

# Silence and Words in Zen Buddhism\*

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## The True Self as a Problem of Language

The topic of this article is the self-less self (*selbst-lose Selbst*) and more particularly this self in its connection with the problem of language.<sup>1</sup> There exists a movement of the self-less self from itself toward itself. This movement also occurs as the liberation from language toward language; language reaches into the core of being self because our understanding of self and of the world is linguistically constituted. Similarly the fundamental conversion – as the occurrence of the breakthrough (by means of the I-am-myself) to the truth of the self – is nothing else than an original word event. The self-less, the true self says at this moment: “I am myself by not being myself (*Ich bin, indem ich nicht ich bin, ich*).” In order to gain a better understanding we now start from the problem of language.

Any reality that we perceive is already a reality that is interpreted through language. Through its own particular horizons of articulation and interpretation, language steers and guides all experiences and this makes them possible in the first place. In this sense our experience of the world is *a priori* linguistically constituted, as Wilhelm von Humboldt and Ernst Cassirer have highlighted in classic ways. By being in this world we inhabit at the same time the world of language. Language thus becomes a perspective on the world in the Humboldtian sense; it reveals its creative world-opening function.

However, we must also clearly recognize the reverse side of the world as a world of language. Language opens a world as a cognitive horizon, but it also determines and limits that world. Initially

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the world in its opened-up character disguises its limitations. The ambivalence of humanity is already enshrined in the elementary linguistic nature. By virtue of its own function, language can also become dangerous. Thus it happens quite often that the cognitive horizon of the world that is predetermined by language impedes new experiences and sometimes even makes them impossible. The power of language may allow us to approach reality, but it can also keel over to alienate us from it. Indeed, the linguistically constituted world is, to begin with, mostly a net or a cage into which we are locked. The reversal occurs – naively and at the same time unfortunately – even at a primitive stage of experience. We say naively that we experience something. And it has already happened. In most cases we understand something we experience simultaneously. This is evidenced by the fact that we are able to give linguistic expression to our experience; for example: “I see flowers.” And initially it is completely irrelevant as to whether or not we articulate the experience. Such an understanding of it is part and parcel of the experience. We then understand, experience (or we already have experienced) what we understand in this way; what we so define through language.

There is “more” behind this than a simple understanding of what we experience. It is not just a matter of understanding what we experience, but of understanding experience as such. It is this “more” that turns language as a cognitive horizon into a potential world cage. It acts as a barrier against another “more” of experience that exceeds what in experience is constituted through language. We experience something and do so as to make us say: “I see flowers.” In this process, experience is being reconstituted from one’s ego so that the ego can seize hold of what has been experienced and comprehend it. In Zen Buddhism the enclosed ego and language as a world net and world cage invariably form a mutually conditioned relationship. For the sake of the true self it is therefore necessary to dissolve the enclosed ego; on the level of language this is deemed to be the liberation from language toward language. We can emancipate ourselves from the danger of language only in this way so as to turn our speaking into a creative activity.

In realizing the self-less self it is similarly necessary to liberate oneself from language toward language. Since the danger of lan-

guage does not by accident lie in language itself, Zen Buddhism is concerned with the movement from the language to the subject matter itself, in order to articulate this subject matter, in order to articulate what is being thought. In the view of Zen Buddhism, all movements, such as do indeed occur very frequently, continue to take place within the force field of language. The concern is with an extreme movement that completely leaves the world of language and then returns from there into the language in a creative way, i.e., by forging a world.

However, is it at all possible for humans whose being is marked by their linguistic capacity to achieve such an extreme movement? This is the decisive question. This extreme movement is at least conceivable. Thus Merleau-Ponty speaks of the transformation of the "spoken word" into the "speaking word."<sup>2</sup>

In his view we inhabit a world in which language is institutionalized. The decisive first step of speaking has therefore always already been taken and has passed. In order truly to be able to speak we must be taken back to the original silence that existed before the sound of the uttered word. If this original silence is then broken by inchoate speech, real speech occurs for the first time. For Merleau-Ponty this transformation is simultaneously a "metamorphosis of my being." He perceived a mutual interdependence between self and language, just like Zen Buddhism. The latter merely asks how this transformation from the spoken to the speaking word happens which simultaneously triggers a metamorphosis of being human.

However, does such an extreme movement really occur and how? We cannot deal with it as our own action; rather it just happens, if it takes place at all. And it happens by penetrating us, by bringing us into the world again. However, it does not somehow come to us and from anywhere. Rather it is a movement that impacts our self. Once again: does the movement in question really occur and if so, how?

Zen Buddhism's answer is yes, indeed, and it gives examples. Wherever we are concerned with the limits of language, concrete examples alone facilitate comprehension, and here is one from the history of Chinese Zen: A monk could not achieve the breakthrough despite most eager exercises. He became very tense and

desperate. One day while working in the garden, he tossed aside a stone which accidentally hit a bamboo plant. It was this sound that did it. The monk awoke. Later he became a grand master named Kyogen.<sup>3</sup> However, there is no specific cause for this awakening. There are many examples of this in Zen Buddhism. In the case of another monk it was a bundle of wood that fell to the ground; in the case of a third it was a singing bird; there are also instances when it happened directly between master and disciple.

In the course of the exercise, a SOMETHING suddenly and directly appears or lights up in front of the person concerned – something unspeakable, incomprehensible and yet clear and powerful. It is a SOMETHING that one might ordinarily perhaps hear as the singing of a bird or in a religious service; something received as an oracle or a word of God. However, in the tense presence of the event that is “SOMETHING” there is neither room for interpretation nor for imagining it. This “SOMETHING” of the moment – in the case of Master Kyogen it was a noise – breaks through the I-am-myself and hence its enclosed world as a linguistic net to become an openness, a liberation, and an awakening. The same SOMETHING. The noise Kyogen heard becomes, as a primordial sound (*Umlaut*),<sup>4</sup> the new source of the word. Frequently, the awakening spontaneously triggers a short poem. By the way, the word “awakening” in Zen Buddhism comprises both a “revelation” in an objective sense and the subjective experience of salvation. This corresponds with the tradition of original Buddhism where “Buddha,” ethymologically speaking, means “someone who has been awakened.”

Another example which is not specifically related to Zen Buddhism may help us to gain a more tangible understanding of this event. We often exclaim “Oh!” Grammatically speaking this exclamation is an interjection. We mostly use this word in a conventional sense, and this precisely signifies how dangerous language is. In a poem this exclamation may mean much more, as, for example, in Rainer Maria Rilke’s well-known funeral oration: “Rose, oh!” Something is happening to the poet that causes him to exclaim “Oh!” and that seems to grasp for a new word. And so it goes: “Oh! Pure contradiction.” We now ask: What happens if “Oh!” is in fact articulated? What kind of an event does “Oh!”

constitute at the very moment when it is exclaimed? We might speak of an "Oh! event" for short. It is a presence that, by virtue of its momentary power, robs man of his language. "Oh!" The world that has had a prior meaning has been pierced, has been torn. Being speechless, man himself has become an "Oh!" At the same time it is precisely this "Oh!" that is the first primordial sound of the unspeakable. This unspeakable presence that deprives us of language, that turns man into something speech-less, has become the primordial word in, and by virtue of, this "Oh!" It is not yet part of language, but it is an "un-wordly word" prior to language that newly reopens the path toward this language.

Put in a nutshell, "Oh!" takes place as a double event: it is the speechless "Oh!" and the primordial word at the same time, as soon as it is uttered. The person who moves within her customary world of language, is, on the one hand, being deprived of her language and lapses into silence; on the other hand, "Oh!" is simultaneously itself a primordial word rooted in silence. Roughly speaking, this means that in and through this "Oh!" language lapses into silence and silence expresses itself. We recall here a word from the late work of Martin Heidegger: "Language speaks as the rings of silence."<sup>5</sup> Seen in this way, the "Oh!" triggers the extreme movement away from language and back to it. It is hence nothing more than "death and resurrection" of the person in question, i.e., of man as a being endowed with language. The language of Zen Buddhism in its various forms and levels now becomes the self-articulation of this event. We shall have to come back to this later on.

Owing to an affinity between Zen Buddhism and poetry we now turn to something that is analogous to the "Oh!" event in the field of Japanese haiku poetry. This is the so-called *kireji*, the cutting word.

The haiku represents a particular form of a short poem; it comprises seventeen Japanese syllables in a 5-7-5 sequence which has the sound of a melody to the Japanese ear. The *kireji* – like the monosyllabic "ya" or the disyllabic "kana" – is as a matter of principle part of all haiku poetry. Thus a haiku by Bashoh (1644-1694) runs as follows: "Shizukasa ya / Iwa ni shimiuru / Semi no Koe." The *kireji* "ya" might be translated here as "Oh." The translation would then be something like this: "Silence oh / penetrating the rock / voice of the cricket." The "ya" has no concrete meaning in a

haiku, but an incisive function, to draw a sharp line between two syllables. This means that a space is opened up for a haiku through a *kireji*. With it the linguistic world net is, so to speak, cut open in which man has somehow always been held and in which things have become fixed within their contexts of meaning. In this newly revealed openness the being surrenders to the poet, resounding like an echo, just as it sounds by itself. This applies not only to haiku poetry; rather it may even be part of the essence of all fiction. Rainer Maria Rilke wrote in one of his poems: "I so like to hear things sing."<sup>6</sup>

We have been saying above by way of an intermediate conclusion that in this "Oh!" and as an "Oh!" language lapses into silence and silence expresses itself. When language is liberated from itself toward itself – which at bottom is nothing else than the realization of the ruth of the self-less self – we are therefore essentially concerned with silence. We shall now turn to this problem. We use, as our starting point the famous concluding sentence in Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*: "What we cannot speak about we must consign to silence."<sup>7</sup> And in the Preface we read: "What can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must consign to silence."<sup>8</sup> Yet how can we limit what we cannot speak about? Wittgenstein believed that this was possible from the inside through what is speakable. He meant by this those things that could be clearly expressed, such as laws of science. Everything else, he believed, was subject to silence. This indicates on the one hand that a definition of the speakable is too narrow and abstract, while, on the other, the unspeakable is delimited too unambiguously by the speakable. It is really impossible to delimit the unspeakable from the direction of the speakable, in that what is speakable is defined *a priori* as being within language. It is just not so that we can remain silent by knowing in advance what is unspeakable. It is only the unspeakable – what cannot be articulated – that causes us to lapse into silence. Wittgenstein must have had an inkling of this; for it is just prior to his concluding sentence that we read: "There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They *make themselves manifest*. They are what is mystical."<sup>9</sup> Our question is what happens if something emerges unspeakably?

To quote Wittgenstein once more: "What we cannot speak about we must consign to silence." Perhaps we humans, being endowed with language, cannot/do not want to remain silent as long as we have not been made speech-less. Only when this happens, silence would not be the ultimate. We would then put into words what causes us to remain silent. It is just not true that there exists somewhere and somehow some unspeakable reality. What is real is the event that stirs us into moving from language toward language. Our discussion of the "Oh!" term was designed to provide a good illustration for the event in question. We are thus not dealing with a reality that exists via language, but with an event. If this is so, one further question must be asked: How and under what conditions does the event happen? Does an event, over which man has no power, merely fall into his lap? How then is it possible that the event liberates man, gives him freedom which in fact should exist only in the autonomy of the "by itself" or respectively of the "out of itself?"

In the face of these problems we would like to return to the basic structure of the human existence with the aim of elucidating the problematique before us. We continue to see language as a world view while we are in this world. Language articulates our view of the world and of ourselves as we deal with something that exists in our inner world or, respectively, with an event in the world outside. What does "being-in-the-world" in fact mean?

Following Heidegger and as is generally assumed, we regard the basic constitution of the human existence to lie in our being-in-this world. The world thereby assumes for us the comprehensive space of meaning; it is the total context of connections of meaning, within which all being gains meaning for us in the first place. However, the world is essentially limited due to its existence as a comprehensive framework for significant connections, due to its connective character. As such it is finite and it is surrounded at its limit by an unlimited openness, without this limit ever becoming obliterated. We inhabit a world that is essentially limited; it is limited by the limitless and it is surrounded and somehow penetrated at its limit by an infinite openness. Our world lies in an infinite openness and accordingly we live at the same time in an infinite openness. In short, we live *in this world in the infinite openness*. In

other words, we live in a *Doppelerschlossenheit*, one that is opened in a limited way as a comprehensive space of meaning, i.e., in the world; and another one that is open without limits as the infinite openness. With the notion of "being-within-this-*Doppelerschlossenheit* (*In-der-Doppelerschlossenheit-sein*)" we modify Heidegger's notion of "being-in-the-world" as the basic condition of human existence in one decisive respect.<sup>10</sup> Already Heidegger's world is a dual one. In his 1929 lecture on "What Is Metaphysics?," Heidegger argued that "*Da-sein* means *being projected into Nothing* (*Hingehaltenheit in das Nichts*)."<sup>11</sup> What we see in the *Da* is the *Da in Nothing*, i.e., a dualism. For us the world exists in this duality of the world and in an infinite openness that encompasses it. As for Heidegger, the self is the existential subject of the world. The selfless self is the ex-sistent subject of this *Doppelerschlossenheit* that finds itself in this world and at the same time in an infinite openness; for there is no self in the in-finite openness.

We therefore regard being in a *Doppelerschlossenheit* as the basic condition of the human existence. However, this dualism is invisible and it is due to this that humans live a peculiarly questionable, ambivalent existence. The task is to elucidate this situation since, as we shall see, the dualism decisively determines the existential character of the world as well as the mode of the being-in-the-world. We live *in the world in the infinite openness*, in a *Doppelerschlossenheit* that is as such invisible. This would be different if there existed a dualism of two worlds. Our dualism means that simultaneously with the world the invisible, infinitely open openness is available as a space for this world.

The openness of the world within an openness that is invisible and infinite, this invisible dualism may perhaps be better understood by looking at the phenomenon of the horizon. Contemporary philosophy speaks of the horizon structure of experience; thus the world is assumed to constitute the world horizon of experience, the comprehensive horizon of meaning. Only what appears within this horizon is accessible to us and means something. In this connection contemporary philosophy is engaged in a detailed discussion of the correlation between the horizon and the (transcendental) subject. Depending on this correlation, different worlds are said to be constituted. Now what is part of the horizon



– inconspicuous, yet immediate and vital – is both the *Jenseits* that is visible to us and the *Diesseits*, also visible, that represents the open space for us. Although the *Jenseits* is not a precondition of a comprehension that the horizon facilitates in the first place, there is nonetheless no horizon without the *Jenseits*. This world, it is true, is removed from our cognition, and yet the non-recognizable *Jenseits* is necessary for opening up a cognitive space. Whoever recognizes this structure of the world horizon in his own existence (i.e., in his *Da-sein* in Nothing), the world beyond the horizon will grow into “another horizon of understanding.” In the process man comprehends something that he encounters within the world horizon as something concrete within the connections of meaning. And yet at the same time he will know that he does not know what this particular something from beyond the horizon represents. It is precisely this not-knowing that provides him with an entry to infinity. It is the understanding in the knowledge of not knowing. In this way the visible horizon before the background of the invisible *Jenseits* forms a sort of double horizon that also opens up the dimension of depth to us. It is only from the depth of the double horizon that “things begin to sing.” They do not do so simply before the world horizon with its connections of meaning. Of course, the *Jenseits* as such represents an infinite openness, although it is not merely open in the beyond but also encompasses the *Diesseits*. It is in a state of infinite openness that even comprises the *Jenseits*. It is in this way that we return to the above-mentioned *Doppelschlossenheit*.

However, since this dualism as such is invisible, the following happens to man first and foremost: He sees only those things that are inside the horizon and is absorbed by them without the slightest inkling of the invisible *Jenseits* that still belongs to the horizon. Even if he becomes aware of the horizon nature of his experience, he – now being the subject of the visible world – focuses only on his interrelationship with the horizon and overlooks the invisible *Jenseits* in the process. To this person, the world no longer appears as being open, in its dualism, as an infinite openness. In short, at first and most of the time we merely see the visible and the visible horizon that makes things visible; but we do not see the invisible *Jenseits* that also belongs to the horizon. In this way we arrive at

the closedness of the world in which humans make the world to their world and live in it as its subjects. The closedness of the world and the sealing of the self to become the *Ich-Selbst* are mutually interdependent; they belong together.

This process of sealing occurs in opposition to the truth of the world and of the self, yet even now these truths continue to be in force. The *Da-sein* of the self-less self as such remains the *Da* in Nothing, even when the *Da* is turned into a closed world and the self into the sealed *Ich-Selbst*. Only the Nothing, when it is the *Da* in Nothing, tends to have a more negative effect toward the closed *Da*. Even if the limited openness toward the world of the I is closed, the dualism of openness obtains, but at this point in a negative sense. This emerges from the phenomenon of "Angst" in Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*.<sup>12</sup> Even if something that has an innerworldly existence in the closed world possesses a certain significance for the subject, the same something nevertheless gains an unfathomable depth of meaning through its *Doppelerschlossenheit*. When the I deals with something that has an innerworldly existence it is possible that this something that is charged up with an unfathomable depth of meaning encounters the *Ich-Selbst* in its closed world, affects and penetrates it -only, to be sure, under the condition that the self suffers from the closedness and, dimly perceiving the wrongness of its ways, and for the sake of truth, makes the attempt to open itself up. This does not mean that one's own striving will achieve openness; rather it leads to a readiness to be penetrated by it. The closedness of this world and the sealing of the self must, in this fashion, be penetrated by the world and the self to achieve the breakthrough toward the truth of this world and of the self. This is when the realization of the truth of the world and of the self take place; it is not just the mere coming into being in this world, the mere action of the self.

Humans live as self-less selves *in the Da in Nothing*, respectively in the world of infinite openness. In this, the world is the world defined *a priori* through language; it is already and at the same time the world of language. By contrast the infinite openness is nothing else than the space of the unfathomable stillness, of absolute silence. Man lives in this world of infinite openness in eloquent silence. It is in this larger context that we can differenti-

ate three different kinds of silence. The Japanese language has a separate word for all three of them:

- 1) The first silence is called *damaru* and means: not speaking, to say nothing in the world of language, i.e. to say nothing during a meeting.
- 2) The second term is *chin-moku* – *chin* for sinking; *moku* for silence – meaning silently to sink to the bottom through silence. It is a pensive silence related to the world of language but with an inkling of the absolute silence of infinite openness.
- 3) The third silence is called *moku*; this is originally a Buddhist term and implies “silence *per se*.” The idea is silently to enter the absolute realm of infinite stillness which is not disturbed by speaking and cannot be broken, but rather endows speaking with a depth of meaning.

In other words, we differentiate between 1) silence as non-speaking; 2) the pensive silence that, without speaking, lapses into a deeper silence; 3) the reaching of the absolute silence of the infinite world through uttering words. These three kinds of silence correspond to our humanity as being in *Doppelerschlossenheit*: 1) silence in the world; 2) silence in the world of infinite openness, and 3) silence in the infinite openness within which the world is to be found. The quality of the word is determined by the kind of silence we have in mind. We have now reached the point from which we can contemplate the language of Zen.

## The Language of Zen

This section is designed to highlight what is characteristic about speaking and about the language of Zen Buddhism. In my contribution to the *Eranos-Jahrbuch* in 1981, entitled “The Upward Movement and the Downward Movement,” we dealt, under the heading of “The True Self,” with the pictorial triad of the true self in its self-less movement of Nothing-Nature-*Zwischenmensch*.<sup>13</sup> This was done by taking the last three images of the so-called “Ten Oxen Pictures” as our guide. In line with this pictorial triad I

would like to turn to three aspects, i.e., 1) to the absolute silence, 2) to the language of nature, as we may call it for the time being, and 3) the a-dialogic dialogue, the a-symmetrical dialogue.

However, to make the transition from the first part to this one the following points must be made first. As we have already seen, the language of Zen Buddhism is seen in its divergent forms and levels as the self-articulation of the primordial word event. The overall context and the mobile structure of the self-less self can in its basic elements be expressed through language. Every image within the threefold "self-image" points to a separate specific linguistic essence and to a corresponding mode of linguistic execution. The first image of the absolute Nothing thus portrays absolute silence (and not just a non-speaking or pensive silence). The second image of nature depicts, so to speak, the "language of nature," as expressed in the poem that accompanies the picture: "Flowers bloom as they bloom from inside themselves." The third image of the dual self shows the dialogue as a question-and-answer event. The classic texts of Zen provide many examples of this.

Each of these three ways of execution is necessary with reference to the true self and true speaking. When executed the three modes are interconnected in a dynamic and lively fashion, as reflected in the following example: Starting from silence the language of nature is spoken in the dialogue from the self to the self. *Za-zen*, corresponding to the first image, signifies the place where one learns to be silent also by way of exercise. *Angya* that corresponds to the second image is the place where one learns to listen to the language of nature. A master and his disciple once wandered along a mountain path. Having asked the master about the highest truth, the disciple received the following reply: "If you hear the mountain creek down there! That is the path toward truth." *Sanzen*, corresponding to the third image, represents the place where we learn to speak in a contemporary dialogue. Here the master's two-edged sword once appears as "Be silent!", and on another occasion as "Say something on this quickly!"

What follows is a more detailed consideration of each of these forms of expression in Zen.

1) There is no way of speaking about the absolute silence. To achieve absolute silence (and perhaps it should be called

"*entschweigen*"), it is not sufficient simply to be silent. Instead and in correspondence to absolute silence, we want to consider here a linguistic modification of silence, i.e., a radically executed negation as a use of language. What we are thinking of here is the "negative theology" respectively the "*via negativa*" in the tradition of Christian mysticism. However, in Zen this negation is being executed more radically and dynamically, in correspondence with the infinite Nothing "beyond the hundred-fold negation." Thus Meister Eckhart, who took a very radical approach to negative theology, would say: "God is a Nothing."<sup>14</sup> Zen Buddhism, on the other hand, simply and unconditionally said: "Nothing!" In stating that "God is a Nothing," Eckhart meant to say that God exists, but as a Nothing so far as the human capacity to grasp it is concerned. God is being itself, *überseiendes Sein*; it is a pure being, so much purer that it is above definition and hence, if viewed from the human angle, a Nothing for man. The term "Nothing" is expressed by Eckhart along the lines of a double duality: "Being and Nothing" or "God and Man." Since Zen Buddhism simply says "Nothing," all dualities and all unity is being smashed and ruptured. It implies an open expanse; The holy and the secular have disappeared without trace.<sup>15</sup>

Such an infinite Nothing is now expressed in a use of language that brings out in a very lively way the radical dynamic negation in the following words: "Neither being nor Nothing;" "living nowhere and simultaneously by living nowhere having no home;" "being secluded from everything and being secluded from seclusion itself." Nothing articulates itself in its infinity. To its radicalism correspond concrete practical ways of execution of the kind characteristic of Zen Buddhism. When a master was asked by one of his disciples: "What is Buddha?", the former put his hand over the disciple's mouth. This may be taken as the practical implementation of negative theology on this specific occasion. Negation does not merely apply with reference to Buddha or to truth, but also to silence as not saying anything. Thus when a master had his first meeting with a disciple, his first word would always be: "Thirty cane strokes, if you have something to say! Thirty cane strokes, even if you have nothing to say." There is another extreme example to illustrate this: A master was being asked: "Each morn-

ing you are preaching to the monks during assembly. Why are you preaching at all?" And he replied: "I do not have a foot of space for an assembly. I have no tongue to preach."

However radically the negation may be implemented, Nothing is nonetheless not the only final word of Zen Buddhism. Just as *via negativa* and *via eminentiae* belong together in Christian mysticism, this is also true of Zen, except that the affirmation is once again executed all the more directly and simply. Master Eckhart said: "Who sees a piece of wood in divine light, this wood appears to him as an angel."<sup>16</sup> This represents Eckhart's affirmation of the wood, but not of the wood as such, but as an angel. Zen Buddhism has a simpler formula: "Mountains [are] mountains; water [is] water, the long [is] long, the short [is] short." It is a kind of fulfilled tautology. The more radically the infinite Nothing appears in its negative dynamism, the simpler and more unassuming is the affirmation that follows. Here we have a conjunction of radical negation and simplest simplicity, of radical negation and simple affirmation. And with this affirmation we reach the point at which we can move to the second aspect, to the "language of nature."

2) The language of nature. Our model for our discussion is provided by a line from the text that accompanies the second image of the true self: "The flowers bloom as they bloom." Here the "language of nature" speaks up. It is, at the same time, the language of the self in which this self emerges fully as being something completely self-less. This relationship requires an explanation; for the self and nature may be viewed – and in most cases this is in fact so – as if they belonged to two different categories. This means that we inquire into how flowers bloom and simultaneously into how the self exists that speaks in this way and thereby self-lessly gives complete expression to itself.

Since we are discussing the language of nature, it seems appropriate to remark on the term "nature" in Buddhist language. The Sino-Japanese term in Buddhism *shi-zen* (or *ji-nen* in Buddhist reading) does not in every respect correspond to the Western notion of nature. The term *shi-zen* (*ji-nen*) is composed of two Chinese characters. The first, in connection with the second, means "from oneself (*von sich selbst her*)." The second means "to be like this," with a certain implied affirmation. In other words and taken

literally, the term means something like: "To be as being is from itself." Nature is not seen as a tangible world of things natural; nor is it a particular region of what exists *in toto*, a region that is differentiated from God, from humans, or from History etc. What is referred to here is rather the truth of the being of all that exists, as it exists in being from oneself. If Zen tells us: "Flowers bloom as they bloom," we are being referred to a so-called phenomenon of nature; but the actual statement is to be found in the "how" or the "*So-wie*," that directly concerns also the person who articulates this. Seen in this context, the saying means that if humans in their Nothing (i.e., not from their I) experience flowers as blooming from themselves – or to put it differently, if in man's Nothing flowers bloom as they bloom from themselves – he will also have found his truth. On the basis (or non-basis) of man's self-lessness there thus emerges a very specific link between the subjectively existential and the objectively material. Man's entire existence thus becomes originally shaped by how he sees flowers – and this is independent of whether or not the person concerned is conscious of this.

In the "*So-wie*" Buddhism perceives of the more original notion of truth even before its differentiation into an existential truth, on the one hand, and a linguistic or cognitive truth, on the other. When referring to the image of blooming flowers, Zen is not concerned to describe a natural phenomenon, but to ascertain truth. If "nature" has gained this kind of significance of truth, it happened due to the mutual interpenetration of "nature" as "*So-heit*" and the infinite nothingness. This interpenetration is expressed through the "how" as well as the "*So-wie*."

As has been said, the flowers bloom as they bloom. In order to be able to identify the place of this saying in Zen within the intellectual history of the major religions, we would like to draw, for comparison purposes, upon a well-known line by Johannes Scheffler (1624-1677), also known under his poetic pseudonym Angelus Silesius: "The rose is without a why; it blossoms because it blossoms. It does not pay attention to itself, does not ask as to whether it is being seen."<sup>17</sup> It was only during the baroque period that nature slowly gained its own reality; there thus existed a mysticism that nonetheless and in the spirit of Meister Eckhart endowed nature with its own worth in its relational connections with God.

This is particularly marked in Angelus Silesius: "The rose that is seen here by your outer eye/has bloomed since eternity in God."<sup>18</sup>

As Zen puts it, flowers bloom as they bloom (from their own self). Silesius wrote: "The rose is without a why; it blossoms because it blossoms." Both almost belong to one and the same spiritual world. Yet on closer inspection we nevertheless sense a slight difference in intonation in the way Zen invokes the term "how" and the German poet the term "because." For Silesius, the flowering of the rose is no longer a natural phenomenon, but an event in God, a divine event: The rose "has bloomed since eternity in God." In fact it is God's life that blooms. The rose's being-without-cause is nothing else than God's being, as He is his own foundation in Himself. This is why Eckhart strongly highlights the "being-without-cause." The rose, that is transparent in its existence to God and that blooms without a why in God as His life, can now also be seen with the "outer eyes." The visible reality of the rose is nothing but a substantialization of God's life as it blooms in itself. The God, who blossoms within Himself "without cause" has become "flesh" and so presents Himself to the outer eyes. By comparison, this sounds simple in Zen: here flowers are completely transparent to the point of Nothing, in that even the "without cause" has disappeared in Nothing. At the same time the same flowers have become a complete reality, even without the "without cause."

"The rose is without cause." Turning this into a positive circumscription, Angelus Silesius added: "It blossoms because it blossoms." But what about the "because," the more so if compared to the "how" in the Zen line? In his *The Principle of Reason* (1957) Martin Heidegger discusses this line in detail. His interpretation of the "because" may be summarized as follows: The "why" searches for the ground. The "because" provides the ground, the rose, without the "why", i.e., the rose remains without the relationship to the ground, that questions and specifically introduces the ground. The blooming occurs to the rose by being opened through it. Its blooming is a simple *Aus-sich-Aufgehen*. However, to quote Heidegger directly, 'Silesius does not want to deny that the blooming of the rose has a ground. It blooms because – it blooms.' This "because" names the ground, but one that



is strange and presumably excellent. The "because" of the sentence simply refers the blooming back to itself. The blooming is grounded within itself; it has its ground with and in itself. The blooming is pure absorption from itself.<sup>19</sup>

If we are thus dealing in this way with a "simple and pure *Aus-sich-Aufgehen*," it probably finds its most immediate and appropriate expression in the Zen saying of "blooming-like-blooming." In the saying "blooming-because-blooming" the blooming has already been integrated into thought, i.e., through the answer-yielding indication of the ground that the "why" is searching for.<sup>20</sup> Basically this is something that has already been thought, as if the blossoming becomes possible as something simple and pure only in thought.

In this Zen saying flowers bloom without being fractured by a thinking "because;" it is a word that penetrates reality, whereas the word "like" is an un-thinking word of reality, in which the latter is reflected, just as it is from itself. However, Zen does not attempt to exclude thought altogether. Fully appreciative of the tremendous power of thought, Zen is decisively concerned with where thinking sets in and with how thought is given what is to be thought. There is no way back from what is being given to the event of becoming, what is to be given that forever renews itself. To apply a thought-provoking expression of Heidegger's to this, this event does not belong "in thinking, but perhaps *before* thinking."<sup>21</sup> If thought begins without any idea of this "prior", everything will be submerged in thought. In this process it does not know that the simple is eventfully given to it in a primordial way, i.e., at the same time and because of this as what is primarily and actually to be thought. Thus thought thinks itself into being all-powerful; it thinks that all is thinkable and submerges everything in what has been thought – instead, for example, of simply letting the roses be submerged in their blossoming, as they blossom. This is then also the avenue toward modern nihilism. It is a different matter with the event of the simple becoming to be given and of *Getroffenwerden*. We have considered this in our first part in connection with the "Oh!" model. We know that this event at first expresses itself simply as follows and without human thought being constituted: the flowers bloom as they bloom.

Where is man in this? Has this saying not already been put into human words which are always also involved with human thought?

In truth and reality, man is *da* when he says: "Flowers bloom as they bloom." However, he does not appear in what is being articulated, but in speech itself. There is no trace of the speaker in what is being spoken; he does not appear in it. Nor is he reflected in it, nor does he move the reflection upon himself into what has been said. This is the self-lessness of man, as it radically represents Nothing in the first image. Nothing as extreme self-lessness makes the flowers bloom as they bloom. This event, it is true, became a human saying ("flowers bloom as they bloom"), but it is still devoid of any molding penetration by man. In this way reality has become the word from itself – through its self-reflection in Nothing, exactly how it is. This kind of language is deemed to be the language of nature that Zen Buddhism likes to employ: distant mountains, limitless, green all over.

Man exists not as speaker, but essentially and actually as speaking; he is a speaking *Da*. According to Zen Buddhism, man does not test the autonomy of his self by talking about himself, but by articulating a new version that he alone conceives, almost as is the case in poetry.

This is why, faced with a given situation, that Zen master challenges his disciple to "quickly say something about this." Man is forever supposed to be *de novo* a speaking *Da*, wherever something gives itself, where Nothing and the simple come together and penetrate each other, and where, because is this, inexhaustible possibilities of articulation are being created. For the sake of realizing the respective reality and, at the same time, for the sake of realizing the self in the present, we shall now turn to a certain articulation that is defined by the situation.

The affinity between Nothing and the simple, as well as their mutual penetration facilitate inexhaustible possibilities of articulation merely because of Nothing and simplicity. Its enormous span can be gauged from two basic articulations. With regard to mutual penetration, the simple is being expressed, for example, in "flowers bloom as they bloom." This represents a basic articulation (A). Through the self-same mutual interpenetration there now simultaneously occurs a reflection of Nothing itself onto the level of artic-

ulation that has been opened up. In this way the chance of defining what has been articulated (A) is removed into Nothing. As is frequently the case in Zen, we now end up with a paradoxical statement: "The blooming flowers do not bloom." This is the second basic articulation (B). This statement that, viewed objectively as a sentence, is in itself illogical and as such impossible, is charged up with the elementary power of negation in the infinite nothingness, and very concretely so, because the negation in this case directly encounters the blooming flowers that are being seen in blossom by "your outer eye." Because it is so tangible, negation is even more powerful here than in so-called negative theology. Another example of articulation (B) would be: "When a person crosses the bridge, the river stands still and the bridge flows."

"The flowers bloom as they bloom." – "The blooming flowers do not bloom." Putting these two statements next to one another is logically impossible. And yet they become necessary, as its self-articulation, in that same locus of mutual interpenetration; they are being articulated together, though without it being necessary that the two must, on each occasion, be jointly articulated. The basic relationship of Nothing and simplicity belonging together requires this kind of double articulation in order to express itself. This expressing itself (due to simplicity) and this "*In-sich-wieder-Zurücknehmen*" of what has been articulated (due to Nothing) are thereby part of the dynamic of belonging together. The echo-like consonance of both articulations (A and B) is nothing else than the articulation of the mutual interpenetration of the simple and of Nothing. An infinite variety of articulations is possible between these two extreme basic articulations so that everyone can find his own. The question is merely whether the "self" is in fact so self-less that it is actually able to articulate itself.

We have already spoken of the necessary double articulation. The two extreme statements in our model are: "The flowers bloom as they bloom." And: "The blooming flowers do not bloom." Let us now imagine that from the double articulation each statement is being designed in each case by another human being in an "I-and-you" juxtaposition. If each partner makes his statement in the space of his opposite number, there arises a consonance, in a concrete interhuman, communitarian way, of those

sentences that have been so differently articulated and asymmetrically coordinated.

If this consonance, that triggers the voice of the infinite Nothing, is achieved we find ourselves in the actual space of the Zen dialogue as represented in the third image. For example, the one says to the other as a way of cordial greeting: "The flowers bloom as they bloom." And the other responds: "The blooming flowers do not bloom." What emerges is a strange consonance between two humans – as in a choir; it is quite asymmetrical, but – or in fact because of it – it is in total correspondence.

By investigating the "language of nature" we now find ourselves in the field of "dialogue (*Zwiesprache*)," of the "I-You" as the unfolded dual self, as it is being thematized in the third image of the triad of the true and self-less self.<sup>22</sup>

## Notes

1. On the concept of the "self-less self" (*selbst-lose Selbst*), see my article "Die Bewegung nach oben und die Bewegung nach unten," in *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 50, 1981.
2. M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Paris, 1945, pp. 214f.
3. Hsiang-yen (Japanese transcription: Kyogen Chikan) was a Chinese grand master from the second half of the 9th century. With reference to him see the 5th Example in "Mumonkan" (*Die Schranke ohne Tor*), transl. and commented by H. Dumoulin, Mainz, 1975.
4. R. Otto (*Das Gefühl des Überweltlichen*, Munich, 1932, p. 203) also refers to this *Urlaut*: "Die numinose Ergriffenheit bricht mit urkräftigem, rohem *Urlaut* wie als eine Selbstentladung aus."
5. M. Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, Pfullingen, 1959, p. 30.
6. The line is contained in a poem by R.M. Rilke (*Frühe Gedichte*, Leipzig, 1928, p. 103) which begins as follows: "Ich fürchte mich so vor der Menschen Wort./ Sie sprechen alles so deutlich aus;/ und dieses heisst Hund und jenes heisst Haus;/ und hier ist Beginn und das Ende dort./ ... sie wissen alles was wird und war,/ kein Berg ist ihnen mehr wunderbar,/ ..." Rilke then counters this with the line quoted in the text.
7. L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (transl. by D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness), London, 1961, p. 151.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

10. On the problem of "In-der-Doppelperschlossenheit-sein" see my article "Der Ort des Menschen im No-Spiel," in *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 56, 1988.
11. M. Heidegger, "What Is Metaphysics?" (transl. by R.F.C. Hull and Alan Crick) in idem, *Existence and Being*, Chicago, 1949, p. 339.
12. *Ibid.*, p.335.
13. See note 1 above. See also my article "Leere und Fülle," in *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 45, 1976. The original has been translated into German by K. Tsujimura and H. Buchner, *Der Ochs und sein Hirte. Eine altchinesische Zen-Geschichte*, Pfullingen, 1958.
14. See Sermon 37 in Meister Eckhart, *Deutsche Predigten und Traktate* (ed. and transl. by J. Quint), Munich, 1955.
15. See "Offene Weite – nichts von heilig" in the first example of *Bi-Yaen-Lu* (transl. and commented by W. Gundert), Munich, 1960. See also the poem in praise of the 8th image in *Der Ochs und sein Hirte* (note 13 above), p. 42.
16. This is a recurrent theme in Eckhart. See, for example, also Meister Eckhart, *Deutsche Predigten und Traktate* (note 14 above), p. 215: "Nimmt man eine Fliege in Gott, so ist die edler in Gott als der höchste Engel in sich selbst ist."
17. A. Silesius, *Cherubinischer Wandersmann*, Book I, p. 289.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 108.
19. M. Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason* (transl. by R. Lilly), Bloomington, Ind., 1991, pp. 36f.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, 35.
22. On the theme of "Zwiesprache" in Zen Buddhism see my articles in *Eranos-Jahrbuch* cited in notes 1, 10, and 13 above as well as my contribution "Die Zen-buddhistische Erfahrung des Wahr-schönen," in *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 53, 1984.