~  
 Hastings? Cousin Gladys & cousin Karl?

The weather having been  
 as good as it ever might be  
 has changed. Fog... these  
 high clouds... the effect  
 is one of calm and quiet,  
 after the full noisy orchestra  
 of clear and light produced  
 by sunshine.

Absolute relativities, as  
 in Contradiction to sit  
 space, time Continuum, its  
 absolute pressure immortality  
 & transience

Pascal, a pope; Urban -  
 urban Polchuk's Union oil, a gas station friend of my folks

p. 311

8: V: 64

TIME POEM

Nope.  
 \*  
 \*  
 \*  
 \*  
 \*  
 It's all still going on out there.

p. 367

The End of the line.

Carefully try to remember what it is that you are doing. "How do you do? How do you like what you do?" are you going to continue in the same wasteful and thoughtless fashion?

21 v 64  
Philip Whalen

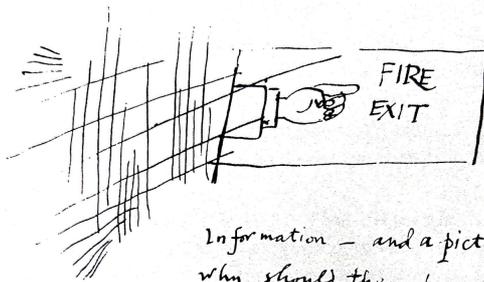


Nagertinus  
22 v 64

p. 371

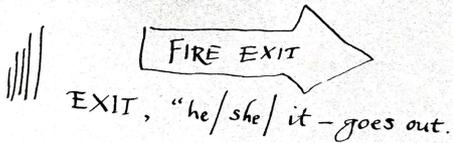
25 v 65

Strange? #



Break glass  
pull down lever

Information - and a picture.  
why should there be a picture  
as well as words



"Hey, lady, your sign fell down."



Brightly

p. 450



p. 373

LECTURE NOTES  
GSS BERKELEY

QUESTION

Charlotte  
North Carolina

cecum duplex  
lygic simple

what I heard?

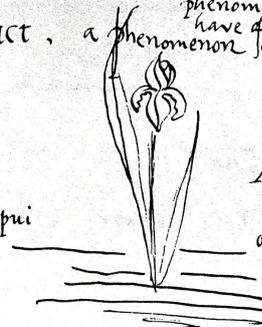
of S S S S

I T

fact, a phenomenon of nature

Extremes meet  
a dull sound on the  
stroke of nine, a  
phenomenon which I  
have often observed

viewpoint or  
point d'appui

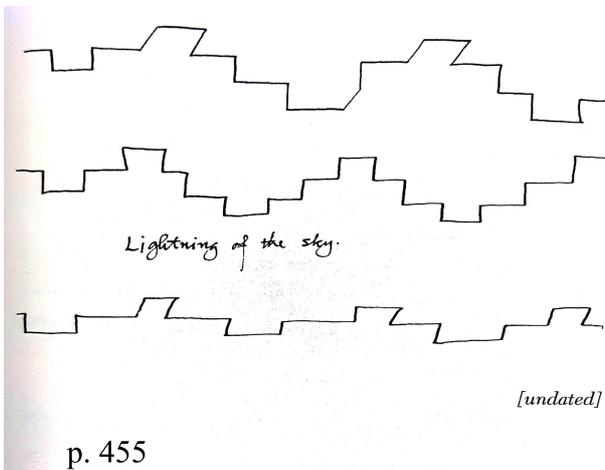


Memory stick  
Quipus mem  
string,  
org  
knotted

Philip Whalen

p. 398

13 I 65



12:XL:66

I keep hunting through the house  
wandering the neighborhood, searching my  
pockets

what it is \_ :

Not yet No such of a thing.



The edge of a stupendous cliff,  
more exactly from the top of a giant  
boulder that lay near the cliff's edge  
Lake of the Fallen Moon.  
pieces of a log raft in clear water



p. 523

6:XL:66

All of it went on the wrong page  
All of it is lost



All of it got creased, bent and dirty  
falling in the unpaved street  
Mud stained, peanut oil, sweat  
Sand in my fingernails  
Black grease in fine cracks of handskin  
hangnail scab callous pimple

Letters from all the wrong people  
and an incipient belly ache



← p. 531

Tiny orange-wing-tipped butterfly  
fluttering sunlit  
from violet  
blossom to violet  
blossom

Ocean is private  
you have to visit  
her to see her  
Garden undercliff  
Dewey Pinks,  
bitter Mint,  
Sea Sage,  
Orange flaming  
Paintbrush  
greenspiked fleurs,  
Thick dainty stalked  
Cow Parsley,  
Starleaf'd violet bushes,  
yelloweyed blue  
Daisy clump—  
red brambled mature sour  
blackberry briars,  
yellow budded  
Lupine  
nodding stalkheads  
in Sunwarm'd  
breezes  
by the brooks tricklet  
wash in the ravine  
Bridged with cloud

Ruddy with wine morning  
glory's tiny tender  
cowbells,  
guarded by poison  
oak sprig's oily hands  
Green horned little  
British chickweed,  
waxlight-leaved black  
seed stalk's  
lilac sweet budcluster—

Allen Ginsberg's →  
poem

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