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The Intuition of the Real and the Aesthetics of Silence in Japanese Haiku

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Abstract. The premise of the present study is identifying the main characteristics that render the haiku poem perceptible as "artistic peak" of Japanese language potentialities. By turning poetic and cultural-semiotic perspectives to advantage while discussing a literary text, the following analysis tries to probe the way in which *haiku* retrieves a world of concentrated emotion and of creative spark created by trivial facts, and transforms them in poetry capable of orienting the spirit towards *satori*, or Zen enlightenment. All this is done using an extremely reduced lexical inventory. Through the diffuse and ineffable, but especially through silence, a unity between the never ending, varied and complex "seen", and an enlivening, simple and impenetrable "unseen" is realised within the *haiku*. Also called "a model for an aesthetic of silence", the *haiku* proposes living and intuitively discovering reality which unfolds infinite silences by recording a graceful moment, and thus offers the reader considerable freedom in his own intervention to create meaning. Only a language characterised by "ambiguity" and "high dependence on context", together with a culture highly imbued by Zen philosophy could create, we believe, a favourable context for the birth of a type of poetry whose shortness could guarantee formal perfection and whose simplicity could stand proof for semantic depth.

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The great discovery of the Occident is humanity; the great discovery of the Orient is man.
Anton Dumitriu, *Eleatic Cultures and Heracleitean Cultures*

Sumi-e, Japanese monochrome brush painting which traces with a black line the cliffs or the tree in a landscape, is supposed to be pure meditation on things and on existence itself. While trying to describe "the spirit of things" and to give shape to that certain something that is named "creative impulse"[1], the act of creation functions in accordance with aesthetic principles such as *wabi* and *sabi*. *Wabi*, in literal translation, would mean 'poverty', and from this basic sense derive other secondary ones, such as 'longing for primitive simplicity, close to the natural way of being' and 'coming into resonance with nature, through mystic contemplation'. This is because, as Japanese spirituality considers, analytic intellect distances man from the essential simplicity of

[1] See Daisetz T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (Tokyo: Tuttle Publishing, 1997), 36.

nature, and as such the mystery of life becomes more and more difficult to decipher. The creative act in monochrome brush painting also involves the state of *sabi*[1], literally translated as 'loneliness', but which can also gain the significance of not only 'ancient imperfection', and 'apparent simplicity in executing a line', but also 'the mystery' that makes the object in question into an artistic realisation.

The same black and white painting also promotes, along with renouncing colour, the rule of asymmetry which actually governs the Japanese *forma mentis*[2]. Symmetry is a notion that inspires grace and solemnity, being the characteristic of a logical, abstract way of thinking. The lack of such a line, or of an element of apparent balance, in places where the regarding eye would probably expect it, provokes the spirit in Japanese mentality, and only that which before seemed an imperfection can become a form of perfection.

Similarly to the artistic program proposed by *sumi-e* painting and comparably with the mode of conception and realisation of the Japanese dry garden, made solely of rocks and the line to which they give birth, Japanese spirituality, in all its creative manifestations, bears in it the secret human aspiration of transcending the physical and of contemplating at infinitesimal scale the colossal, the infinite.

Considering that "poetry appeared along with the birth of the earth and sky"[3], Japanese verse, of a "delicate reluctance", which expresses through words only an insignificant part, the rest being only suggested, affirms itself through a famous anthology, *Manyōshū* (*Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves*). It appeared at the end of the 8th century, and among the five thousand poems it contains, the poetic formula of the *chōka* also appears, the long poem, borrowed from Chinese literary tradition. *Manyōshū* is followed, in time, by the arrival of other 21 imperial anthologies compiled along five centuries (10th-15th), the first of which is *Kokinshu* (*Collection of Poems of Ancient and Modern Times*). The *Kokinshu* was shaped at the request of emperor Daigo (885-930), and it uses the poetic formula of the *tanka* or *waka* – the two words are not traditionally synonymous, but today they are used as such – characterized by a number of 31 syllables, arranged in the structure 5-7-5-7-7. Among others, Ki no Tsurayuki (868-946?) brought a main contribution to the elaboration of this famous work. In the preface to the mentioned anthology, he describes Japanese verse as a spontaneous act, "spontaneous" being here, without question, in relation to the intensity of emotion. In the same preface, Tsurayuki admits from the very beginning that the spring of poetry is the human soul, and the verse of Yamato has as root the human heart, from which thousands and thousands of word-leaves grow. He acknowledges that this poetry expresses the thoughts in people's hearts with the help of what they see and hear: "Our native poetry springs from the heart of man as its seed, producing the countless leaves of language. Multitudinous are the affairs of men in this world – what their minds think, what their eyes see, what their ears hear they must find word to express."[4]. The poem is

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[1] See Ibid., 23-25.
[2] Cf. Ibid., 24.
[3] Cf. Tsurayuki, in Ion Acsan, Dan Constantinescu, *Tanka - Haiku. Antologie de poezie clasică japoneză* (Bucharest: Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică, 1981), 87.
[4] In F.V. Dickins, *Primitive and Mediaeval Japanese Texts* (Translated into English by F.V. Dickins, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906), 379.

constituted, as such, of three essential elements: emotion, which is the source of the poem, the poem proper which is born out of this emotion, and an external event that has caused this emotion[1]. The world of poetry is transformed into one of the feelings that the surrounding universe has stirred within the poet, feelings transferred to the reader through the means of a particular state of sadness, delicacy and dreaming.

Classical and post-classical *tanka* used the figures of speech that supported the Japanese language moderately, but, later, because of the abuse of wordplay and allusions to literary legends, poetry acquires a bookish flavour, a precious and pretentious one[2]. This impasse is broken by *renga*, 'connected-poetry' or the 'chain-poem', which consisted of a string of several *tanka* belonging to different authors, interconnected by a lyrical idea, and *haikai* or *renga* in satirical form. In time, the first hemistich, called *hokku*, is isolated from a succession of *renga*, being the part of the poem that contained the word which indicated the season (*kigo*). Thus, the proper circumstances for the apparition of a new lyrical style were created. This style was later called *haiku*, a term formed through the combination of the first syllable of *haikai* with the last of *hokku*. During the 17th century, through Matsuo Bashō, a renowned *haikai* poet, the *hokku* becomes an independent type of poem, and its interpretation as a part of a chain of verses is discarded. Overcoming the conflict between the serious *renga* and the comic *haikai*, the *haiku* shows itself capable of expressing humour, but also profound feelings and religious introspection with such precision and awareness of nuance, with such sincerity and sobriety, that the understanding of the way in which it communicates with the "mystery" of existence becomes rather difficult for the reader belonging to another cultural space. On a fairly poor lexical keyboard, the simple passing of a cloud on the autumn sky is laden with the drama of existing in the world: この秋は何で年よる雲に鳥 (This autumn, - / Old age I feel, / In the clouds, the birds.)[3] .

Japanese poetry, interpreted since its very beginnings as "the language of passion and emotion"[4], seems to have crystallised its essence in the *haiku*, the shortest poetic formula that can be found in universal history. The poem that stores "some of the highest feelings human beings are capable of"[5], is composed of 17 *mora*, or, in a Western terminological approximation, 17 syllables. Although it is difficult to believe that through the simple enumeration of some lexical elements an entire meaningful universe can be created, it is said that the *haiku* reminds one of the supreme moments of existence, for example that of death, when a shout or a gesture replace the story, when feelings refrain from conceptualisation, refusing to be transformed into a product of the intellect. The shortness of a *haiku* is precisely its meaning[6], and the *haiku* strives to say as little as possible while meaning as much as possible.

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[1] Cf. Makoto Ueda, *Literary and Art Theories in Japan* (Center for Japanese Studies, Michigan: The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1991), 3.
[2] See Kenneth Yasuda, *The Japanese Haiku. Its Essential Nature, History, and Possibilities in English with Selected Examples* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1995), 107-123.
[3] Matsuo Basho, in R. H. Blyth, *A History of Haiku* (In Two Volumes, Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 1984), 111.
[4] Ueda, *Literary and Art Theories in Japan*, 2.
[5] Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, 227.
[6] Cf. Ibid.

In the 17th century, Matsunaga Teitoku, who had become the mentor of the "Teimon" school, proposes a new variety of *haikai*, the poetry of comic verse that had already appeared a century before. This new type would combine the *haigon*, a word of foreign origin, usually Chinese, with lexical elements bearing a "humble" meaning, which had been completely removed from the classical poetic code of the 10th century. As a reaction to the formalism of the Teimon school the Danrin school appears, promoting the "instant", as the written poem was now defined as a quick, uninterrupted notation of the moment[1]. Once it reached this stage in its evolution, Japanese verse, through Matsuo Bashō (1643-1694), the one who had experimented the poetic exercise under the tutelage of both the mentioned schools, will give birth to a new poetic formula, known today as *haiku*. The wandering troubadour who signed with several pen names, but who, owing to a biographical detail, entered the memory of posterity under the name of Bashō ('banana tree'), the Zen Buddhist monk considered to be the founder of a new poetic genre, in agreement with Shakespeare[2] for whom poetry was the revelation of the hidden world, invisible to logical, rational knowledge, in his turn considered that only very short poetry could concentrate on a momentary impression, and in this way stop the instant: "You must capture in words the light in which you saw something, before it is erased from your mind."[3].

The haiku which is considered Matsuo Bashō's *ars poetica*: 古池や蛙とびこむ水の音 has known several translations into English: *The old pond; / A frog jumps in, - / The sound of the water.*[4]; *The old mere! / A frog jumping in / The sound of water* (Masaoka Shiki); *Into the ancient pond / A frog jumps / Water's sound !* (Daisetz T. Suzuki); *How many frogs? / Old pond... frogs jumped in... sound of water. /* (L. Hearn)[5]. This poetic formula undoubtedly surprises the Western reader by the extremely reduced inventory of lexical elements, causing great puzzlement as one tries to understand what makes "an old pond", "a jumping frog" and "the sound of water" into poetry?! The answers found by Bashō's exegesis could be synthesised as "the intuition of Reality" and "poetic inspiration".

As the expression of a sensation instantaneously roused by the meaning of an apparently commonplace event offered by nature or by human experience, the *haiku* refuses an explanation of the cause – effect type[6]. Accepting this premise, the sound of water in Matsuo Bashō's *haiku* is not the effect of a frog's jump in an old pond. The pool has always been there, and the *ya* from the original text is proof of this. It is the equivalent of an interjection similar to *ah!* , which indicates and insists on the place in which the "sound" was realised, and the acoustic element seems to become a main

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[1] See Michiko Arima, "Japanese Haiku vs. English Haiku vs. Concrete Poetry", in *Poetica* 46 (Tokyo: Shubun International, 1996): 137-152, 139.

[2] See Roland Barthes, *L'empire des signes* (Genève: Editions d'Albert Skira S.A, 1970), 111.

[3] Matsuo Basho, in Shūichi Katō, *Istoria literaturii japoneze (De la origini până în prezent)* (Traducere din limba japoneză de Kazuko Diaconu şi Paul Diaconu, Cu un interviu al autorului pentru cititorii români şi o prefaţă de Nicolae Manolescu, Vol. I, Bucharest: Editura Nipponica, 1998), 446.

[4] R. H. Blyth, *A History of Haiku,* 46.

[5] In Yoshihiko Ikegami, *On Translating Haiku* (Lecture, Faculty of Letters, Babes-Bolyai University, November 2004, manuscript), 2.

[6] Blyth, *A History of Haiku,* 11.

element in the decoding of this *haiku*. The frog's jump is, grammatically, an attributive determination, which leaves room for the interpretation that the created noise is not consecutive to the frog's leap into the water. Both the pond and the frog are coexistent, eternally present. While the ancient pond continues its existence in time, the leap and the sound of the water seem to be outside of time. The silence of eternity has been interrupted by a short noise, and the creation of this almost mystical atmosphere is due to the absence of thought, to transcending the cause – effect relationship. Specialised critics have affirmed[1] that not only has *haiku* nothing to do with Good, Truth, or Beauty, but also that it is not symbolic, nor does it represent a portrayal of natural phenomena with a meaning behind them. *Haiku* speaks about the man who tries to become one with the surrounding universe by overcoming his own limits, somehow continuing the teachings promoted by Zen Buddhist masters. Zen philosophy affirms that to learn about the pine tree or about bamboo as a man means that human beings surpass their own ego while searching for the true knowledge that will lead them to finding creative impulse: "To learn means to submerge oneself into the object until its intrinsic nature becomes apparent, stimulating poetic impulse"[2]. This truth might have been revealed to Matsuo Bashō one day when he received the visit of his Zen master, Bucchō. When the master asked his disciple how he had been doing, the answer given sounded like the following: "After the recent rain the moss has grown greener than ever.", and to the next question "When is timeless time? ", Bashō is said to have answered: "A frog jumps into the water, and hear the sound!"[3]. Without initially containing the phrase "the old pond", which he later added, Matsuo Bashō created a complete *haiku*, out of 17 syllables, about a tranquil pond, placed somewhere near a Buddhist temple, whose eternal silence was broken by a frog's leap. The serenity of the place that man notices with the sound made by the small creature's jump in the water is believed to be able to bring the human spirit to resonance with the spirit of the universe[4]. Thus, Bashō has given voice to the intuition and inspiration that make this possible.

However, some Western interpreters believe that to affirm that the sound of water caused by the frog's jump revealed the truth of Zen to the poet is the kind of conclusion that would belong to an Occidental type of hermeneutics, and because of this it would be more appropriate to consider that this genre of poetry rather reminds one of "the end of language"[5]. The *haiku*, seen as "the Zen literary branch", similarly to the Zen enigma known as *koan*, tries to reach the threshold where words stop, making way for "non-language"[6] on the path of the individual towards *satori*, or Zen enlightenment. The shortness of the haiku is not formal or conventional, but represents the correspondence of the form to the revealed moment: "le haïku n'est pas une pensée riche réduite à une forme brève, mais un événement bref qui trouve d'un coup sa forme juste"[7], where the signifier "adapts" itself to the signified in a sentence that is evocative of music. If

[1] See Ibid., 12-13.
[2] In Ibid., 13.
[3] Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, 239.
[4] Cf. Ibid., 240.
[5] Cf. Barthes, *L'empire des signes*, 96.
[6] Cf. Ibid., 97.
[7] Ibid., 98.

Western art transforms "impression" into description, *haiku* never does this[1], respecting the tradition according to which revelation before the things mentioned by the Buddhist *mu* ('nothingness, void') and the Zen *satori* ('enlightenment') cannot be described, nor defined. As such, for some Western interpreters, the *haiku* seems to be pure designation:

"C'est cela, c'est ainsi, dit le haïku, c'est tel. Ou miex encore: Tel! Dit-il, d'une touche si instantanée et si courte (sans vibration ni reprise) que la copule y apparaîtrait encore de trop, comme le remords d'une définition interdite, à jamais éloignée."[2]

Defined as "the expression of a temporary enlightenment", through which one can see "the life of things"[3], the *haiku* attracts the attention of the West which perceives this poetry as expression of things such as they are within and outside the mind, subjectively and in a primordial union with man himself. Accordingly, a way in which man can return to nature is created, a way towards his own Buddha nature, and the rereading of the previously discussed *haiku* finally allows for the interpretive suggestion[4] that the old pond is no more, just as the frog is no longer a frog. Everything is enveloped in a veil of mystery whose mysteriousness is completely gone.

To continue the Occidental approach, if one considers the three "verses" of 5, 7, 5 syllables of the *haiku* as a syllogistic drawing in three beats, that of escalation, suspense, and conclusion, in Matsuo Bashō's *haiku* the only syllogism that becomes admissible would be that of inclusion, in which the whole swallows the fragment[5]. However, abandoning this syllogism, for the contemporary reader the commentary of a *haiku* seems to become impossible, ending in its simple repetition: "parler du haïku serait purement et simplement le répéter"[6]. A Zen teaching says that "bamboos are straight and pine trees are gnarled"[7], from which one understands that Zen Buddhism accept the facts of experience as they present themselves. Zen is neither negativistic nor positivistic, and, similarly, the *haiku* of which is said that "it doesn't mean anything"[8] invites a paradoxical interpretation for the Western reader. Since it is "empty", it may be believed that, apparently, the *haiku* is ready to accept any interpretation, but, on the other hand, it is precisely because of the same "emptiness", before which everything becomes relative, that it indeed cannot accept just any interpretation[9]. *Haiku*, in the same manner with the pictograms and ideograms used for writing in this cultural space, firstly evoke a visual impression, as they actually are "a painting in words"[10]: 枯れ枝にからすの止まりたるや秋の暮れ (*Autumn evening; / A crow perched / On a withered*

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[1] See Ibid., 100.
[2] Ibid., 111.
[3] Blyth, *A History of Haiku,* 2.
[4] Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, 229.
[5] See Barthes, *L'empire des signes*, 93.
[6] Ibid., 93.
[7] In Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, 36.
[8] See Barthes, *L'empire des signes*, 89.
[9] Cf. Ibid., 89-107.
[10] Yoshihiko Ikegami, "Some Traditional Japanese Visual Tropes and their Perceptual and Experiential Bases", in Yoshihiko Ikegami, Seisaku Kawakami (eds.), "New Developments in the Study of Metaphor", *Poetica. An International Journal of Linguistic-Literary Studies*, 46, Special Issue (Tokyo: Shubun International, 1996): 89-99, 92.

branch.)[1]. More than a world of form and colour, the haiku follows the embodiment of movement in the sway of a branch from which a bird or a wild goose has just taken flight, ready to disappear into the clouds. "A few words", "an image" and "a feeling"[2], where Occidental literature demands the development of a long rhetorical labour, become the poetry of the trivial and ephemeral.

Also called "the essence of pure poetry", the haiku speaks about the diffuse and ineffable, about concentrated emotion, about marking a moment of grace, and especially about silence[3] through conservative means. Exploiting the characteristics of the Japanese language morphological classes, to be precise, the onomatopoeia that emotionally and affectively loads a sentence, the noun that lacks gender, number and case, and the verb which is liberated from tense category, Japanese has given birth to a poetic formula in which what the poet puts to silence becomes just as important as the things which he affirms: 静かさや岩に染み入る蝉の声 (How silent and still! / Into the heart of rocks sinks / The cicada's shrill.)[4]. Specialised critics consider that the *haiku* is a model of the aesthetics of silence, owing to the infinite silences met once it unfolds, silences generated by syncopes of words, among others[5]. In the relationship between void and fullness (of which it is believed that it governs Far Eastern spirituality) in the *haiku* poem, the accent falls once again on the void, imprinting its singularity indirectly on the fullness. Resembling the Zen *koan*, the labour of reading becomes that of "suspending language and not causing it"[6], and Bashō seems to have deeply understood this: 旅がらす古巣は梅になりにけり (*The old nest / Of the journeying crow,- / It has become a plum-tree.*)[7]. "Fluid indeterminacy", impersonality, and discretion in simultaneity, to which one could add the capture of a primordial burst of emotion, relate the *haiku* to the Oriental mirror, which is tightly connected in its symbolism to the reproduction of perfection. If, in the West, the mirror is par excellence an object to do with narcissism, in the East it seems to be the symbol of the void, which lets something be the way it is, without altering it in the slightest. "L'esprit de l'homme parfait, dit un maître de Tao, est comme un miroir. Il ne saisit rien mais ne repousse rien."[8]. Similarly to the mirror, the reading of a *haiku* could remind the reader of something that hasn't happened to him yet, when he recognises in the poem "a repetition without origins", "an event without a cause" and "a memory without identity"[9], by which he can easily be pulled in.

In Japanese tradition, an object has never been considered for itself, and it was most often thought of as "something" that possesses "a heart" or "a spirit". As *shingon* ('true-word') and *kotodama* ('spirit-word') speak about the relationship of the word with the heart/spirit of the person who uses it, in the same way, the act itself of birthing a

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[1] Basho, in Blyth, *A History of Haiku,* 422.
[2] Barthes, *L'empire des signes*, 90.
[3] See Ibid., 92.
[4] Basho, in Yasuda, *The Japanese Haiku. Its Essential Nature, History, and Possibilities in English with Selected Examples,* 185.
[5] See Ibid., 33.
[6] Barthes, *L'empire des signes*, 94.
[7] In Blyth, *A History of Haiku,* 124.
[8] In Barthes, *L'empire des signes*, 104.
[9] Ibid.

poem is tightly connected to the heart/spirit of its creator. Poems can then be divided, according to the established relationship, in poems that "are born" and poem that "are made". Concentrating on one's own emotions and placing them in harmony with the surrounding atmosphere will cause the creative impulse that will transform a poem which becomes "the essence of the spirit and of one's own heart"[1]. When this gesture is lacking, poetry is not conceived, but composed.

The assertion according to which *haiku* is the "artistic peak of inherent potentialities in Japanese"[2] comes somehow as a natural extension to the belief that literature, in its essence a verbal art, has to inevitably reflect the characteristics of the language in which it is created[3] . This fact can also be recognised in classical Japanese poetry, which uses a language whose specific traits are, among others, ambiguity and contextual dependence. As a result, it comes to develop, as canons of the poetic genre, shortness, ellipsis and polysemy[4], as can be observed in the *haiku* poem. There being a relatively vague and unclear articulation between language and "heart/spirit", it is then not surprising that rhetoric, as an art of persuasion, has never thrived[5] in the Japanese cultural space.

The term 'ambiguity' (*aimai-sei*) is, in the Japanese language, a Sino-Japanese lexical compound meaning 'that which is obscure, equivocal', by combining *ai* 'obscurity', 'the act of covering', with *mai* 'obscurity', 'indeterminacy'[6]. Through this particularity, Japanese, full of periphrases and successive approximations of a reality that is never fixed[7], leaves every speaker the possibility of refuge in a world of reserve, of allusions, and ambiguity situates the text at a relatively high degree of context dependency[8]. As the essence of the *haiku* type discourse is to say the minimum and to convey the maximum[9], this genre of poetry becomes, in its turn, a text that is strongly dependent on context. Differentiating itself from the Western textual theory that speaks of the autonomy and the self-sufficient functioning of text in relation to the context in which it is used, a text composed in Japanese makes the reader an active participant in the construction of the meaningful universe, due to its dependency on context. The relationship text/context combined with the particularities of an SOV language, that

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[1] Basho, in Katō, *Istoria literaturii japoneze*, 447.

[2] Yoshihiko Ikegami, "Homology of Language and Culture - A Case Study in Japanese Semiotics –", *The Nature of Culture* (Proceedings of the International and Interdisciplinary Symposium, October 7-11, 1986 in Bochum, edited by Walter A. Koch, Studienverlag Dr. Norbert Brockmeyer, Bochum, 1989): 338-403, 394.

[3] Jakobson, in Ibid.

[4] Cécile Sakai, *Kawabata, Le Clair-Obscur. Essai sur une écriture de l'ambiguité* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2001), 23.

[5] Ikegami, "Homology of Language and Culture - A Case Study in Japanese Semiotics", 399.

[6] *Nihongo Daijiten* (*The Great Japanese Dictionary*) (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1995), 10.

[7] See Jean-Claude Courdy, *Les Japonais* (Paris: Pierre Belfond, 1979), 43.

[8] Cf. Yoshihiko Ikegami, *Introduction: Semiotics and Culture* in Yoshihiko Ikegami (ed.), *The Empire of Signs: Semiotic Essays on Japanese Culture* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1991): 1-24, 10.

[9] Cf. Yoshihiko Ikegami, *Signs Conception in Japan*, in Roland Posner et al. (eds.), *Semiotik. Semiotics* (Volume 2, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1998): 1898-1910, 1905.

emphasises the topical rather than the subject in a sentence[1], requires it to become the reader's "responsibility" to decipher the meaning of a text. Thus, sometimes, the Japanese poet/writer will deliberately adumbrate the meaning, offering the reader considerable freedom in his intervention that creates meaning. In this case, the reader is aware of the fact that, when he constructs, he has to take the rhythm of decomposition of what he builds into consideration[2].

The *haiku* is constructed of two juxtaposed nominal phrases, whose semantic relationship is established by the reader. This fact can be proven by the numerous possible translations given, for example, in English, for one and the same *haiku* written by the wandering poet Bashō before setting out on the way of no return. 旅にやんで夢はかれのをかけめぐる。can receive the following translations: *Ailing on my travels, / Yet my dream wondering / Over withered moors. ; On a journey, ill / And over fields all withered; dreams / Go wandering still.; Ill on a journey; / My dreams wonder/ Over withered moors. /*[3]. The nominal lexical elements, as semantic nodes of a *haiku*, are not sufficient to generate the whole meaning, the verbal expressions are incomplete, and as such their association strongly stimulates the imagination of the reader. This independence of connected images is often overwrought by *kireji* ('caesura words'), as *ya* or *ka na*, lexemes that suggest semantic discontinuity in various ways. Without the reader's active participation in interpreting, through which the sense passes beyond literal meaning, the *haiku* could not function as an artistic text[4], a fact that is easily achievable, as the endophoric, the reference to the linguistic context, and the exophoric, the reference to the extralinguistic context, are rather vague in Japanese. For example, the personal pronouns, whose primary function is endophoric, are not very well developed in this language as distinct grammatical objects, and their referential function is assumed by the demonstrative pronouns, whose primary function is exophoric. Thus, the border between the produced-text, the object-text and the subject who produces text is easily eroded[5], so that a *haiku* poem comes to discover human depths in stirring simplicity. At one of his children's death, Issa wrote: けろりくわんとして鳥と柳かな (*As if nothing had happened, - / The crow, / And the willow.*)[6]

One of the famous interpreters of this poetic genre, R. H. Blyth[7] considered the *haiku* to be a poetic formula without rhyme, with little rhythm, assonance, alliteration or intonation. However, recent studies prove that in each of the three segments of the *haiku* a rhythm of eight beats can be recovered, in an alternation of full and empty beats, in which those lastly mentioned would suggest significational discontinuity, greatly important in the construction of meaning:

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[1] See John Hinds, *Reader Versus Writer Responsability: A New Typology*, in Ulla Connor; Robert B. Kaplan (eds.), *Writing Across Languages: Analysis of L2 Text* (Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1987), 141-142.
[2] In Courdy, *Les Japonais*, 17.
[3] Ikegami, *On Translating Haiku*, 2.
[4] Yoshihiko Ikegami, "Introduction", in *An Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of Discourse*, Special Issue. *Discourse Analysis in Japan* (Edited by Yoshihiko Ikegami, Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1989): 263-273, 265.
[5] See Ibid., 268-269.
[6] In Blyth, *A History of Haiku,* 243.
[7] Ibid., 7.

"The meaning in such poems [tanka, haiku] depends considerably on the silent beat in context: we may say that the (personal) association in the silent beat links the artistically designed semantic discontinuity of each phrase"[1].

But through the establishment of time necessary for metonymic or metaphoric associations[2], this silent beat perceived as silence becomes the main element in the process of activating the exercise of interpretation. Taking into consideration the fact that a normal breath is also composed of eight beats, the *haiku* becomes a poetic formula as natural as breathing.

Japanese sensitivity pays great attention to all things in nature. Zen wisdom does not forget that however small and however unimportant the surrounding world seems, it enters a relationship with the great cosmos. This Zen teaching has been adopted by the poetic formula of the *haiku*[3] by situating the concept of *kigo*, a term that combines *ki*, 'season' with *go* 'word', among the aesthetic principles that form the basis for creating a *haiku*. Resembling the other characteristics of the *haiku* poem, the *kigo* is, in its turn, "strongly dependent on particular context"[4], acting the part of an emotionally heavy, symbolic word, that participates in the activation of an extremely context dependent metaphoric interpretation in the *haiku*.

The originality of the school of poetry created by Bashō was defined by Japanese aesthetics through: *wabi*, or the love for sobriety and austerity, contemplation of nature in silence and detachment, search for richness in poverty and for beauty in simplicity; *sabi*, or the love for the old and antiquated, loneliness and resignation; *shiori*, or special spiritual state, capable of perceiving deep suggestions of eternal truth in everyday life[5], all these principles being derived from the artistic ideals of *waka* and *renga* poems, and *noh* theatre, with the purpose of realising *mysterious beauty* (*yūgenbi*). *Yūgenbi* is a lexical creation composed of *yū* and *gen*, which would literally mean 'cloudy impenetrability'. The combination can be freely translated as 'obscurity', 'mystery', 'beyond intellectual calculation', but not as 'manifestation of darkness', to which the lexeme *bi*, 'beauty', is added. An object thus named cannot become the subject of a dialectical analysis[6], nor of a clear definition. If it cannot be presented by intellectual sense, it doesn't mean that the object in question is beyond human experience. Even hidden, the presence of that mysterious beauty can be perceived intuitively, according to the suggestion of Zen philosophy which does not desire a refusal of life. Quite the contrary, it urges one to live life more intensively. Reevaluating practical activity itself, among other arts that it generated, Zen is configured as "a recall to life lived, to things themselves: *zu den Sachen selbst"*[7]. Liberation from any trace of

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[1] Michiko Arima, *Creative interpretation of the text and the Japanese mentality*, in Y. Ikegami (ed.), *The Empire of signs: semiotic essays on Japanese culture* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1991), 48.

[2] See Idem, "Japanese Haiku vs. English Haiku vs. Concrete Poetry", in *Poetica* 46 (Tokyo: Shubun International, 1996): 137-152, 141.

[3] Cf. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, 238.

[4] Arima, "Japanese Haiku vs. English Haiku vs. Concrete Poetry", 144.

[5] Cf. Ibid., 140.

[6] Cf. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, 220.

[7] Umberto Eco, *Opera deschisă. Formă şi indeterminare în poeticile contemporane* (The open work. Form and indetermination in contemporary poetics), trans. Cornel Mihai Ionescu, (Piteşti: Paralela 45, 2002), 225.

selfishness and entering what Far Eastern spirituality calls "the cosmic subconscious"[1] are the pursuits of Zen Buddhism and of art, while *mushin* ('no-mind') and *munen* ('no-thought') become unsuspected treasures of the human soul: 露はらりはらり世の中よかりけり (*The dew-drops fall / By ones and twos, rapidly,- / It is a good world.*)[2].

One of the countless attempts at defining this poetic genre is: "Haiku is an ascetic art, an artistic asceticism"[3]. Zen enlightenment, to which a haiku can lead, is not transcendentalism, nor immanentism, nor a combination of the two, but it could be a sudden turn towards Truth. A monk once asked the Zen master Tōsu "What is Buddha?" and Tōsu answered: "Buddha". "What is Zen?", the monk asked him next, and the master replied: "Zen."[4]. The master's answers, which seem to be simple repetition, are actually the echo itself. For the enlightenment of the monk's mind there seems to be no other solution than affirming that something is what it is, that Reality must be accepted in its essence, without analysing its concepts, without going through circular reasoning. Zen philosophy is, generally, that of Mahayana Buddhism, but it separates itself by its own methods of understanding the path to *satori*. To see in human existence Reality itself and to pay unlimited attention to the inner experience of "intuitive understanding"[5] are ways to knowledge suggested by Zen philosophy:

"The idea that the ultimate truth of life and of things generally is to be intuitively and not conceptually grasped, and that this intuitive apprehension is the foundation not only of philosophy but of all other cultural activities, is what the Zen form of Buddhism has contributed to the cultivation of artistic appreciation among the Japanese people."[6].

This "intuition", a fundamental ontological quality, which comes in direct contact with Reality, establishes a relationship between Zen Buddhism and art, as both try to reveal "the mystery of life" in a way different from intellectual, logical and rational analysis. If *satori* is resonance with a "spiritual rhythm", art, in its turn, has its own mystery (*myō*), also called in Japanese *yūgen*, or the instant of eternity in this world of permanent change.

It has been said about the *haiku* that it reflects the Japanese character in many ways:

"We humans, however fiercely or desperately we may strive or struggle, can never go beyond this. All that we can do then is to write a *haiku* appreciating the fact, without asking why or how. This we may say is a kind of resignation. But the Japanese do not grumble, nor do they curse as most Western peoples do; they just accept cheerfully and with humor."[7].

A culture deeply permeated by the philosophy of Zen Buddhism and a language characterised by ambiguity and a high degree of textual indeterminacy[8] have created a

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[1] Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, 226.
[2] Issa, in Blyth, *A History of Haiku,* 411.
[3] Ibid., 2.
[4] In Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, 34.
[5] Ibid., 218.
[6] Ibid., 219.
[7] Ibid., 231.
[8] Ikegami, *Introduction: Semiotics and Culture* , 5.

favourable background for an artistic genre such as the *haiku*. This poetic formula, whose shortness could guarantee formal perfection and whose simplicity could stand witness for depth, thus manages to fulfill a double myth[1]: that of classical form, which makes proof of art out of concision, and the romantic myth, which gives preference to the truth expressed through/by improvisation.

[1] See Barthes, *L'empire des signes*, 89.