

## Chapter 32

# Expressing Experience: Language in Ueda Shizuteru's Philosophy of Zen



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*Abandon words and speaking, and say a word!*

—Wumen (Nishimura 1994: 103; Shibayama 2000: 175)

*What can be understood with and expressed by language is not, in the end, language. ... Any yet, at the same time, it is not the case that there is something that cannot be expressed by language. Rather, at bottom lies what I have called the primordial movement of “exiting language and exiting into language.”*

—Ueda Shizuteru (Ueda 2002a: 309)

As the central figure of the third generation of the Kyoto School of modern Japanese philosophy, UEDA Shizuteru 上田閑照 (b. 1926) has not only followed in the footsteps of his predecessors, NISHIDA Kitarō 西田幾多郎 (1870–1945) and NISHITANI Keiji 西谷啓治 (1900–1990), but has taken several strides forward in their shared pursuit of what can be called a “philosophy of Zen.”<sup>1</sup> The “of” in this phrase should be understood as a “double genitive,” that is, in both its objective and subjective senses. Ueda not only philosophizes *about* Zen, he also philosophizes *from* Zen. Like Nishida and Nishitani before him, he has devoted himself to the

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<sup>1</sup> Although Ueda is widely recognized as the most important contemporary philosopher in the lineage of the Kyoto School, only fairly recently has research begun to appear on his thought in Japanese and in Western languages. See the essays gathered in *Shūkyōtetsugaku kenkyū* 21 (2004) and *Tōzai shūkyō kenkyū* 4 (2005), as well as Davis (2008, 2013a, 2014b), Döll (2005, 2011, 2015), Heisig (2005), and Nagel (1998). On the Kyoto School and Ueda's place therein see Davis (2014a) (Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this essay are my own. Since the subject of this essay is Ueda's philosophy of Zen, I will generally use Japanese readings of terms and phrases from the Chan/Zen tradition. Names of Chinese figures, however, will be given in pinyin with Japanese pronunciations in parentheses. Japanese and Chinese names are written in the order of family name followed by given name.).

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practice of Zen as well as to the study of Western philosophy. However, what does it mean to speak, much less philosophize, about Zen experience? Ueda has in fact concentrated much of his attention on questions concerning the relation between Zen and philosophy or, more generally, between experience and language. Any development of a “philosophy of Zen,” Ueda recognizes, must begin with the question of what it means to “speak of experience.”

What does it mean to express, that is, to speak *from* and *about* experience? This question has been at the heart of Ueda’s philosophical path from the beginning. His many works on this topic include a seminal early (1968) essay “Zen and Language,” later re-titled “The Language of Zen” (Ueda 2001: 183–260), articles written in German including “Awakening in Zen Buddhism as a Word-Event” (Ueda 1982a), and a recent article, “Language in a Twofold World,” which Ueda put together to represent his thought in a major anthology of Japanese philosophy (Ueda 2011a). In these and other works, Ueda convincingly demonstrates that the question of the relation between language and experience has always been a pivotal issue for the Zen tradition itself. He also shows how this tradition can help us, in the wake of the “linguistic turn” in philosophy, to return afresh to this fundamental question.

## 1 Zen as a Practice of Commuting Between Silence and Speech

Ueda begins by acknowledging that the Zen stance or stances toward language often appear extremely paradoxical, if not contradictory (Ueda 2001: 183–184). On the one hand, the fundamental practice of Zen is silent, seated meditation (J. *zazen* 坐禪). On the other hand, the verbal “question and response” (J. *mondō* 問答) encounters involving a *kōan* 公案 (a problem given to practitioners) that take place in *sanzen* 參禪 (one-on-one meetings with the teacher) are equally central to Zen practice, at least in the Rinzai tradition. On the one hand, Zen is said to be “not founded on words and letters” (J. *furyū monji* 不立文字). Words are said to be like a “finger pointing at the moon” or a “painting of a rice cake,” and our fixation on words is often derided as a barrier to the direct experience of seeing the moon or tasting a rice cake. Even Dōgen 道元 (1200–1253)—that most philosophical and prolific author among Japanese Zen masters who is well-known for his affirmation of language as a medium for the “expressive attainment of the Way” (J. *dōtoku* 道得)—warns against becoming “enmeshed in the traps and snares of words and letters.” Before reading his own or any other texts, Dōgen encourages us to “cast everything aside and singlemindedly engage in *zazen*,” that is, to “set to rest our interpretive activity of investigating sayings and pursuing words and learning” and to “just sit” in silence (Dōgen 1990a: 1, 24–25 = Dōgen 2002: 17–18; Dōgen 1990b: 171). On the other hand, striking affirmations of the expressive power of language can be found not only in Dōgen but in many classical Zen texts, such as the following saying quoted

by Ueda, “Zen is like spring and words are like the flowers. Spring abides in the flowers and all the flowers are spring. Flowers abide in spring and all of spring is the flowers” (Ueda 2001: 240). Can we reconcile these apparently contradictory claims of the limits and the ubiquity, of the impotence and the power of language? Can nothing be expressed or can everything be expressed? Are we to remain silent or are we to speak? Deshan (J. Tokusan) 徳山 (780–865) thrust the dilemma upon us and presses us for an answer, “Thirty blows if you can speak; thirty blows if you can’t!” (Sasaki and Kirchner 2009: 300).

Zen’s ambivalent attitude toward language has become a favorite topic for scholarly commentary in the West. Zen is accused by some Western critics of evincing a self-contradiction in its texts or an inconsistency between its teachings and its practices. Even scholars who take a more sympathetic approach tend to suggest that Zen needs the latest developments in Western hermeneutics, deconstruction, and philosophy of language in order to attain a self-critical modern or post modern understanding of itself. Notably, the general consensus among both critical and sympathetic scholars is that Zen’s claims to “not be founded on words and letters” and to entail a transcendence of the domain of language cannot be accepted at face value, insofar as contemporary Western philosophy teaches us that there is nothing, or at least no experience, that takes place outside of language.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>I will discuss the noteworthy views of Wright (1998) and Hori (2000) below. A lucid attempt to moderate the debate between the proponents of “Traditional Zen Narrative” (TZN) and “Historical and Cultural Criticism” (HCC) can be found in Heine (2008). In seeking a middle way beyond the extremes of the TZN view that language is merely a heuristic instrument (a disposable finger pointing at the moon) and the HCC accusation that Zen’s use of language dissolves into sheer nonsense, Heine argues that “Zen writings are fully expressive of spiritual attainment, rather than merely a prelude to the abandonment of language,” and that Zen invents “a creative new style of expression that uses language in unusual and ingenious fashions to surpass a reliance on everyday words and letters” (Heine 2008: 29, 38, 40). Along with Hee-jin Kim, Heine prefers the epistemological and soteriological affirmations of language in Dōgen’s *Shōbōgenzō* to other figures and texts in the Zen tradition that stress the need to cut through the “entangling vines” of language (see Heine 1994; Kim 1987; Kim 2007). A more critical treatment of the topic of language in Zen can be found Faure (1993), who argues that Chan (Zen) emerged as “first and foremost ... a *discourse* on practice and a discursive practice” that, like all discourses, is “subject to specific epistemological, cultural, and sociopolitical constraints” (Faure 1993: 194). While dismissive of what he sees as Chan/Zen’s “rhetoric of immediacy,” which purports to attain to a “pure experience” outside of language, Faure, too, is more sympathetic with Dōgen’s affirmative view of language. He writes: “A recurrent description of awakening is that ‘the path of language is cut off, all mental functions are extinguished.’ However, language was also perceived as having an infinite depth. Therefore, the possibility of an awakening taking place *within* language could not be excluded. Perhaps this alternative is at the background of the famous opposition drawn by Dōgen between Linji’s notion of the ‘true man without a rank’ (C. *wuwei zhenren*, J. *mui no shinnin*)—who has awakened outside (and without) language—and his own advocacy of the ‘true man with a rank’ (C. *youwei zhenren*, J. *ui no shinnin*)—who has awakened with and within language” (Faure 1993: 195–196). As we shall see, however, Ueda problematizes this apparent dichotomy between with/within and outside/without language, and in so doing offers a fresh alternative that is able to account for both positive and negative attitudes toward language found in the Zen tradition (including Dōgen).

In contrast to philosophical interpretations that would either deconstructively discredit Zen or hermeneutically reinterpret it in order to save it from its supposed self-misunderstanding, Ueda shows how we can understand its contradictory stances toward linguistic expression not as an inconsistency that plagues Zen but rather as a dynamic interplay essential to it. Zen's paradoxical ambivalence toward language is not a problem; it's the point. In this essay I seek to demonstrate how Ueda develops an original and compelling interpretation of the role of language in the Zen tradition, an interpretation which is based first and foremost on the traditional self-understanding of Zen figures and texts themselves and yet also speaks to recent developments in Western philosophy.

We will need to proceed one step at a time in order to get Ueda's understanding of the relation between experience and expression, or between Zen and language, properly in view. Let us begin with his quotation of a passage from Bankei 盤珪 (1622–1693), “There is a time to look at the written records of the patriarchs. But when you are seeking to acquire the principle (J. *ri* 理) of the sutras and records, looking at them will blind you. When you are looking back at this principle [after having attained it], however, they will provide verification of it” (Ueda 2001: 240–241). In other words, one must first set aside words in order to attain the Dharma eye with which it becomes possible to understand and express the Dharma in words. Ueda finds this bidirectional movement away from and back into language epitomized in the twin practices of the Rinzai 臨濟 Zen tradition, namely *zazen* or silent seated meditation and *sanzen* or verbal interviews with a Zen master (Ueda 1994: 18).<sup>3</sup> According to Ueda, “[z]azen is a bottomless stillness and silence, whereas *sanzen* is a cutting edge of movement and speech” (Ueda 2001: 210). Elsewhere he elaborates:

*Zazen* is a thoroughgoing silence, a continual deepening into stillness; *sanzen* is a matter of words, words that are born of the stillness of *zazen*. ... Zen practice is the repetition of going from *zazen* to *sanzen*, and from *sanzen* back to *zazen*. This cycle is the same as that from emptiness to opposition and back again to emptiness; from silence to words and back again to silence; from rest to activity and back again to rest. Through this repetition, emptiness becomes ever more free of things, opposition becomes ever more clear-cut, silence becomes ever deeper, and words become ever more expressive. (Ueda 1994: 28)

The bilateral movement between these two practices, or between these two aspects of the one practice of formal training in Rinzai Zen, can be understood in terms of a double negation: “*Zazen* is a negation of language, and *sanzen* is a negation of silence” (Ueda 2001: 210). Or it can be understood in terms of a “twofold breakthrough: through language to primordial silence, and then through silence back again to primordial language” (Ueda 1989a: 74 = Ueda 1991b: 61, translation modified; see also Ueda 1982a: 216). The apparent contradictions in Zen between negating and affirming language, between prohibiting and demanding words, can

<sup>3</sup>More fully, Ueda explains the practice of Zen as a dynamic triad which, in addition to *zazen* and *sanzen*, includes *samu* 作務 (“work”) together with *angya* 行脚 (“wandering”) (see Ueda 1982a: 213; Ueda 1991b: 59; Ueda 2011b: 99).

thus be understood as exhortations to participate in the interplay of this twofold movement.

Ueda, in fact, sees this bilateral movement not just as an essential aspect of Zen practice but as the essential relation between experience and language as such. He calls this double movement that of “exiting language and exiting into language” (J. *kotoba kara dete, kotoba ni deru* 言葉から出て、言葉に出る).<sup>4</sup> One must break through the sedimentations of language to experience things afresh; and one must allow this fresh experience of things to find its appropriate linguistic expression. Whereas in Zen training the two moments of this movement are deepened and intensified in the twin practices of *zazen* and *sanzen*, in the “practice of everyday life” (J. *nichijōkufū* 日常工夫), experience and expression are not two separate occurrences but rather occur as two sides of the same primordial event of “exiting language and exiting into language.” As we shall see, the nondual yet radically bivalent movement expressed by this phrase is how Ueda understands the relation between language and experience in general, and the event of “pure experience” (J. *junsui keiken* 純粹経験) in particular.

## 2 The ABCs of Nishida's Philosophy of Pure Experience

The notion of “pure experience” is often understood—or misunderstood—to refer to a mystical state of rapture. Ueda stresses, however, that Zen is not an other-worldly mysticism; it is rather a “non-mysticism” (G. *Nicht-Mystik*, J. *hishinpi-shugi* 非神秘主義) or “de-mysticism” that repeatedly passes through and beyond a silent state of *unio mystica* on the way back to a nondual (that is, “not one and not two”) experience of living in the linguistically articulated world of plurality (see Ueda 2002b; Davis 2008). Zen is not a matter of transcending the everyday world of speech merely to dwell in a higher ineffable abode, but rather a matter of “trans-descending” or “stepping back” from our habitual linguistic reifications of experience to the primordial wellsprings of what Nishida calls “radical everydayness” (J. *byōjōtei* 平常底). It was only a number of years after Ueda first developed a philosophical account of Zen's return to the roots of everyday experience—an account that sought to explain the death-and-rebirth of language at this primordial level of experience—that he first began a serious engagement with Nishida's philosophy, taking as his principal focus the philosophy of “pure experience” set forth in Nishida's maiden work, *An Inquiry into the Good*.

In the preface to *An Inquiry into the Good*, Nishida expresses his intention to “explain all things on the basis of pure experience as the sole reality” (Nishida 1987: 4 = Nishida 1990: xxx). In the opening paragraph of the first chapter, Nishida

<sup>4</sup>This key phrase can also be translated as “exiting language and then exiting into language.” But, as we shall see, it is important to bear in mind that Ueda thinks of this as a bidirectional and circling movement. I will keep the phrase in quotes to indicate that the two moments of the movement must be thought together.

declares that “by *pure* I am referring to the state of experience just as it is without the least addition of deliberative discrimination.” He then gives as his first example of a pure experience “the moment of seeing a color or hearing a sound ... prior not only to the thought that the color or sound is the activity of an external object or that one is sensing it, but also to the judgment of what the color or sound might be.” In other words, in pure experience “there is not yet a subject or an object, and knowing and its object are completely unified” (Nishida 1987: 9 = Nishida 1990: 3). In the following pages and in the course of the book, however, Nishida expands his definition of pure experience to include not only activities having duration, such as a “climber’s determined ascent of a cliff and a musician’s performance of a piece,” but also the “activity of thinking” itself, at least when it advances in a nondual and non-volitional manner (Nishida 1987: 11, 19 = Nishida 1990: 6, 13). In the most expansive sense of the term, Nishida claims that “we cannot leave the sphere of pure experience” (Nishida 1987: 16 = Nishida 1990: 9).

Clearly there are ambiguities in Nishida’s uses of the term “pure experience,” but it is not my intention to try to sort these out here, or to show how Nishida’s path of thought unfolded as an attempt to deal with the philosophical problems that remained unresolved in his maiden work (see, in this regard, Ueda 1991a: 145–168, 261–381; Ueda 1993: 88–89; Ueda 1995: 43–47). Rather, I am presently concerned with Ueda’s interpretation of pure experience, especially as it pertains to the question of language. Ueda distinguishes between three senses of the term “pure experience” in Nishida’s text: an originary “event,” an unfolding “state,” and a philosophical “standpoint” (Ueda 1991a: 79).<sup>5</sup> Ueda is mostly concerned with the first of these, which he not only calls the “original” (J. *gensho* 原初) or “primordial” (J. *genshi* 原始) sense, but also the “proper sense” (J. *shōgi* 勝義) of pure experience (Ueda 1991a: 151–153; Ueda 2002b: 68).

This primordial sense of pure experience is an originary “event” (J. *dekgoto* 出来事), more literally an “advent” of something that arises and comes forth from out of the blue, from nowhere, from “nothing” (J. *mu* 無). Such an event may be triggered by a “limit situation,” such as a near-death experience or an impasse in Zen

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<sup>5</sup> According to Ueda, Nishida eventually realized that, as a philosophical standpoint which intended to “explain everything,” “pure experience” was insufficient because it did not account for the intellectual reflection involved in this activity of explaining itself (Ueda 1991a: 167). In response to this problem, Nishida shifted to a standpoint of “self-awareness” that would include both “intuition” and “reflection.” Nishida’s understanding of self-awareness as a matter of “seeing the self within the self” led to his middle period philosophy of “place,” which was subsequently developed through his considerations of alterity and history into his later period philosophy of the dialectically self-determining world. In the latter, as Nishida himself notes in his 1936 preface to *An Inquiry into the Good*, the notion of “pure experience” is rethought as “acting-intuition” (Nishida 1987: 6–7 = Nishida 1990: xxxiii). In any case, while Nishida’s abiding concern was with developing a system of philosophy which could “explain everything,” Ueda focuses his attention on the sense in which the primal event of pure experience takes place as a death-and-rebirth of language and meaning, which entails a death-and-rebirth of the linguistic horizons and meaningful parameters of—and thus of the very possibility of—explanation. In this sense, while Nishida was more concerned with developing a philosophical system on the basis of Zen experience, Ueda is more concerned with giving a phenomenological account of the basic Zen experience itself.



*kōan* training, but it often manifests as something extraordinarily ordinary, as is the case with Nishida's example of "seeing a color or hearing a sound." Insofar as it is a primordial event of pure experience, seeing a color or hearing a sound takes place as an immediate experiential unity prior to the introduction of "deliberative discrimination" (J. *shiryo-funbetsu* 思慮分別), analytical "judgment or discernment" (J. *handan* 判断, literally "splitting and severing"; "discernment" literally implies "separation by sifting"), and linguistic articulation (J. *bunsetsu* 分節, literally "division into segments"; "articulation" literally implies "division into jointed segments"). Such events of pure, direct, and immediate experience are rare, insofar as we are generally aware of things, not as they "show themselves from themselves," but only as they get sifted through the filter of a sedimented linguistic framework.

As paradigmatic examples of pure experiences that burst through these linguistic filters, Ueda refers to classical stories of enlightenment experiences, such as Xiangyan 香嚴 (J. Kyōgen, d. 898) hearing a pebble strike a stalk of bamboo, an event which Ueda expresses with the onomatopoeic expression, "*kachin!*"—we might say in English, "*ping!*" (Ueda 2002b: 210–211). He also relates a story told by Nishida about D. T. Suzuki who, when asked to explain Zen, startled everyone by shaking the table, "*gata-gata!*"—an onomatopoeia for a rattling sound (Ueda 2001: 2–3 = Ueda 1994: 12; see also Nishitani 1991: 26). It is well worth pausing to note here that the Japanese language is replete with onomatopoeias or "sound-imitating-words" (J. *giongo* 擬音語), as well as with "condition-imitating-words" (J. *gitaigo* 擬態語) for the other four senses, for emotions, and for a variety of other states of affairs. Along with the prevalence of grammatical forms similar to the middle voice, which express the nondual self-unfolding of an event prior to its bifurcation into the subject/object dualism implied by the active and passive voices (see Elberfeld 2011), this vast vocabulary of imitative words is an aspect of the Japanese language with intriguing philosophical implications. Insofar as onomatopoeias could be understood along the lines of Paul Valéry's characterization of a poem as "a prolonged hesitation between sound and sense" (quoted in Dworkin 2009: 181), these *giongo* and *gitaigo* could be understood as *traces of the birth of sense*, a birth that takes place in what Ueda is calling pure experience and as what we will see him call an "originary word" (J. *kongengo* 根源語, G. *Urwort*). While, on the one hand, these proto-linguistic expressions give rise to newly articulated worlds of meaning, on the other hand, Xiangyan's *kachin!* and Suzuki's *gata-gata!* point back to a level of nondual immediacy that precedes the reconstitution of these experiences by means of linguistic conceptualization, that is, by means of what Nishida calls "deliberative discrimination" and the interpretive "fabrications" (J. *saikū* 細工) subsequently imposed on the world by a dualistically alienated ego-subject.

According to Ueda, Nishida's unprecedented venture was to develop, in the wake of his intense practice of Zen, a philosophy *of* (double genitive) pure experience. His philosophy is based on the idea of "pure experience" which, in turn, is based on what this term indicates, namely the fact of pure experience itself. In other words, Nishida's "philosophy *of* pure experience" speaks not only *about* but also *from* this wellspring of all experiential reality. According to Ueda, this means that Nishida

had to proceed in two directions: from out of pure experience toward a discourse of philosophy, and from within the discourse of philosophy back toward pure experience. Speaking from out of the event of pure experience is said to proceed in two stages: first to poetic expression and then on to philosophical discourse. In sum, according to Ueda's three-tiered model, level *A* is the primordial event of pure experience; level *B* is the "*Ursatz*" (J. *konponku* 根本句) or "rudimentary phrase" level of poetic-religious expression; and level *C* is the discursive level of worldly prose, including philosophy (Ueda 2002b: 13–18, 68–72; Ueda 1993: 173–176; see also Davis 2004a: 256ff.). Whereas level *A* is indicated by Nishida with the term "pure experience," level *B* includes such proto-philosophical expressions as, "Pure experience is the sole reality." On its own, the latter could be taken as a rudimentary phrase analogous to the Zen saying, "The world in its totality has never been hidden" (J. *henkai katsute kakusazu* 遍界不曾藏) (Ueda 2002b: 69–70; Hori 2003: 216).<sup>6</sup> On level *C*, such an *Ursatz* becomes a *Grundsatz* or "fundamental principle" (J. *konpon-meidai* 根本命題) around which a philosophical discourse is constructed.

Whereas the tradition of Zen is characterized by its movement back and forth between levels *A* and *B*, Ueda suggests that Nishida was the first philosopher and practitioner of Zen to successfully traverse the entire spectrum from *A* to *C* and from *C* back to *A* (Ueda 1981: 71–81; Ueda 1993: 183; Ueda 2002b: 14). Following in the wake of Nishida and then Nishitani, Ueda himself can be understood to have self-consciously inherited this bilateral undertaking of developing a "philosophy of Zen" as a "philosophy of pure experience."

### 3 The Linguistic Turn: Away from Pure Experience?

One might expect that a philosophy of Zen as a philosophy of pure experience would be welcomed as a synthetic fruit born out of the modern encounter of certain East Asian and Western traditions.<sup>7</sup> Yet, in the context of the currents of Western

<sup>6</sup>Ueda also refers here to Dōgen's "the presencing of truth" (J. *genjō-kōan* 現成公案) as a rudimentary phrase. As if in counterpoint to the idea that "nothing is hidden," however, in the text that bears the title *Genjōkōan* Dōgen proclaims: "When one side is illuminated, the other side is darkened" (Davis 2009: 256). Working out the relation between such contrasting and/or complementary rudimentary phrases found in Zen literature (level *B*) would require developing a philosophy of Zen (level *C*). In this case, one might argue that "nothing is hidden" does not entail that everything is *simultaneously* illuminated.

<sup>7</sup>The idea of "pure experience" has in fact been frequently attacked by critics of Zen and the Kyoto School who claim that it is as ideologically motivated as it is epistemologically questionable (see Faure 1993: 78–80; Sharf 1995). While in some cases I would question the epistemological assumptions and ideological motivations of these critics themselves, I do not doubt that the notion of "pure experience" can and has been used for ideological ends and in epistemologically questionable ways, at least by epigones, if not at times by the Kyoto School philosophers themselves. I will nevertheless make the case in what follows that Ueda's specific account of "pure experience" as a bivalent event of "exiting language and exiting into language" is a viable and compelling way to think about the relation between experience and language, a way, moreover, that effectively calls



philosophy, which has undertaken a massive “linguistic turn” on both sides of the Atlantic,<sup>8</sup> it appears to be not only anachronistic but anathema to speak of a “pure experience” that in any sense precedes linguistic conceptualization.

Ueda argues that an inherent ambiguity in experience leads to two divergent views of language. The ambiguity is namely that “experience” means both the immediate experience of something (*E*) and the linguistically mediated understanding of that which is experienced (*U*).<sup>9</sup> According to Ueda, experience is always in some sense a conjunction of *E/U*. Views of language diverge, however, depending on whether one attends predominantly to *U*, and hence to *E* only as it is reflected in *U*; or attends to *E*, and moreover to the element of non-meaningful excess (*X*) in *E* that surpasses or withdraws from any given linguistic understanding (*U*). After Immanuel Kant's (1724–1804) transcendental turn and especially after it is echoed in the more recent linguistic turn, modern Western philosophers have tended to adopt the first view, according to which, “Everything that is experienced is always already experienced as interpreted through language.” Ueda, however, defends the second view, according to which, “The to-be-interpreted experience *E* is always somehow more than the linguistically interpreted experience [*U*]” (Ueda 2011b: 135–137). “Originally and truly,” writes Ueda elsewhere, “experience as such transcends that which is grasped in experience with the help of language” (Ueda 2011b: 170). Ueda understands “pure experience” to be an event in which the *EX* element of experience breaks through linguistically established *E/U* (or, as Ueda writes in this case, *e/U*) experience and transforms it into an originary *EX/U* experience that is more transparently “at once in and beyond language” (Ueda 2011b: 144).

The subtlety of Ueda's notion of a “pure experience” that is “at once in and beyond language” is today, however, likely to fall on deaf ears. The author of an influential philosophical critique of mysticism, Steven Katz, states what he professes to be his “epistemological assumption” in no uncertain terms: “*There are no pure (i.e. unmediated) experiences.*” We must acknowledge, he goes on to say, “that the [mystical] experience itself as well as the form in which it is reported is shaped by concepts which the mystic brings to, and which shape, his experience.” Hence, he concludes, the “notion of unmediated experience seems, if not self-contradictory, at best empty” (Katz 1978: 26). In a sense, Ueda would agree that such experiences are “empty,” and yet he would add that it is precisely an exposure to this emptiness or indeterminacy that introduces an *element* of immediacy in all genuine experience. In other words, he would turn the tables on Katz and say that a purely mediated experience is what is impossible, or at least such would not be worthy of the name “experience.” In this way Ueda could be seen as radicalizing Hans-Georg

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into question some of the philosophical assumptions of these critics (and of the philosophers on whom they rely).

<sup>8</sup> Ueda's familiarity is with the continental European tradition of philosophy rather than with the Anglo-American analytic tradition, and I will be referring mainly to continental philosophies of language. For a landmark anthology of the linguistic turn in analytic philosophy, see Rorty (1967).

<sup>9</sup> This ambiguity is clearer in German, since *erfahren* is often used in the sense of “to find out” or “to come to know” as well as “to experience.”

Gadamer's (1900–2002) point that “every experience worthy of the name thwarts an expectation” (Gadamer 2004: 350). Insofar as our “expectations” (G. *Erwartungen*) or “prejudgments” (G. *Vorurteile*) are framed by our linguistic horizons, every experience worthy of the name would to some extent tear through the very fabric as well as fabrications of language.

To be sure, this is radicalizing Gadamer's point in a way that would perhaps be unacceptable to Gadamer himself, who in *Truth and Method* claims that “man's relation to the world is absolutely and fundamentally verbal in nature, and hence intelligible” (Gadamer 2004: 471).<sup>10</sup> For Gadamer, our linguistic horizons are constantly in the process of being modified, expanded, and through dialogue fused with other linguistic horizons; yet throughout all this “man's being-in-the-world is primordially linguistic” and so our “verbal experience of the world is ‘absolute’,” it “embraces all being-in-itself” and is “prior to everything that is recognized and addressed as existing” (Gadamer 2004: 440, 446–447; for some of Ueda's references Gadamer in this regard, see Ueda 2002a: 61, 383).

This view of Gadamer's is adeptly applied by Dale S. Wright in his critique of “romantic” interpretations of Zen which claim that language “acts as a ‘filter’ or a ‘veil’ obstructing the purity of experience,” and that its positive use is limited to serving as an “instrument” to direct others to this purportedly non-linguistic experience (Wright 1998: 65–68). “Language,” Wright asserts in opposition to this romantic view, “is a universal and inescapable element in all of our experience, and any account of language or of Zen must now come to terms with this realization” (Wright 1998: 73). Language is said to be “present even in the ‘direct’ perception of an object” (Wright 1998: 71), for it is by means of language that “the world (the given) is focused and organized in advance of every encounter with entities, persons, or situations. Thus, when we see something, we have already interpreted it—immediately—as whatever it appears to be” (Wright 1998: 72). We sense in the background, not just Gadamer, but also Kant when Wright adds: “Although this language refers to something extralinguistic—something beyond language—that something appears to us as the reality that it is through language” (Wright 1998: 72). Indeed, the epistemological orientation of many of the philosophers who have made the linguistic turn can be traced back in part to Kant's transcendentalism, according to which sensible intuitions are made intelligible though being organized—we might say “filtered”—by the categories of our faculty of understanding (Kant 1965: 65). This transcendentalism gets linguisticized, historicized, and cul-  
tured by philosophers after Kant, such that the filters of our understanding are identified with language, which is formed and reformed through history and which varies from culture to culture. What generally persists is the central claim of Kant's

<sup>10</sup>Gadamer's insistence on the irreducibly linguistic nature of our relation to the world is strongest in the period of his magnum opus, *Truth and Method* (1960). Subsequently, there is arguably a turn in his thinking away from too closely identifying being with language, and late in life he sometimes reflects on the limits of language (see Gadamer 2000). In an interview with an Indian philosopher, he goes so far as to say that “language is always limited. At some point, we have to look beyond language” (Gadamer in Pantham 1992: 130). For a fuller treatment of Gadamer in this regard, see Davis (2015).

dualistic transcendentalism that we do not and cannot know “things in themselves” but can only know things as they appear to us, that is, as phenomena. When the very idea of a “thing in itself” as “something beyond language” is dropped, or shaved off with Ockham’s razor, then we are left with a full-blown linguistic idealism, which identifies being with language. Or, at least, as Gadamer more cautiously claims, “being that can be understood is language” (Gadamer 2004: 470).

Victor Sōgen Hori’s views are particularly relevant here, based as they are on his academic background in philosophy as well as his extensive monastic training in the Rinzai Zen tradition. While twice raising, in passing, the crucial objection that “in Buddhism ... there is the state of meditation, called *samādhi*, which does indeed seem to be a state of pure consciousness” (Hori 2000: 308, see also 282), Hori agrees with Katz and others (such as Wright) that there is no “pure consciousness” in the sense of an ability to “see things as they are” in the world without the mediation of language and concepts (Hori 2000: 284). Hori begins by affirmatively citing the Kantian notion that “ordinary perception is saturated with conceptual activity which gives meaning to sensation” (Hori 2000: 283), and yet he himself implicitly goes on to reveal how Zen radically calls into question the ontological and epistemological dualism inherent in the Kantian view.<sup>11</sup> The enlightening experience of *kenshō* 見性, argues Hori, should be understood, “not as a breakthrough to a pure consciousness without cognitive content but instead a breakdown of subject and object within the cognitive complexity of ordinary experience” (Hori 2000: 292). “*Kenshō* is not a state of non-cognitive consciousness awaiting the monk on the other side of the limits of rationality,” it is rather “the realization of nonduality within ordinary conventional experience.” In this sense, “it is a breakthrough not out of, but into, conventional consciousness” (Hori 2000: 307).

However, Hori goes on to say that “the original nonduality of subject and object at first obliterates duality and then resurrects it” (Hori 2000: 307, emphasis added). This implies that what occurs is, in fact, two breakthroughs: as Hori himself puts it, there is first a breakthrough from duality to a “first-order nonduality” (which overcomes the dualities inherent in the conventional world and yet remains itself problematically opposed to duality), and then there is a breakthrough to a “second-order nonduality (the nonduality of duality and nonduality)” (Hori 2000: 300–301).

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<sup>11</sup> Nishitani calls this dualism into question by referring to what he calls “the paradox of representation.” In ordinary dualistic experience on what Nishitani calls “the field of consciousness,” “all things are taken to be objective entities, in opposition to which the self-conscious ego is posited as a subjective entity.” The paradox of representation lies in the fact that “an object is nothing other than something that has been represented as an object, and even the very idea of something independent of representation can only come about as a representation” (Nishitani 1987: 122 = Nishitani 1982: 108). That is to say, the very idea of a “thing in itself” outside representation is itself a representational idea. Nishitani’s solution to this paradox, however, is not to declare a subjective or linguistic idealism but rather to suggest the possibility of nondualistic experience. The field of consciousness is both a place of alienation from things and a place wherein things are distorted by being reduced to objects within the representational horizon of the egocentric subject. Only by breaking through this field of dualistic and egocentric experience, and, moreover, through the field of nihilism, wherein the world loses all its (egocentric) meaning, can one experience things nondualistically on “the field of emptiness” (see Davis 2004b: 155–158).

In other words, *kenshō* would involve the dynamic of a double breakthrough, *out of* and *back into* conventional consciousness. This is precisely what Ueda means by pure experience as the extremity of the irreducibly double movement of “exiting language and exiting into language” (Ueda 2002a: 386). *Kenshō*, according to Ueda, is thus not just a breakthrough beyond language, it is also an “originary event qua advent (*dekigoto*) of language” (Ueda 2001: 256). For Ueda, pure experience is not simply a non-linguistic state; it is, as we shall see, the event of an “originary word” (Ueda 2002a: 307; Ueda 1982a: 232).

Although Hori’s focus is on criticizing the notion of a “pure consciousness” that could purportedly operate in the world without being in language, this is decidedly *not* what Ueda means by “pure experience,” and Hori’s critique can be seen as complementing and being complemented by Ueda’s interpretation of “pure experience.” In Ueda’s terms, in order to counteract those who would isolate and misconstrue the moment of “exiting language,” Hori can be understood as rightfully emphasizing the moment of “exiting into language.” Following Nishida and much of the Zen tradition, Ueda himself may at times emphasize the moment of “exiting language”; but, in the end, he always stresses that both of these moments are partial abstractions from the concrete whole of the movement of “exiting language and exiting into language.”

#### 4 The Sigmatic Re-turn: Pure Experience as the Pivot Between Silence and Speech

Ueda is not only well aware of critiques of the idea of linguistically unmediated experience, he is well versed in the post-Kantian linguistic turn in philosophy from which they derive. He cites Wilhelm von Humboldt’s (1767–1835) thesis that “it is language alone that provides access to reality,” Ernst Cassirer’s (1874–1945) view that human experience depends on the mediation of symbols, and Otto Bollnow’s (1903–1991) claim that “man lives with objects ... exclusively in the manner in which language conveys them to him” (Ueda 1982a: 233; Ueda 2001: 198–199; Ueda 2002a: 295). On occasion Ueda also makes reference in this regard to the views of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), Gadamer, and Jacques Derrida (1930–2004). Wittgenstein famously wrote: “*The limits of my language mean the limits of my world*” (Wittgenstein 1964: 56).<sup>12</sup> Heidegger declared: “Only where there is language, is there world” (Heidegger 2000: 56). Derrida made a similar point when he wrote: “there is nothing outside of

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<sup>12</sup> This statement retains its significance beyond the restrictions of the representational philosophy of language of this early work. Wittgenstein later speaks of a plurality of “language games,” each defining a “form of life,” as collectively defining the shifting parameters of the worlds in which we dwell (see Wittgenstein 1958: 11). It should also be noted that, in his early period, Wittgenstein is also interested in directing out attention the experience of the mystical which exceeds the limits of our linguistically determined worlds.

the text" (Derrida 1976: 158). All of these claims might be thought to imply that language is coterminous with the parameters of our experiential world and, thus, that it would be senseless to speak of either pre-linguistic experience or a world outside language.

And yet, we might ask, is there room in our experience for a speechless encounter with that which is not yet saturated with meaning? Do we in any sense experience "being that cannot be understood," or, if being is defined as what can be understood, what about "the nothing" that cannot be understood? What about the nothing that lies outside the text? What about the "fundamental experience of the nothing" in which the meaning of entities slips away? Heidegger, in fact, describes, as an essential trait of human existence, the experience of "being held out into the nothing," that is, of standing out beyond (ek-sisting) the horizontal limits of intelligibility (Heidegger 1998: 91).<sup>13</sup> If "language is the house of being," as Heidegger later famously remarks (Heidegger 1998: 239), a house is a home, replies Ueda, only in the process of leaving and returning to it; otherwise it is a bird cage or a prison house (Ueda 2001: 387). The limits of language may demarcate the limits of the intelligible world, but when these limits are such that they can no longer be transgressed, they inscribe us in a linguistic "world-cage" (G. *Weltkäfig*) (Ueda 1982a: 216).

Ueda agrees in large part with philosophers such as Gadamer and Bollnow, who claim that "language directs every experience through its horizons of articulation and interpretation." But, he points out, "the world-opening power of language has another side to it." "The horizon of understanding produced by language often makes new experiences difficult and sometimes even impossible for us precisely because it does function as horizon." A "horizon" (from the Greek *horizein* meaning "to bound or limit") opens up a meaningful space for dwelling precisely by delimiting the range of possibilities in which things can be viewed and understood. Language thus "opens up the world for us as a horizon of meaning, but this world is also defined and limited through language, even as its open character blinds us to its limitedness." A horizon is essentially a *delimited openness*, and if we only attend to the fact that the horizontal world opened up through language makes things manageable and meaningful, forgetting its essential limitations, the "linguistically conceived world" easily becomes a "world-net" or "world-cage" in which we are caught and imprisoned (Ueda 1989a: 73 = Ueda 1991b: 61, translation modified; see also Ueda 1982a: 214–216).

Heidegger would agree that we cannot simply disregard what lies beyond our linguistic horizons. The delimited openness of the horizon, he tells us, is but "the side turned toward us of a surrounding openness." Moreover, in itself this openness is like a "free expanse," an "open-region" which lies beyond the horizons that establish the boundaries of our meaningful worlds; it is an "open and yet veiled expanse" that extends beyond and embraces all domesticated being (Heidegger 2010: 72–75,

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<sup>13</sup> On Heidegger's understanding of "the nothing," and Ueda's interpretation of Heidegger's shift from experiencing the nothing in an attunement of "anxiety" (G. *Angst*) to experiencing it in an attunement of "releasement" (G. *Gelassenheit*), see Davis (2013b: 465–468).

132). Ueda calls the unlimited open region that encompasses our delimited horizons of meaning the “hollow expanse” (J. *kokū* 虚空) and explains that our being-in-the-world is twofold: we always exist within the finite openness of a meaningful world, which is, in turn, situated within an infinite openness that exceeds and enfolds all such inherently delimited horizons of intelligibility.<sup>14</sup>

We should not, after all, be content to attend only to what makes sense to us here and now, that is, to what we can speak about intelligibly at any given moment, within the horizons of intelligibility of any given historical-cultural-linguistic context. Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961) suggests that a common aim of phenomenology and cultural anthropology should be to get back in touch with “the wild region” (F. *la région sauvage*) that frees one from being a prisoner within the sedimented horizons of one’s own culture and enables one to communicate with other cultures (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 120, translation modified; see Ueda 1995: 36). With regard to Derrida, we should note that he deconstructs not only the idea of a “transcendental signified” outside the text but also the idea that we are locked up within any given horizons of textuality. Citing various later writings, François Raffoul shows how Derrida increasingly turned his attention to the experience of “the event,” understood as the arrival of something that cannot be anticipated or predicted as a possibility within one’s current horizons of intelligibility. Genuine experience of an event is thus an experience of “the advent of the impossible,” since “the absence of horizon [i.e., of a given range of meaningful possibilities] is the condition of the event.” “The event is first of all that which I do not first of all comprehend”; the event is the advent of what *is not yet*, of what does not yet exist in any meaningful sense (Raffoul 2010: 301–304). The event, we could thus say, is an encounter with an initially meaningless “nothing” that arrives from outside our textual or linguistic horizons. It is the advent of that which brings speech to a halt and demands that we pass through a silent recognition and re-cognition to respond in a way that now, in some measure, speaks differently.

At the avant-garde of the linguistic turn in philosophy, we thus find a return to a recognition of the limits of language. Should we then resign ourselves to say, with the early Wittgenstein, “What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence” (Wittgenstein 1964: 74; see Ueda 2011b: 150–151)? Or should we venture into the paradox of saying more about this silence that lies just beyond the edges of our wor(l)ds? Ueda is in fact not alone in wanting to attend to silence and to the outside that can only be pointed to from within the discourse of philosophy. Heidegger claims that “language itself has its origin in silence,” and adds that, “Since we humans are always already thrown into a spoken and said discourse, we can only ever be silent in withdrawing from this discourse; and even this is rarely achieved” (Heidegger 1999: 218). Merleau-Ponty makes a similar plea for a radical return to a “primordial silence” as the origin of “authentic speech” when he writes:

<sup>14</sup>On Ueda’s phenomenology of “being-in-the-twofold-world” (J. *nijūsekainaisonzai* 二重世界内存在), according to which we are situated within a world of meaning which is in turn situated within a “hollow-expanse,” see Ueda (2002a: 329–345; Ueda 2002c: 294–295; Ueda 2002d; Ueda 2011a: 769; Ueda 2011b: 75–76; Ueda 1992: 63–64).



The linguistic and intersubjective world no longer surprises us, we no longer distinguish it from the world itself, and it is within a world already spoken and speaking that we think. ... It is, however, quite clear that constituted speech, as it operates in daily life, assumes that the decisive step of expression has been taken. Our view of [human being] will remain superficial so long as we fail to go back to that origin, so long as we fail to find, beneath the chatter of words, the primordial silence, and as long as we do not describe the action which breaks this silence. (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 184; for Ueda's references to Merleau-Ponty's phrase "*le silence primordial*," see Ueda 1982a: 216; Ueda 2001: 201; Ueda 2002a: 302)

I have quoted this passage from Merleau-Ponty at length because it closely corresponds to Ueda's account of language in Zen. Ueda describes, by way of reference to Zen practice and texts, both the return from language to silence and the birth of language out of silence. And "pure experience" for Ueda indicates precisely the dynamic bidirectional event of "exiting language [into silence] and exiting [silence] into language." Ueda writes:

In an extreme formulation, pure experience is "the moment of seeing a color or hearing a sound, prior to the bifurcation of subject and object." ... In the strict sense, "neither subject nor object" clearly designates an experience free from all language. It does not point, however, to a state of mere quietistic silence, but originally to a primordial event, the *Ereignis*, which itself becomes the impetus that drives us to express that experience in words. (Ueda 1995: 43)

Pure experience is not just an interruptive event that tears through the linguistic framework of our horizons of understanding; it is not just an experience that cuts off words. That is only half the story—or in fact not even half, since without the other half there is no whole to which it could be a half. The other half of the whole story is that "the very experience that cuts off language is under way toward becoming language" (Ueda 2002a: 68).

With this conception of the relation between language and experience, which traces them back to a radically bivalent event, Ueda seeks to move beyond both "the extreme position that everything is within language" and "the opposite extreme position ... according to which language is what cloaks the true face of the world and blocks the way to true reality." While both views have a point, "as standpoints, they are both one-sided" (Ueda 2002c: 293 = Ueda 2011a: 767). Rather than as standpoints, Ueda situates them as moments within the primordial movement of "exiting language and exiting into language." He explains this as follows:

I wish to see a dynamic integration of the fact that in and through this movement the possibility of experience is conditioned by language, with the fact that what is experienced at its extreme tears through the linguistic world. Precisely because language is a condition for the possibility of experience, being at a loss for words is a fundamental experience, and it is precisely this fundamental experience that seeks new words for its self-understanding. I am not supposing that, when there is an event of language being torn through, the ineffable is in some manner there. This is a crucial point. What I call exiting language and then exiting into language is not a smooth and automatic movement. It is rather a movement consisting of a twofold breaking through: language is torn through into silence and silence is torn through into language. It is precisely this movement that is primordial experience, which altogether I understand as a living wellspring of the death and resuscitation of experience. (Ueda 2002c: 293 = Ueda 2011a: 768)

“Exiting language and exiting into language” is thus not just a matter of Zen practice or Zen experience; or rather, Zen practice is a radicalization of everyday experience, a stepping back to the roots of experience as this movement between silence and speech, between meaninglessness and meaning, between emptiness and form.

Ueda thus comes to speak of “pure experience,” not simply as an ineffable occurrence that precedes language—for this would be to amputate only one part of the nondual yet bivalent dynamic of exiting and reentering language—but rather as what he calls the primordial event of an “originary word.” In this way, Ueda interprets Nishida’s “pure experience and its spontaneous self-unfolding” in terms of “an originary word and its articulation” (Ueda 2002a: 75).

## 5 *Oh!*—Pure Experience as Originary Word

As we have seen, pure experience for Ueda is not an ineffable state of stillness in which one should permanently dwell. Much less is it a transcendent or immanent realm of meaning prior to or beyond language. Ueda affirms that there is no meaningful experience outside of our linguistic horizons of intelligibility; there is no meaningful world without words. Pure experience indicates rather the originary interplay of silence and speech in a dynamic event that at once annuls and resuscitates language (Ueda 1982a: 219; Ueda 2002a: 299–300). As this originary event, pure experience is the pre-linguistic and pre-meaningful origin of language and meaning. But “pre-” here indicates that such experiences are both *not yet* and *in the process of becoming* linguistically meaningful. Pre-linguistic is also already proto-linguistic. The nonduality and purity of pure experience is always already under way toward becoming impure, that is, toward becoming dualistic experience within (re)established boundaries of meaning. The “purity” of pure experience could be thought of as a kind of limit concept, an indication of the limit of horizons of language and meaning, the limit at which the originary event of the delimitation or reformation of these horizons takes place. Analogous to Heidegger’s notions of “authenticity” and “inauthenticity,” experience traverses a spectrum between purity and impurity and, proximally and for the most part, we find ourselves situated the latter.

To be sure, there is according to Zen a state of pure concentration called “*samādhi*” (J. *zenjō* 禅定) which takes one—insofar as one exhaustively empties oneself into a deep stillness and becomes an “absolute nothing” beyond or before the very opposition of something and nothing—utterly beyond or before language and meaning (see Ueda 1994: 17, 22, 28). Recall that we first introduced Ueda’s idea of the primordial movement of “exiting language and exiting into language” in terms of the movement between *zazen* and *sanzen*: one exits language as one enters a profound silence in *zazen*, and then one exits this silence and reenters the linguistically mediated world afresh in *sanzen*. More precisely, the movement between *zazen* and *sanzen* is not simply that between silence and speech, for while there may be a deep dimension of silence without speech, there is never speech without silence.

Just as a text that completely covers the white background of the paper on which it is written would cease to be an intelligible text, continuous speech that completely suppresses its essential interplay with silence would mutate into a deafening white noise. The speech of *sanzen*, in fact, reverberates out of and back into the silence of *zazen*, since the ultimate dimension of silence does not stand opposed to speech but rather enfolds it and affords it a dimension of depth (see Ueda 2011b: 154–155, 170). With this in mind, we can nevertheless say that in *zazen* and *sanzen* the “exiting language” and “exiting into language” polarities of the event of pure experience are mutually intensified. The twofold practice of Zen slows down and bifurcates, as it were, the bivalent pulse of experience, so as to enable one to awaken to and freely participate in the movement of the death and rebirth of sense—a movement which, more or less, takes place at each moment of our lives.

Yet how does this event of “exiting language and exiting into language” happen in the pure experience of “the moment of seeing a color or hearing a sound”? What would it mean to say that a twofold movement of pure experience takes place in a “moment” or “instant”?<sup>15</sup> Moreover, insofar as one is hearing a particular sound, is it not already a linguistically delimited phenomenon, and, thus, is it not already encountered within the context of a language world? Ueda agrees that the vast majority of our experiences take place within predominantly predetermined linguistic worlds of meaning. And yet what he, following Nishida, is calling “pure experience” is an originary event of “exiting language and exiting into language” that opens up a world in the first place.<sup>16</sup> This “new world” can of course always be seen as a modification of a previously existing world; but an inexplicable element of newness is necessarily involved in any genuinely creative modification. The innovative reformation of a linguistic world also requires a moment and element of *creatio ex nihilo*. This event of creation is both passive and active; or rather, “it occurs” (*Ges ereignet sich*) in a manner that precedes and undercuts the dualistic ontology that determines this grammatical duality: the sheer passivity of hearing the sound of a pebble striking bamboo immediately corresponds to the sheer activity of Xiangyan's laughter as this articulation of a nondual middle-voiced event of pure experience gives birth to a new or newly reformed being-in-the-world (see Ueda 2001: 219, 234–235; see also Ueda 1982a: 216–217).

The sounds and expressions with which Zen masters have attained enlightenment are paradigmatic “originary words” for Ueda: *kachin!* is an originary word

<sup>15</sup>The word Nishida uses for a “moment” of pure experience is not the usual *shunkan* 瞬間 but rather *setsuna* 刹那, derived from the Sanskrit *ksana*, which is a technical Buddhist term for the smallest increment of time (Nishida 1987: 9 = Nishida 1990: 3). Although Abhidharma Buddhist philosophers sometimes calculated a *ksana* to be approximately 1/75 of a second, Ueda suggests that the Kierkegaardian notion of *Augenblick* as a momentary irruption of eternity into time is closer to what is at issue here (see Ueda 1991a: 79; Ueda 2002a: 375).

<sup>16</sup>One could compare this to Heidegger's discussion of artworks, and poetry in particular, as opening up and establishing a world. “Poetry,” writes Heidegger, “is the founding of being in the word” (Heidegger 2000: 59). Developing this idea, John T. Lysaker writes that “certain poems enable us to experience the birth of sense in such a radical fashion that they transform the sense of all that is” (Lysaker 2002: ix).

that begins to articulate itself in Xiangyan's laughter; and we are looking back through dualistic linguistic articulations of this nondual event when we say, "Xiangyan laughed upon hearing a pebble strike a stalk of bamboo." The pure experience of the sound both ek-statically removes one from and in-statically reintroduces one into a language world. "The moment when the sound struck him, the net of the linguistic world, the closed ego, was broken through." At the same time, the sound itself is an originary word, a "non-verbal fore-word to language, through which the way to language is newly opened" (Ueda 1989a: 74 = Ueda 1991b: 62, translation modified).

In written texts, we find originary words, or at least traces of originary words, above all in poetry. Ueda returns time and again to one such trace found in Rainer Maria Rilke's (1875–1926) self-composed epitaph, etched on his tombstone:

Rose, oh reiner Widerspruch, Lust,  
Niemandes Schlaf zu sein unter soviel  
Lidern.

Rose, oh pure contradiction, desire and joy  
To be the sleep of no-one under so many  
Lids.

(Rilke 1975: 123–124, translation modified)

In his multiple readings of Rilke's epitaph, Ueda always focuses our attention on a single word, and the least conspicuous word at that: the "oh" in the phrase "Rose, oh pure contradiction" (Ueda 2001: 186ff.; Ueda 1982a: 218ff.; Ueda 2011b: 29ff. = Ueda 1982b: 30ff.). Like a glimpse of the empty kernel of the rose itself, for Ueda this utterance is a trace of the pure experience from out of which the petals of the poem evolve, from out of which the rose expresses itself by way of "articulation" (J. *bunsetsu* 分節) or division into phrases or "linguistic segments" (J. *bunsetsu* 文節). As if following through on Rilke's attempt to whittle his entire life and poetry down to a single verse, to what in Zen would be called his "death poem" or "world departing verse" (J. *jisei* 辞世), Ueda retraces even these compact lines back to the originary word from which they were to have sprung.

According to Ueda, an originary word such as the "oh" of Rilke's epitaph both cuts off and gives birth to language; it is, as it were, the rotating hub of the "and" in the dynamic movement of "exiting language *and* exiting into language." On the one hand, in the direction of exiting language into silence, the *Oh!* manifests the astonishing "pure presence" of an *X* that "robs us of speech." Here the "rose" becomes, or rather "*debecomes*" an *Oh!* "Language is gathered back into the inarticulate in order to *debecome* [*entwerden*] in absolute quietude." On the other hand, in the direction of exiting silence into language, "this *Oh!* is also and at the same time the prefatory, starting point for the words of the verse that follow it .... It is the very first, primordial sound that reverberates in absolute stillness," and out of this kernel the word and world of the rose is articulated (Ueda 2011b: 30–31 = Ueda 1982b: 32; see also Ueda 1982a: 219–220; Ueda 1989a: 74–74; Ueda 1991b: 62–63). As a

verse from Zen proclaims: “when a single flower blooms, the world arises” (J. *ikka kai sekai ki* 一花開世界起) (Iriya et al. 1992: 251 = Cleary and Cleary 1977: 123).

In short, writes Ueda, “as an occurrence of ‘pure experience’, the *Oh!* is also a circular movement from language through absolute silence and back again to language” (Ueda 2011b: 32 = Ueda 1982b: 33). As an “instant” of pure experience, an originary word is thus the primordial axis point of the convergence and divergence of the bidirectional movement of “exiting language and exiting into language” (see Ueda 2002a: 388).

Such originary words of pure experience entail the death-and-rebirth of language and, as such, the death-and-rebirth of self and world. The “*Oh!*-event” occurs not just as a dynamic unity of silence and language, but also as a dynamic unity of word or speech (J. *koto* 言) and fact or affair (J. *koto* 事)—and it is indeed remarkable that these are homonyms in Japanese (see Marra 2011: 6–7, 76–77). This linguistic doubling could be seen as testimony to the fact that, in the originary nondual *Oh!*-event, “reality and language are not yet divisible”; an *Urwort* is also an *Ur-sache* (Ueda 1982a: 220). Moreover, as Nishida remarks of pure experience, the nondual *Oh!*-event evinces a dynamic unity of person and thing insofar as it precedes the split between subject and object. In short: “The *Oh!* occurs as an ek-static unity of person, language, and reality (or affair)” (Ueda 2011b: 32 = Ueda 1982b: 33). Conversely, this ek-static event, in which we are drawn out of ourselves and drawn into an originary nondual occurrence, is an in-static event in which differentiations of language, self, thing, and world are born anew in a movement of self-unfolding and self-articulation. The both centrifugal and centripetal event of pure experience is the death-and-rebirth of the self and its linguistically articulated world. This is how Ueda explains the secret of death in life, the death that gives life, a secret that Rilke sought to intimate and embody in his own way.

## 6 The Language of Zen: Haiku and Kōan

The words of Rilke’s epitaph sound forth out of the *Oh!* without losing a sense of the silence in which the *Oh!* itself reverberates. Elaborating on Ueda’s indications (see Ueda 2001: 230; Ueda 1982a: 222–223), we can witness this twofold sense of sound as a determination of silence—this perceptual understanding of sound as at once an expression and a cloaking of silence—directly presented to us in Matsuo Bashō’s 松尾芭蕉 famous haiku:

古池や	<i>furuike ya</i>	
蛙とび込む	<i>kawazu tobikomu</i>	
水の音	<i>mizu no oto</i>	(Ueda 2001: 230)

The old pond –  
A frog leaps in  
The sound of the water!

It could be said that the *kireji* 切れ字 (literally “severing phoneme”), namely “*ya*” や, is the originary word of this haiku. Following Ueda’s German translation of another haiku (see below), I have translated *ya* here with an unspoken dash. But it could also be translated as “oh” or “ah.” Read with a sigh of nostalgic resignation, *ya* gestures back to the peaceful silence of “the old pond,” primordially empty of the distractions of noise and aboriginally free of the delimitations of form. And yet, conversely, read with a rising tone of anticipation, *ya* gestures forward to the wondrously sonorous event of the frog’s splash. The haiku reminds us of—or perhaps awakens us for the first time to—the nondual intimacy of silence and expression, of emptiness and form, of death and life. Ueda also cites the following Zen poem in this regard:

一鳥鳴いて	<i>icchō naite</i>	
山更に	<i>yama sarani</i>	
幽なり	<i>yū nari</i>	(Ueda 2001: 230)

A solitary bird calls out, and  
The mountain grows all the more  
Darkly mysterious.

We may also read another of Bashō’s haikus in this manner:

閑かさや	<i>shizukasa ya</i>
岩にしみいる	<i>iwa ni shimi-iru</i>
蝉の声	<i>semi no koe</i>

Oh quietude –	Stille –	
Seeping into the rock	in den Felsen dringt	
The cicada’s voice	Zikadenstimme	(Ueda 1982a: 223)

Rilke would likely have esteemed such Zen poetry as what he once called “the kind of speech that may be possible THERE, where silence reigns” (Rilke 1967: 18). In a poem from *Sonnets to Orpheus*, Rilke writes: “Full round apple, pear and banana, / gooseberry ... All this speaks / death and life into the mouth.” Edging toward the death of language, he goes on: “Do not things slowly become nameless in your mouth?” And then he urges us back toward the rebirth of speech: “Dare to say what you call apple ... ambiguous, sunny, earthy, of the here and now—: / O experience, sensing, joy—, immense!” (Rilke 1970: 40–41, translation modified). Words not only “gently fade before the unsayable” (Rilke 1970: 88–89), they also spring forth into ever new vibrant possibilities of expression.

Zen’s originary words are often more abrupt than Rilke’s poetry. Whereas the poet allows things to slowly become nameless and words to “gently fade before the unsayable,” Huangbo 黄檗 (J. Ōbaku, d. 850) prefers to shatter our wordy worlds with a stick. Certainly one of the most famous of Zen’s originary words is Linji’s 臨



在 (J. Rinzai, d. 866) “shout” (C. *he*, J. *katsu* 喝). Ueda writes that Linji's shout is “the reality of the self and the world balled together in a single X, an X that bursts forth as a single ray of clarity; it is the reality of a single shout that embodies a place *beyond meaning* that is directly *prior to articulation*, a place of non-thinking at the utmost limits of principle where words have been severed.” He goes on to say that this originary word of Linji's “clears a pathway that brings ‘that which transcends language’ into language,” and the result is none other than the text, *The Record of Linji* (Ueda 2001: 220).

We could also view Zhaozhou's (J. Jōshū) 趙州 (778–897) “No!” (C. *wu*, J. *mu* 無) as a great originary word of Zen. On the one hand, like a “red hot iron ball” in your throat, this *No!* chokes off all possibilities of linguistic expression based on dualistic discrimination (that is, a doctrinal or intellectual answer to the question of whether or not a dog has Buddha-nature). Wumen (J. Mumon) 無門 (1183–1260) thus calls this *No!* “the gateless barrier of Zen” (Nishimura 1994: 21; Shibayama 2000: 19) and places it at the beginning of his collection of *kōans* called the *Wumenguan* (J. *Mumonkan*) 無門關, which can be translated as *The Gateless Barrier*, *The No-Gate Barrier*, or *The Barrier of Nothing*. In his preface to the collection, Wumen disparages the foolishness of “one who clings to words and phrases and thus tries to achieve understanding” (Nishimura 1994: 16; Shibayama 2000: 9). As the so-called *Wu* or *Mu kōan*, Zhaozhou's *No!* stands as a gateless barrier to anyone who attempts to approach the *Wumenguan* by means of the linguistically delimited forms of dualistic intellection. “Gateless is the Great Way,” writes Wumen in a poem appended to his preface. However, in the following line he adds: “There are thousands of ways to it.” Wumen's *No!* is both a barrier he uses to repel us, and the gate he puts before us and challenges us to somehow pass through. Don't think about it dualistically or nihilistically, *be* this *No!*, he tells us. Then, having passed through this barrier by becoming one with it, “you may walk freely in the universe” (Nishimura 1994: 17; Shibayama 2000: 10). Having thrown away words, they are now at your disposal.

Of course, rarely, if ever, is this breakthrough a once and for all affair. True, according to an old saying, “if you break through one *kōan*, hundreds and thousands of *kōans* have all been penetrated at once.” Yet in the *kōan* system of Rinzai Zen, one's initial passing of the “main case” (J. *honsoku* 本則) of the *Mu kōan* is followed by up to a hundred or more “checking questions” (J. *sassho* 拶所), each of them a *kōan* in its own right. One may encounter these further *kōans* as, on the one hand, reiterations of the “first barrier” (J. *shokan* 初関) that one must still pass through by way of cutting off all dualistic intellection based on linguistic conceptualization, or, on the other hand, as articulations of the originary word *No!*—which can now be understood as the “first entrance” (note that the character *guan/kan* 関 can also mean “entrance”) into the world of Wumen's collection of texts, and thus into the entire *kōan* system of Rinzai Zen as established by Hakuin. A *kōan*, as used in Rinzai Zen, can be understood in this regard as “a means of on the one hand robbing one of all language, and on the other hand of reviving one into language from a place where there is no language” (Ueda 2001: 209). *Kōan* training, indeed,

involves not only undergoing experiences that transgress one's accustomed linguistic horizons (and which therefore may initially seem simply ineffable); it also involves encountering "turning words" (J. *tengo* 転語) which trigger experiences that transform and expand one's horizons. While, on the one hand, learning to free oneself from the prison house of sedimented language, on the other hand one learns to freely pursue an "explication of words" (J. *gonsen* 言詮), as a subsequent level of *kōans* in Hakuin's system is called.<sup>17</sup>

The practice of Zen thus aims at a "freedom from language for language" (Ueda 1982a: 215; Ueda 1989a: 73 = Ueda 1991b: 60). Stuck in neither speech nor silence, that is, both free from words and free for words, one is at home in traveling the circling way of "exiting language and exiting into language."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>"*Gonsen* kōan bring to light the fact that while the Fundamental is 'not founded on words and letters', it is nevertheless expressed through words and letters" (Hori 2003: 21).

<sup>18</sup>It remains to be discussed how *dialogue*—beginning with the *mondō* of *sanzen*—is an essential aspect of language for Ueda. It is noteworthy that, in his first book on Zen, the long chapter on language is followed by an equally long chapter on dialogue (Ueda 2001: 183–319). In his first German essay on the topic of language and Zen, Ueda writes: "The verbal as well as the nonverbal articulation ... takes place primarily in the betweenness [*im Zwischen*] of person and person.... The originary word articulates itself in the encounter with and in facing the other.... The place of articulation is primarily the between [*das Zwischen*]" (Ueda 1982a: 229). There is also a form of Zen-affiliated poetry that Ueda attends to, the "linked verses" of *renku* 連句, which is noteworthy for its radically dialogical character (see Ueda 2001: 321–344; Ueda 2011b: 59–71 = Ueda 1989b: 25–36). On Ueda's understanding of interpersonal dialogue and its relevance to intercultural dialogue, see Davis (2014b: 182–194; 2017).

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