



## Review Essay: José Kozer and the Articulation of Writing.

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a concentric  
circle of furies with no  
centre [Ind 71]<sup>1</sup>

Let us start with the notion of articulation, of juncture, of the gap between what the poet is and what he writes and how the gap is constantly present. There are other gaps: that between the poet's life and his work, between the physical and the metaphysical, between the concrete and the abstract, between the ego and its other. Too many gaps but all critical to the poet's work. Writing involves this series of gaps. Articulation is the point at which two parts conjoin and work together.

The poet's life appears in his work in spite of inspiration, of the way language speaks through his biography. Poetry imposes itself on the poet in spite of his history or the history of poetry. The point where biography and inspiration meet, the point where these two elements are allowed both to be distinct and yet connected, is the point where poetry arises. An articulated lorry only works when its two parts—tractor and carrier—are linked.

A poet's biography is of some importance as it mediates inspiration. It is the poet who holds the pen. Kozer was born in 1940 of Jewish immigrant parents and grew up in the old Cuba where he favoured the revolutionaries. His father sent him to New York to further his studies. After a year and a half, he went back but was disillusioned with politics. Again, his father provided him with a little money and his gold watch and he took flight for Miami where he sold the watch to buy a ticket to New York. He had various jobs studying and working in English, a language he was unable to write and which meant that he began to lose his Spanish. It was in 1968 that he began speaking Spanish again and that and alcohol made writing possible again. After 1972 he began to visit Spain, and this also helped. After living for two years in Spain, he finally settled in 1999 in Florida where he still lives with his lifelong companion Guadalupe.

Thus there are various elements in the life of this poet: He is the son of parents who were themselves exiles from Poland and Czechoslovakia who spoke Yiddish at home and bad Spanish with a Yiddish accent. His father was a Haredi and his grandfather the founder of the first Ashkenazi Synagogue in Cuba. He is an exile from Cuba—the lapse from and thus exile from Judaism which led him to Buddhism (as an escape and thus exile from both his Judaism and his Western roots?). So much to be exiled from! Jabès, himself a Jewish exile from Egypt, writes, “You have always been easy in your skin, you have never been *here*, but always *elsewhere*, ahead of yourself or behind yourself as is winter in respect of autumn or summer in respect of

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<sup>1</sup> José Kozer, *Indole/Of Such a Nature*, trans. Peter Boyle, *Of Such a Nature*, Birmingham: The University of Alabama Press, 2012. Names in square brackets are of individual poems thus far unpublished in translation. The translations are mine.

spring.”<sup>2</sup> He writes of himself as “a Cuban without ceasing to be the other: a Jew from the other side of the Jordan.”<sup>3</sup>

Kozer’s consciousness of these between, these gaps, are of course, cases of exile, in Kozer’s case a triple exile, which result in ever present disjunctions or articulations. The exile is always exiled *from*, is always other. The Jews, specifically, are a nation of exiles, most famously from Egypt but also from Israel: a people of the diaspora. Kozer is clearly this but is also an exile from Cuba and thus one of the Cuban diaspora. This means he is also an exile from language and is conscious of the distance from the mother tongue he writes in, which is again one further step away from the mother tongue of his ancestors. This especially as he has to rediscover his Spanishness and Cubanness from afar—from the USA. Peter Boyle, a translator of Kozer and a poet in his own right, writes that

Kozer discovered himself as a Cuban poet inside the United States, mostly having to relearn Spanish in his late twenties and early thirties in order to be a poet in Spanish, realizing that only in the language of his childhood and adolescence would poetry be possible for him. He writes often of Cuba in (if I may put it like this?) Cuban. He writes, “When I left Cuba when I was 20 years old, my language was aborted, I lost my language, I lost my poetry and I spent 10 years without writing anything; [...] at around the age of 28, I returned to Castilian, and all that came out again, and I remember that [...] I wrote 10, 12 poems in a row, one after the other.”<sup>4</sup>

Kozer writes that, “A novelist can write in a second language, but a poet must write in the language of his childhood.”<sup>5</sup>

So there are multiple layers of articulations which inevitably affect the words on the page, the form of his writing, its fragmentation. This manifests itself in various ways: visually in the very short lines that look like a scroll on the page (of Torah) and the way that this layout allows for continuity over caesuras that run from one line to another and the reverse of this, jumps in subject in the middle of a line, his

no visible sign

We had to see how  
we avoided each other,  
both of us a simulacrum of  
shadows encrusting us  
in penumbrae

false conjugations,  
between general and concrete, [Confirmación]

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<sup>2</sup> “tu as toujours été ma dans ta peau, tu n’as jamias été là, mais *ailleurs*; avant toi ou après toi, comme l’hiver au regard de l’automne, comme l’été au regard du printemps” (my translation) in Edmund Jabès, *Le Livre des Questions*, Paris: Gallimard, 1965, p. 37.

<sup>3</sup> José Kozer, “Esto (También es Cuba),” from *La Voracidad Grafómana*, ed: J. Sefami, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2002, p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> Cristina Ruiz-Poveda, Interview conducted in Middlebury College, 2011; video; access 18.07.2013.

<sup>5</sup> <https://nbclatino.com/2013/07/12/revered-new-york-poet-wins-coveted-latin-american-prize/>

## II

Articulation is a word with three principle meanings. One is: the way in which you pronounce words or produce sounds, the second is: the way in which you express your feelings and ideas, etc., and the third is: the point where two bones connect to allow movement. All three are relevant to the poetry of José Kozer.

Kozer sometimes uses the word “ambiguous” for this.<sup>6</sup> The idea is not to hold apart but to link in part so as not to fall on one side or the other, in reality a critique is when two notions are held together as in the critical moment of an illness when things can go either way. Kozer sees this “in the rhetorical sense of what constitutes an amphibology.”

Varro noted just this in one of the categories of his *De Lingua Latina*. He writes of a language “that is hybrid; born here of foreign paternity.”<sup>7</sup> The language “coming from abroad” and pilgrim language—“born here of foreign paternity”—for the poet, always draw attention to themselves and their context either as meaningless or as strange; either as something needing translation or as something needing to be incorporated into the vernacular, the language of the guest land. By using the vernacular, we serve it. As with the world, we are thrown into its flow without first being asked, and only death can part us from it. This is the root from which our understanding of existence grows. The fluency of the vernacular which we serve enables us to say, “I am,” and each particular “I am” is rooted in the vernacular. In the dedication to Queen Isabel of Castile, de Nebrija stresses the importance of his work on grammar by emphasising to her that Castellano, the language of the conqueror, must on no account remain a pilgrim language in her new conquests in the Americas but should, as rapidly as possible, become the vernacular.<sup>8</sup> However, the exile speaks the language of his exile, the pilgrim language always conscious of its strangeness of its need for translation.

Thus, he is strangely exiled from language, as all poets must be just as the religious Jew prays in Hebrew but speaks any language but in the street. Kozer was educated in a secular Cuban school thus being alienated from his Eastern European roots and later again from these Cuban ones.

But, most important, the exile, the real exile, is the one that stops yearning to return. Kozer writes, “I knew already in 1960 that I wouldn’t return to Cuba, I didn’t have the slightest intention of returning, rather than a banishment I wanted to live a multifarious experience.”<sup>9</sup> Acceptance of exile, assimilation is recognised by the host country (for example by the Nazis) as the most dangerous. To the neighbour the exile becomes unrecognisable as exile but not to the exile because for him as poet, this chiasm of land and language, of speaking a foreign tongue amongst strangers, of living amongst strangers is critical.

And this game Kozer plays with brilliance. Often his “placing” is “atopos.” We find ourselves with him in surroundings lovingly detailed, but we cannot be sure where. Perhaps it is the Cuba he hasn’t visited for 50 years. Perhaps it is Mount Yoshino in Japan, which he has, in fact, never visited. The “perhaps” is crucial. Often we find ourselves “condensed in a / swarm of

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.latinamericanliteraturetoday.org/en/2017/april/composition-place-conversation-between-roberto-brodsky-and-jos%C3%A9-kozer>

<sup>7</sup> Marcus Terentius Varro, *On the Latin Language*, Book X:69, trans. R. C. Kent, R.C., Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1938, Vol. 2: 585.

<sup>8</sup> Antonio de Nebrija the Elder, *Grammatica Castellana* (Salamanca, 1492).

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.latinamericanliteraturetoday.org/en/2017/april/composition-place-conversation-between-roberto-brodsky-and-jos%C3%A9-kozer>

bees” [Ind 71], tiny descriptions of 2,3 or 4 words which he never nails down and which we know we will leave in a line or two. Articulation is everywhere. This fragmentation has its own kind of violence (often mirrored in the subjects he chooses) that rejects finality and certainty. One element does not combine with others to make up a whole but asserts its individuality against completion. His very perfections are disarticulated from their surroundings, discontinuous. His poetry even undermines itself in such a way as only a poet so undermined by his own genius could achieve. Reynolds writes that artists should aim at “the general effect of the whole,” to which Blake responds, “Real Effect is Making out the Parts, & it is Nothing Else but That.”<sup>10</sup>

Likewise, each fragment the poet grants us is articulated, needs its relationships, its others. It is these very relationships that prevent laziness; that excite the reader into interpretation even though it is doomed to failure for the very reason that each *kunstwerk*, each poem is always already a failure, is not governed by an idea to which it is subservient and towards which it might aim. Its governing idea is none other than fragmentation and failure. Maurice Blanchot writes of:

the necessity of an interpretation that is not the unveiling of a unique or hidden or even ambiguous truth but is the reading of a text in several senses at once, with no other meaning than “*the process, the becoming*” that is the interpretation.<sup>11</sup>

We find this also in Kozer’s attraction to Buddhism for which all attachments, all sensory perceptions are illusory and transient, a fact which applies also the poet’s autobiography (including his imagined autobiography). Our very existence, memories, perceptions are by the very nature of things fragmentary which to quote Eliot, “I have shored against my ruins,”<sup>12</sup> and which each of us attempts to gather together into memory; into an ego. Every biographical “fact” is tilted away from a core story, is put into doubt and this, paradoxically, makes each fragment stand out more strongly, like a detail in a painting which doesn’t quite fit. The reader is rivetted by detail but somehow without a clear topos. These details unnerve, are *unheimlich*.

The whole point of the poetic is in the paraphrastic heresy: it can’t be put into words other than those on the page. Thus, the baroqueness, the shifts, the uncertainties, in short, the fragmentation.

Ah well, here is Vega by name, and in the name of

my wife: at her  
side, it’s  
me, Deneb,  
sneaking up close,  
blindly, the eternal  
stealthy one,  
shattered and  
staved in by fears,  
by layers and  
layers of distress, shocked numbed,

<sup>10</sup> William Blake, *Complete Writings*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967, p. 450.

<sup>11</sup> “la nécessité de l’interprétation qui n’est pas dévoilement d’une unique vérité cachée, voire ambiguë, mais lecture d’un texte à plusieurs sens et n’ayant aussi d’autre sens que ‘*le processus, le devenir*’ qu’est l’interprétation.” From Maurice Blanchot, *L’Entretien Infini*, Paris: Gallimard, 1969, p. 232. My translation.

<sup>12</sup> Eliot, T.S., “The Wasteland” in *Collected Poems 1909-1962*, London: Faber and Faber, 1962, p.79.

turned to stone there  
 in the sky: in the  
 pupil's soft core,  
 in the crack<sup>13</sup>

Could the poet paraphrase this? Would he want to?

### III

This poetry has sometimes been thought of as surreal. I don't see it thus. Rather I find it painfully concrete. There is no dreaming here. The eyes are wide open. The world is seen or rather is sensual. Concrete images abound. When Joshua Reynolds wrote that "this disposition to abstractions, to generalizing and classification, is the great glory of the human mind," Blake writes in the margin "To Generalize is to be an Idiot. To Particularise is the Alone Distinction of Merit" and again "There is no such thing as General Knowledge only Particular Knowledge." Kozer writes, "Eternity does not exist, the onion exists" [Ind 135]. Kozer seems to me a powerful example of this rule. His work is riddled with particulars, details, and the failure to allow induction to lead anywhere. One example of hundreds from "Indole"

she  
 grasps the soup spoon  
 looks at it (a contemplative  
 act) balancing the metal  
 shadow of the spoon on  
 the tablecloth, beside the  
 bowl of oatmeal: no  
 need to look at the  
 clock on the wall to  
 know it's a quarter to  
 seven, the senses hang  
 in suspense, she knows  
 the cup of coffee on the  
 table (plastic tablecloth  
 with white an emerald  
 green squares)  
 [...]

she knows that  
 under everything there's  
 always something. Till you  
 touch bottom. A deep base  
 made of superimposed  
 planes, unreachable. At the  
 deepest level and to all  
 intents and purposes, there  
 is no bottom. [Ind 47-9]

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<sup>13</sup> Kozer, *Anima*, trans. Peter Boyle, Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2011 p. 53.

There is only the particular. Dōgen writes that “all the sutras in the Universe are contained within a mote of dust,” and we find, “The only way to the truly universal is to be very particular, moment by moment, detail by detail,”<sup>14</sup> which is Blake’s “Infinity in a grain of sand / and Eternity in an hour.”<sup>15</sup> Dōgen famously said that “even a mote of dust is sufficient to turn the dharma wheel.”<sup>16</sup> When Reynolds praises the general at the expense of the particular, Blake writes, “To Particularise is the Alone Distinction of Merit”<sup>17</sup> and “Singular & Particular detail is the Foundation of the Sublime.”<sup>18</sup>

Kozer has been called a poet of the neo-baroque, yet he writes, “I want and do not want to belong to the neo-baroque, I want to be one among peers and at the same time not be reduced to a payroll, to a school, to a unique way of perceiving poetry.”<sup>19</sup> Yet in the true sense, his work is baroque. One etymology before the 18th century associates the word with irregular pearls from the Portuguese term *barroco*, a flawed pearl. Over exaggeration. Lack of perfection yet a jewel still. Loaded with detail. And so, we have the collapse of grammatic conventions, the refusal to write clear sentences plus brackets, broken lines, unfinished thoughts. In a word, rupture.

This is poetry as *evidentia*, Quintilian’s rhetoric, that bring details to bear so as to create a vividness that can convince a jury—in our case the reader—and create “emotions just as if we were present at the event itself.” *Evidentia* is both this older meaning of intensesness, vividness and the modern one of evidence as plausible, provable. Yet this is also another kind of exile: the exile from truth. Rhetoric (famously in Plato) can be based on lies, the most plausible evidence can be a lie. It is as if the poet wants to convince himself of the solidity of his memory, of the world he knew, of his Cubanness and Jewishness, of the grandmother wearing:

the two-tone apron with deep pockets and  
 you retain a scent of  
 lily that you distill  
 two handed and you pick up  
 like a basket of puff pastry  
 and matzo [Evocación de Abuela]

or the father

My father, who was tailor and communist,  
 and didn’t believe in God,  
 my father who did not speak and just sat there on the  
 terrace  
 wanting nothing more to do with men,  
 who was indifferent to Hitler, indifferent to Stalin,  
 my father who once a year downed a  
 glass of whiskey, [Mi Padre]

<sup>14</sup> Dōgen, Fascicle “Hotsu Bodai Shin,” *Shobogenzo*, ed. K. Tanahashi, Shambala, 2012, p. 649.

<sup>15</sup> Blake “Auguries of Innocence,” *Complete Writings*, p. 431.

<sup>16</sup> Jason Wirth, video talk at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9l8jpCvIa3M&feature=youtu.be>

<sup>17</sup> Blake, *Complete Writings*, p. 451.

<sup>18</sup> Blake, *Complete Writings*, p. 459.

<sup>19</sup> Margo Glantz, “José Kozer: Poet Laureate” in *La Jornada*, 07/11/2013.

as:

it seemed as if dad was doing nothing.

He would clasp his hands behind his back leaning forward like  
 a rabbi smoking a  
 pipe, cut from birch-wood  
 the plumes of smoke  
 creating an air of mystery, [Te Recuerdas, Sylvia]

The detail is almost banal. The very word means to relate or narrate in particulars and comes from the French detailer, often used in tailoring, “to cut up in pieces.”

But these images, these fragments of memory, never reach the picture frame, the metaphysical for which they yearn. Rather they hover in an insecurity that is more palpable than any complete image or memory. More powerful in their *evidentia*, as rhetoric, perhaps even as a lie, than any truth might be. “*Nec scire fas est omnia*”—it is not God’s will that we should know all.<sup>20</sup> His fragmentation questions like Jabés’ *Livre de Questions*, which has so many echoes with Kozer’s work.

You are walking towards death. It has spared you till now, so that you should go towards it of your own accord. You are walking on all the deaths which belong to you and your race, on the obscure sense and the lack of sense of all these deaths. [LdeQ 33]

In Kozer there is almost too much detail as if piling on more and more might force it to make sense, to come to something. This is painting as much as poetry. “plastic tablecloth / with white an emerald / green squares” placed in parenthesis for the sake of exaggeration. And from this, what can she know? only that “At the / deepest level [...] there / is no bottom” [Ind 49 again]. She is exiled even from meaning. The superimposed planes disappear into nothing. This is the existential writing of a poet who yearns for the abstract, a metaphysical which always eludes him.

making me feel as if I  
 were a god. A minor god.  
 A vanquished one [Ind 149]

What he writes about his father is his case also:

He,  
 a vestige without a sign and I  
 convinced that behind  
 his shadow there was  
 a visible number of  
 signs where the  
 answer I was looking for  
 was hiding: [Confirmación]

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<sup>20</sup> Horace, *Odes*, 4.4.22.

what body what mind?  
 how can you pretend that  
 after death,  
 etc.  
 [...]

The arguments revert to a high degree  
 of silence of a tiny thread / filament  
 of air. [El Cuento de la Buena Pipa]

He decides to “Shrug off an unnecessary effort” and instead to “Listen to the grunt of the deer.” Yet the pull of the metaphysical never leaves him. It is impossibly there behind the encroaching propulsion of the sensual:

at the end of the  
 day the Messiah,  
 anyway. here at  
 home, I help  
 I count I  
 can  
 stuff  
 the  
 cabbages [Ind 39]

Indeed, this is like Caravaggio in both its detailing the banal and in its fragmentation. With Caravaggio, who used a *camera obscura* focused on one detail at a time, each segment would have had to be made in turn and the composition as a whole compromised. The eye has deep focus while mechanical optics produce small areas accurately in focus between areas, which are not and thus would have appeared fuzzy. Accuracy in detail involved distortion of the whole. In many earlier paintings done with optical aids you can see the receding image going out of focus.<sup>21</sup> The focal point on the canvas would have had to be constantly altered as the detail to be dealt with was closer or further from the lens as it would have had to be shifted around to concentrate the light of a single element of a larger composition.

As a result of this technique the seer doesn't take in the whole, rather the eye darts from detail to detail; to elements of the real rather than the ideal. The image is, as it were, fragmented into the real which lies disrupted within the whole which remains at the periphery of vision as a “frame” for individual creations which rely on perceived space rather than conceived space. What rationality there is lies behind or after the visible and involves an effort to see what Vasari, writing of Giorgione, calls “una sola occhiata.”<sup>22</sup>

With him meaning seems to be relative and to a lack of topos. The sharpness of the light forces the eyes open to see *what* is happening not *where*. There is no topos for these startled

<sup>21</sup> See e.g. the way that the tablecloth in the centre foreground of Lorenzo Lotto's *Portrait of a Married Couple* (1523) loses clarity of both detail and form.

<sup>22</sup> Vasari, Giorgio, *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori, ed architettori*, Florence, 1832, p. 457. This translates as “a single glance” or as Wollheim puts it “at a glance.” See Richard Wollheim, *Painting as an Art*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 312.

shapes that stand before us as in a flash of lightning and will vanish in a moment and stand out in a momentary exile from non-being or oblivion. This is an attempt to paint the solidity of the physical or sensuous as it stands out against the soul, the dead or god as if the momentary and the visible are holding eternity at bay.

### III

Kozer sits zazen every morning. Kozer writes a poem every morning. Creativity and zazen are parallel experiences involving suspension of the ego.

Dōgen suggests, “learn to take the backward step [...] Give up the operation of the mind, intellect, and consciousness; stop measuring with thoughts ideas and views,”<sup>23</sup> and in the *Genjōkōan*, “When Buddhas are truly Buddhas, there is no need for them to be conscious of themselves as Buddhas.”<sup>24</sup> And in the *shinjin datsuraku* he writes of: “a falling away of body and mind. The forgetting of the self.”<sup>25</sup>

Gujin is not merely active effort. Effort requires an ego or will to initiate it. It is a kind of surrender of will which does not negate effort.

“To study the self is to forget the self [...] your mind and body as well as the bodies and minds of others drop away” and it is the ego, that is the self, that is forgotten yet this entails exertion. “Egocentricity. This is a fundamental delusion.” Brian Schroder adds that “without the realization that comes with practice, the mind does not ‘drop away’ and Buddha nature is not ‘seen.’”<sup>26</sup>

However, it is not merely passive either. It requires exertion. Zazen, although negative, is nonetheless a capability,<sup>27</sup> and Nishijima writes that it “suggests the state of natural balance which we experience when making effort without an intentional aim.”<sup>28</sup>

Imagination is Self-annihilation. The moment in which Imagination speaks occurs as if in a dream and is only recognised as Imagination on waking. It seems, indeed, to take place outside time Blake writes:

Every Time less than a pulsation of the artery  
Is equal in its Period & value to Six Thousand Years,  
For in this Period the Poet’s Work is Done, and all the Great  
Events of Time start forth & are conceiv’d in such a Period,  
Within a Moment, a Pulsation of the Artery.<sup>29</sup>

Dōgen writes that “all the sutras in the Universe are contained within a mote of dust” and that, “The only way to the truly universal is to be very particular moment by moment, detail by

<sup>23</sup> Dōgen, “Fukanzazengi,” *Engaging Dōgen’s Zen: The Philosophy of Practice as Awakening*, ed. Jason M. Wirth et al., Somerville, Mass.: Wisdom Publications, 2016, p. 215.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

<sup>25</sup> Jason M. Wirth, *Engaging Dogen’s Zen*, p.131.

<sup>26</sup> Brian Schroeder, “Shushogi Paragrah 31,” *Engaging Dōgen’s Zen: The Philosophy of Practice as Awakening*, ed. Jason M. Wirth et al., Somerville, Mass.: Wisdom Publications, 2016, p.188.

<sup>27</sup> Joan Stambaugh, *Impermanence is Buddha-Nature: Dōgen’s Understanding of Temporality*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1990, pp. 58ff.

<sup>28</sup> Gudo Nishijima and Chodo Cross, *Master Dogen’s Shōbōgenzō*, Book 1, Dōgen Sangha, 1994, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> William Blake, “Milton,” Plate 28:62 in *Complete Writings*, p. 516.

detail,”<sup>30</sup> which is Blake’s “Infinity in a grain of sand / and Eternity in an hour.”<sup>31</sup> Dōgen famously said that “even a mote of dust is sufficient to turn the dharma wheel.”<sup>32</sup> When Reynolds praises the general at the expense of the particular, Blake writes, “To Particularise is the Alone Distinction of Merit,”<sup>33</sup> and “Singular & Particular detail is the Foundation of the Sublime.”<sup>34</sup>

by Self-annihilation back returning  
To life Eternal<sup>35</sup>

The Imagination is not a State; it is the Human Existence itself<sup>36</sup>

The atman or self which keeps us attached to desires and is the primary cause of suffering has to be negated. This leads us to the notion, fundamental to Buddhist thought of the anatman (*lit* not-self). Biography pulls against satori. Like two negative poles of a magnet, they cannot draw apart unless there are two parts to disarticulate. This produces the fragmentation which is the undercurrent of all of Kozer’s poetry. The biographical details, this cutting into pieces, is a way of distancing or annihilating the self—Nietzsche’s *Selbstüberwindung*. The idea is to constantly break away from the detail if only to another detail. The breaking off is the point. This is what meditation is. The bits and pieces of life, of memory, of loves and losses are just like the detritus of thoughts that pass through the mind in meditation.

and make it so the lamb is resurrected and drinks  
(waters) visible and (waters)  
invisible becomes

merely junk food

And these fragments, these articulations of the mind, are like our dreams, and it is as Keats maintains in this dreams, without any overt questioning by the poet, without any striving towards the creation of an artwork, that which is created creates itself; and the poet, on waking, finds it to be truth. The poet recognises that thinking about the horrors of life [samsara] will reveal nothing:

Oh never will the prize,  
High reason, and the lore of good and ill  
Be my award<sup>37</sup>

and he adds:

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<sup>30</sup> Dōgen, Fascicle “Hotsu Bodai Shin,” in *Shobogenzo*, ed. K. Tanahashi, Boulder, Col.: Shambala Publications, 2012, p. 884.

<sup>31</sup> Blake, “Auguries of Innocence,” in *Complete Writings*, p. 431.

<sup>32</sup> Jason Wirth, video talk at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9l8jpCvIa3M&feature=youtu.be>.

<sup>33</sup> Blake, *Complete Writings*, p. 451.

<sup>34</sup> Blake, *Complete Writings*, p. 459.

<sup>35</sup> Blake, “Vala or the Four Zoas” Night VIIa. in Ed: Geoffrey Keynes, *Blake: Complete Writings*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 328.

<sup>36</sup> Blake, “Milton,” Plate 32:32 in *Ibid.*, p. 522.

<sup>37</sup> Keats, “Letter to Reynolds,” in *The Poems of John Keats*, ed. H.W. Garrod. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 383.

Things cannot to the will  
Be settled, but they tease us out of thought<sup>38</sup>

In its  
own trajectory  
thought scarcely  
rouses itself<sup>39</sup>

No standard law, no “consequitive reasoning”—“Maiden-Thought”—can direct us into the mysteries of the imagination.

imperial wisdom  
was and will be  
mere (horseshit)<sup>40</sup>

Those mysteries “tease us out of thought,” out of the province of the ego. The poet, like the person on his zafu, has to aim for what he calls “negative capability”: “that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason.”<sup>41</sup>

This is the faculty that “Shakespeare possessed so enormously.”<sup>42</sup> This ability to remain in uncertainties is, for Keats, the quest, remaining in the region of thought which is not “consequitive,” or speculative. In this state in which the straining after results, the questioning of the world, is suspended, the Self—the identity of the poet—is annihilated. Keats writes, “As to the poetical Character itself [...] it is not itself—it has no self—it is every thing and nothing—it has no character [...] A poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity [...] he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God’s Creatures.”<sup>43</sup>

In this moodlessness of indolence, in this negation of mood. “In this state of effeminacy the fibres of the brain are relaxed in common with the rest of the body, and to such a happy degree that pleasure has no show of enticement and pain no unbearable frown.”<sup>44</sup>

The

lack

of attention he pays to the attention he pays [“Meditation” in Ind 48]

In this indolent state in which negative capability is possible the poet achieves “a complete disinterestedness of mind”<sup>45</sup> in which the three great aims of Keats’ life—“Poetry, Ambition and

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> José Kozer, *Tokonoma*, trans. Peter Boyle, Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2014, p. 104.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p.105.

<sup>41</sup> John Keats, Letter 45 to The George Keatses of 21/12/1817, in *The Letters of John Keats*, ed: H.E. Rollins, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958, Vol. I: 193.

<sup>42</sup> Keats, Letter 180 to Reynolds of 3/5/1818, in *The Letters of John Keats*, Vol. I: 282.

<sup>43</sup> Keats, Letter 93 to Woodhouse of 27/10/1818 in *The Letters of John Keats*, Vol I: 386-7.

<sup>44</sup> Keats, Letter 93 to The George Keatses of 19/3/1819, in *The Letters of John Keats*, Vol II: 78-9.

Love”—lose “any alertness of countenance as they pass by.”<sup>46</sup> “In this rare instance of the body overpowering the mind, the poet is “the most unpoetical of all God’s creatures”<sup>47</sup> and, in “diligent indolence”<sup>48</sup> renounces the language of poetry,<sup>49</sup> refusing to question language poetically in order that it itself may speak poetry. He writes,

He who saddens  
 At thought of idleness cannot be idle,  
 And he’s awake who thinks himself asleep.<sup>50</sup>

So often Keats is portrayed as the curly-headed youth dreaming amongst the daisies, but indolence or idleness is not a kind of passivity but the most active possible state of mind. It is Gojin, exertion which is to pull oneself free of attachments, to stop consecutive links that build up to a conclusion because exertion is already and quite simply what you seek. The aim is the source. If the pilgrim seeks out a shrine in order to attain forgiveness, then he will find merely a shrine. If he genuinely seeks forgiveness, he needs no shrine, for that is what he starts out with. If I want to write a poem or seek nirvana, then a special kind of effort is needed: not that I impose my categories on the flower but that I exert myself by letting the flower be, by letting it presence simply as it is.

and he awoke and found it truth.<sup>51</sup>

Thus, I disagree here with the poet himself who writes that for him “Language after all is not an end in itself, it’s an instrument; it’s not autonomous, it’s a vehicle.”<sup>52</sup> The word is autonomous and different from what it describes. “Árbol” and “tree” are nothing like the object in the forest. In “Concentration of Chu His” he writes

the idea  
 that a word like the  
 word scarcely can  
 scarcely transmit the  
 notion of Future  
 [...]
   
 as if it  
 were a cliff that not  
 being eternal must  
 in its own due time  
 crumble [Tok 16]

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<sup>45</sup> Keats, Letter 159 to The George Keatses of 19/3/1818, in *The Letters of John Keats*, Vol II: 79.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Letter 119 from Woodhouse to Taylor of 27/10/1818, in *The Letters of John Keats*, Vol. I: 390.

<sup>48</sup> Keats, Letter 62 to Reynolds of 19/2/1818, in *The Letters of John Keats*, Vol. I: 231.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Keats, “Oh thou whose face” in *The Poems of John Keats*, p. 380.

<sup>51</sup> Letter 93 to Richard Woodhouse of 27.10.1818, in *The Letters of John Keats*, Vol. 1: 9.

<sup>52</sup> Kozer, *Indole*, p. xx.

Rather than using language, language uses him. It comes in the moodlessness of negative capability like in meditation. He does not know what he wants to say before he says it.

The amanuensis, aged  
sixty, wakes at dawn,  
drinks tea, passes water,  
in this notebook (sturdy  
covers) embraces hills,  
small channels of water,  
sheepfolds, he sees  
nothing, nothing  
ever absolutely  
(damn it, not even  
relatively):

Is this zazen or the writing of poetry?