Andrés Claro

Poetic Figurations, World Configurations

Abstract: Adopting a comparative approach to the transcendental outputs of poetic language (the forms of language as an exploration of representation), this article examines how the dominant figurations of the poetic image synthesize the characteristic metaphysical-temporal configurations of the real. The examination of three poems by authors who are classics in their traditions (Horace's Ode 4.2, Tu Fu's "Thinking of Li Po on a Spring Day," and Ezra Pound's Canto II) opens the way to a reflection on how their primary poetic figurations (analogical metaphor in classical poetics, correlative parallelism in Chinese poetics, and the fragmentation-juxtaposition of montage in contemporary poetics) project characteristic metaphysical-temporal configurations (comparison and substitutive referral from the sense-image to the idea in classical ontology, the Tao or process of correlative unfolding in the Chinese tradition, and that conception of interruption amidst simultaneity which increasingly defines contemporary representation). The basic solidarities discernible between "forms of the poem" and "conceptions of the world" thus enable us to outline a more general proposition about the ways in which the dominant habits of poetic imagery project the ideal conceptions whereby a culture responds to the inevitable question of what constitutes the basis of the real.

Keywords: comparative metaphysics, comparative poetics, Ezra Pound, Horace, metaphor, montage, ontology, parallelism, Tao, Tu Fu

> There is no classification of the universe that is not arbitrary and conjectural. The reason is very simple: we do not know what the universe is [...]. The impossibility of penetrating the divine scheme of the universe cannot dissuade us, though, from offering up human schemes, even if we are aware they are provisional. (Borges 1974, 708; my translation)

> Whenever a mind of true greatness and genius occupies itself with language, this phenomenon becomes manifest in reality [...]. The real importance of studying languages lies in the role of language in forming representations. Everything is there, for it is the sum of these representations that makes the human being. (Humboldt 1990, 85; my translation)

By adopting a comparative approach to the transcendental outputs of language (i.e. a critical perspective that scrutinizes the formal conditions of possibility of representation), one can reveal the extent to which the dominant habits of poetic figuration synthesize characteristic metaphysical configurations. More precisely, one can understand how dominant poetic tropologies (such as metaphor in classical poetics, parallelism in Chinese poetics, and montage in contemporary poetics), while imposing a recognizable type of linkage on the level of language (analogy,

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110645033-029

correlation, and juxtaposition), project characteristic metaphysical topologies (comparison and substitutive referral from the sense-image to the idea in classical ontology, the Tao or process of correlative unfolding in the Chinese tradition, and that conception of interruption amidst simultaneity which increasingly defines contemporary representation).

It is this continuity between poetic forms and metaphysical conceptions that the following conveys in a reading of three poems by authors who are classics of their respective traditions: Horace's Ode 4.2, Tu Fu's "Thinking of Li Po on a Spring Day," and Ezra Pound's Canto II. On the face of it, these three poems might all appear to speak about the same issue in staging the poet's complex relationships and feelings towards a strong literary forebear: Pindar, Li Po, and Browning & Co. respectively. However, when attention is given to the dominant behaviour of their poetic images (analogical metaphor, dynamic parallelism, and interruptive montage), one realizes how these works project alternative worlds, promoting the type of characteristic metaphysical order whereby their cultures have answered the inevitable question of the structure of the real (ontological dualism, correlative Taoism, and interruptive immanence).

1 Horace's metaphors for Pindar: From idealizing analogies to ontological dualism

> Reality is a cliché from which we escape by metaphor. It is only *au pays de la métaphore qu'on est poète*. (Stevens 1989, 179)

> He would have us believe that a metaphor is a communication from heaven. — A metaphor is *what happens* when one *looks at something in a certain way*. (Valéry 1957, 1447; my translation, emphasis in original)

> Metaphysics *itself* has not only constructed and treated *the* concept of metaphor […]. It would itself be situated tropically with respect to Being or the thought of Being […]. Metaphysics *as* tropics. (Derrida 1989, 112; my translation, emphasis in original)

In the first half of Ode 4.2, a circumscribed episode of the poem dedicated to the memory of the Greek poet Pindar (517–438 BC), the Latin poet Horace (65–8 BC) writes:

> Whoever tries, oh Julus!, to rival Pindar
> mounts up on waxen wings with Daedalean
> art and will give his name
> to a glassy sea.

Like a river rushing down from the mountain
that rain has swollen above its usual banks,
so Pindar seethes and falls, immense,
with deep speech,

worthy of Apollo's laurel crown,
whether he coins new phrases in daring
dithyrambs and is carried along in rhythms
free of rules,

or whether he sings of gods and kings of divine
blood at whose hands the Centaurs justly died,
and the flame of the fearful
Chimaera died,

or speaks of those the Elean
palm returns home godlike, boxer or horseman,
and bestows a tribute more powerful
than a hundred effigies,

or laments the youth snatched from his tearful
wife and exalts his powers and courage and golden
demeanour to the stars, envying
black Orcus.

A strong breeze, Anthony, lifts the Dircean
swan whenever he rises to the high
regions of cloud; but my methods are those
of a Matinian bee

working hard to gather the pleasant thyme
all about the many groves and the banks
of Tibur's streams, and I shape
my small songs.[1]
(Horacio 1990, 324–326; my translation)

1 "Pindarum quisquis studet aemulari, / Iulle, ceratis ope Daedalea / nititur pennis vitreo daturus / nomina ponto. // Monte decurrens velut amnis, imbres / quem super notas aluere ripas, / fervet inmensusque ruit profundo / Pindarus ore, // laurea donandus Apollinari, / seu per audacis nova dithyrambos / verba devolvit numerisque fertur / lege solutis, // seu deos regesque canit, deorum / sanguinem, per quos cecidere iusta / morte Centauri, cecidit tremendae / flamma Chimaerae, // sive quos Elea domum reducit / palma caelestis pugilemve equomve / dicit et centum potiore signis / munere donat, // flebili sponsae iuvenemve raptum / plorat et viris animumque moresque / Aureos educit in astra nigroque / invidet Orco. // Multa Dircaeum levat aura cycnum, / tendit, Antoni, quo-

In what can be taken as a hyperbolic tribute to the lyrical virtues of Pindar, the profusion of metaphors and similes makes Horace's poem a substitutive fiction in the restricted, strong sense of the word. For nothing of what its images literally say – that Pindar is a swan flying through the sky, or a deep and fast-flowing river descending from the mountain, or that Horace himself is a bee gathering thyme, or that ignorant and overconfident poets are Icaruses falling into the sea – could have any basis in everyday perception or intuitive experience. Readers used to this type of metaphorical figuration know, without even consciously considering the matter, that to understand the meaning and representation of this poetic language, they need to activate an analogical habit entailing repeated shifts from comparison between the sensible images to their resolution into ideal meanings, of which the most obvious here are the unattainable superiority and the irrepressible dynamism of Pindar's verse.

On the face of it, attention to Horace's metaphorical imaginary and behaviour can enable us to determine the intentions and possible ulterior motives at work in his homage to Pindar, the characteristic tension between admiration of and rivalry with the memorable Greek past. Thus, if one asks what else is common to the profusion of metaphors and similes deployed by Horace, one notices how both the expert labour of the industrious bee that Horace claims to be and Icarus' failed attempt to rise up to the heavens, referring to the rival poets who are unaware of their limits, entail an allusion to working and understanding the properties of wax. The analogical meaning is fairly obvious: Horace is claiming that he, as a skilled and industrious bee who confines himself to a certain height in his work with wax, has the expertise to shape his material in his small poems, unlike those other inexpert poets who aspire to reach the clouds without knowing the properties of their material, so that the higher they try to rise, the more disastrously they will fall, just as the late-lamented Icarus did because he was unaware of the properties of wax. If one further asks what exactly is figured by "wax," the response should be quite clear by now as well: it is the work of metaphor itself, a skill in which Horace shows that he is in fact not all that inferior to Pindar, a lauded predecessor who is also a rival to be surpassed.

Once one recognizes the basic intentions and possible ulterior motives of Horace's tribute to Pindar, one can go on to recognize everything that this metaphorical figuration configures over and above authorial intentionality, the way that everything, from the very imaginary staged to the habit of figuration entailed by metaphorical analogism, organizes the representation of the real as a vertical,

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tiens in altos / nubium tractus: ego apis Matinae / more modoque // grata carpentis thyma per laborem /plurimum circa nemus uvidique / Tiburis ripas operosa parvos / carmina fingo."

idealizing topology, projecting and promoting the dualism between the sensible and the intelligible that characterizes classical ontology.

Already when one attends to the imaginary of Horace's ode – that is, to the empirical content of the metaphors and similes he stages – one can see how a vertical topology and a vertical order of value that place the high over the low are presupposed and affirmed. This is conveyed by all the analogies with the natural world, where what is praised and prized is "lifted" to a celestial height, whereas what is sincerely or supposedly held to be low is placed at an earthly height. Thus, Pindar is figured as a swan "flying higher" than any other poet, and also as a river that descends from the highest peaks. Unskilled poets, in turn, are figured as beings falling to the earth's surface. Horace, in his false modesty, is presented working safely and skilfully at a certain intermediate height. To be sure, these imaginaries that Horace employs more or less automatically are recognized conventions of an established and widespread metaphorical system, which, based as it is on a projection of the orientations of intuitive space to determine ideal aspects (where the high and the low, the above and the below, play a central role), can be used to conceptualize and envisage a number of non-immediate, more abstract aspects of existence (as is done here with poetic value). But what is interesting to note is the way that, just as there is a prevalent "idea" of the "above" being better and having a "higher" status than what is "below," so a vertical and hierarchical topology is organized and asserted, going from the sky to the earth, from the higher ideal to the lower material. While the empirical content of the series of analogical figurations staged by Horace is traditional up to a point, and certainly conventional (in the sense that it could have been different), it is not arbitrary, in the sense that it determines the way in which the real is represented: starting with this vertical topology of the real, with this idealizing representation in which the model is shown on the celestial heights, while the copies that seek to resemble it have more or less fallen to an earthly height depending on whether they are more or less successful.

It is this topology of the real, in which the basic ontological structuring that hierarchizes the transcendent ideal over the immanent material can be recognized, that, far more powerfully than the empirical content of the poem's imagery, drives the habit of formal synthesis of metaphor, the type of linkage in the representation which it projects, this being precisely that of an analogy between sensible images that project an ideal meaning, the idea. From a transcendental perspective – one that examines the formal conditions of possibility for representation – what is immediately apparent is a strong solidarity between metaphorical tropology and ontological topology. One can see how the structure and teleology asserted by metaphorical-analogical figuration – a poetic habit dominant at least since Homer and Pindar in archaic Greece that requires an inconso-

nant comparison between sensible images to be carried to a resolution in an ideal sense – is replicated in the ontological configuration of the real – a metaphysical conception dominant at least since Plato in classical Greece, where comparison between entities leads on to the Idea, the dispersion of sensible images on to what is understood to be their ideal model. The structure of signification and representation in language imposed by the metaphorical habit, which separates and hierarchizes the literal and the figural, is replicated in the ontological structuring of the real as a hierarchical dualism between the transcendent idea and the immanent sensible copy. Semantic inconsonance in metaphorical substitution, which produces the idea, becomes metaphysical inconsonance that breaks with immanence, projecting an ideal sphere.

Faced with this strong solidarity between dualist-analogical structuring of the poetic figure and of the metaphysical configuration, a naive realist will say that it is precisely because the real is conceived as (or simply *is*) an ontological conjunction of the sensible and the intelligible that the poetic figure imitates it, moulding itself to a world that is presented to it as a given. The problem, though, is that there have historically been other conceptions of the real that have been as vital to other cultures as ontology has been to the West, conceptions that display a no less discernible solidarity and dependency on the habits of poetic imagery dominant in their respective traditions.

2 Tu Fu's parallelisms about Li Po: From vibratory correlations to the process of Tao

> Nature, in the process of giving forms, always configures the limbs in pairs. In the workings of the spiritual principle, nothing is left in isolation […].
> The ribs of the body must be paired.
> A phrase, once formed, must have its counterpart. (Liu Xie 1995, 239; my translation)

> Parallelism is a necessity in any literary work. For nothing exists in isolation in the cosmos, all things arrive at existence in pairs. So with the high and the low, the noble and the base, the present and the absent, the alike and the unalike, what arrives and what departs, the empty and the full – in all cases we speak of parallelism by correlation. (anonymous "Treatise on Parallelism," in Martin [1989, 119]; my translation)

Among the series of poems Tu Fu (712–770) composed honouring his own literary predecessor Li Po (701–762), one finds at least half a dozen *lu-shih* or regulated octets. The most celebrated of these is:

A Spring Day: Thinking about Li Po

The poetry of Li Po has no equal.
Free imagination, out of the ordinary.
Clear, fresh, like Yu Kaifu;
Strong, fluid, like Bao Zhao.
To the north of the Wei, the spring tree.
To the east of the River, the twilit cloud.
When, before a pot of wine,
shall we speak of literature again?[2]
(Tu Fu 2001, 266; my translation)

If the figures staged by Tu Fu are once again at the explicit service of homage to the strong predecessor, in this case Li Po, they configure an experience and representation very different to that found in Horace's ode to Pindar. Certainly, a reading that confines itself to fixating on the author's intentions and possible ulterior motives would once again reveal a complex tension between admiration and rivalry, or, more precisely, between friendship and reproach. But the characteristic formal behaviour of their dynamic parallelisms, the complex interplay of vibratory correspondences that the images activate at different levels of the poem, promote a conception of the real wholly different to the analogism between the sensible and the intelligible projected by the metaphorical on to the ontological, that is, the conception of an immanent process of active correlations.

On the face of it, one can note how, in contrast to Horace's poem, there is nothing in Tu Fu's octet to force readers into a substitution for the immediate reality it presents. Not that this poem cannot be interpreted with reference to another level of meaning, activating the series of allusions entailed by its natural images and characters, and continuing, more importantly, with its play of parallelisms and other patterns of dynamic correlation. But readers of the poem are not obliged to treat the literal scene it presents as a literary illusion that could not have a basis in sensible experience. The dynamic figuration does not offer an image to be replaced by an idea, but says one thing and another simultaneously, using an active and endless correlation to figure between images that do not cancel each other out.

It is this dynamic effect arising from a process of correlations that already explains the tension between praise and reproach staged in the poem, which was written in the context of the aftermath of An Lushan's failed revolution, in which Tu Fu and Li Po were trapped on opposite sides (Li Po would end up falling out of

2 春日忆李白 // 白也诗无敌 / 飘然思不群 / 清新庾开府 / 俊逸鲍参军 / 渭北春天 / 江东日暮云 / 何时一樽酒 / 重与细论文.

imperial favour and being exiled, so that there came to be not only a geographical but also a political separation between two poets who, as was customary, had aspired to an official career). Thus, in its central parallel distichs, for instance, one finds an alternation, far from easy to resolve, between homage to the literary predecessor (activated by the correlation Tu Fu establishes with Li Po, paralleling the correlation he establishes between two major Chinese poets who were known well for their political and administrative impact, namely the official Yu Kaifu and the general Bao Zhao), and nostalgia at the dramatic separation of poets who are friends (sanctioned by the greater geographical and political parallelism between the North and the South, and by the natural and poetic parallelism staged by the correlation between the freshness and clearness of a tree in springtime versus the threatening fluidity of a twilit cloud). It is this same unresolvable tension that is intensified when we attend to the broadest of the correspondences staged by Tu Fu's octet as a whole, namely his alternation between an imagistic mode of presentation from an objective viewpoint, and a propositional mode of presentation from a subjective viewpoint. This can be seen already in the poem's title, "A Spring Day: *Thinking about Li Po*" (my emphasis): a contrast between an objectively presented natural image and a propositionally presented subjective response, which summarizes the tension between the celebration of productive fecundity and introspective lament developed by the poem as a whole. For it is this correspondence that can be observed between the objective mode of presentation of the two central parallel distichs with their compact imagistic language, and the subjective mode of presentation in the first and last distichs with their direct propositional language, a most general correlation between modes of perception and presentation which makes the poem vibrate as a whole.

In this sense, when our attention turns to the heuristic output generated by the imaginary and the dominant habit of figuration through dynamic parallelisms, what we find is not the projection of a vertical, hierarchical topology that refers the sensible to the ideal, but the projection of a horizontal topology as a "process of correspondences," this being precisely the characteristic and traditional metaphysical conception of the Tao.

Turning attention to the empirical content of the images, as those most obviously conjoined in the central parallelisms – Tu Fu and Li Po, Yu Kaifu and Bao Zhao, north and south, the spring tree and the twilit cloud – one finds that these linked elements are not hierarchized metaphysically, still less ontologically as a dualism between the immanent sensible and the transcendental ideal, but are correlated within the same order of the real to which the human being belongs as part of nature. To be sure, these correlative images that Tu Fu employs more or less automatically or creatively are part of a category system and habit of conceptualization widely deployed in the Chinese tradition, where, for the purpose of

representing the non-immediate, more abstract aspects of existence, the predominant way of generating concepts is not by analogy between sensible elements, but by correlation between elements regarded as natural. Looking beyond concrete examples, however, it is crucial that, just as the dominant habit of poetic figuration leads to conceptualization by correlation between dependent elements on the same level, often through dynamic parallelism, one obtains the organization and projection of a horizontal topology of the real in which entities are correlated in reciprocal dependencies. As before with Horace, while it can also be recognized here that the material content of the series of dynamic images staged by Tu Fu is traditional up to a point and certainly conventional (in the sense that it could have been different), it is not arbitrary, for it determines how the phenomena are represented, starting with this projection of a horizontal topology where entities stand in a process of reciprocal relations.

Thus, it is this topology of the real, in which the traditional Chinese metaphysical conception of Tao as a process of correlations has been recognized, that, far more powerfully than the empirical content of the poem's imagery, drives the habit of formal synthesis of dynamic parallelism as such, the type of linkage in representation which its process of correlations imposes on the most widely differing levels. The structure and movement set up by the dynamic parallelisms of classical Chinese poetry, the meaning process of language that correlates and sets up vibrations between parts deemed to be interdependent, are reproduced in the metaphysical configuration of the Tao, where the real is conceived as a process of rhythmical unfolding into correlative pairs.

It is because of this habit of representation characteristic of dynamic parallelism that the language of a classical Chinese poet like Tu Fu projects a very different world to that projected by the language of a classical Latin poet like Horace. While the analogical metaphor of the Western classic constitutes a habit of representation that establishes a comparison between images which resolves into the idea, deploying a dualistic topology that refers the sensible to the intelligible, the dynamic parallelisms of classical Chinese poetry constitute a habit of representation that establishes a correspondence between parts which confer reciprocal meaning upon each other, projecting a topology as a process of correlations (the Tao). In the first case, the poetical substitution of the literal by the figural dovetails with the metaphysical difference between the sensible and the intelligible, all made possible by the analogy established between the two orders of language and being. In the latter, the vibratory correspondences within the poem dovetail with the cosmic correlations as part of a process of permanent unfolding, all made possible by a category system that conceives of the topology of the real as organization into dynamic pairs.

This does not, however, mean that these habits of representation of the real constitute a formal *factum*, a perpetual figural doom preventing any other configuration of the world from being inhabited. The historical and literary fact is that these two forms of poetic imagery examined, analogical metaphor and dynamic parallelism, have crossed over already on more than one occasion, sometimes with surprising results, to the point of revolutionizing the inherited representation of the real.

3 Pound's montage of Browning & Co.: From interruptive juxtapositions to transcendence in immanence

> In this new conception [...] almost all the threads of the fabric forming the material of modern art come together: [...] above all, technical montage and the mixing of spatial and temporal forms [...], whose basic element is simultaneity [...]. Time is losing both its uninterrupted continuity and its irreversible direction. It may be brought to a halt. (Hauser 1978, 679; my translation)

> Method of the project: literary montage. I needn't say anything. Merely show. Formula: construction by assembly of facts. Construction that completely does away with theory. (Benjamin 2009, 91; my translation)

In the programmatic *Draft of XVI Cantos* (1925), the first instalment of a "poem containing history" in which Ezra Pound (1885–1972) relates to several literary predecessors by way of translation and juxtaposition, Canto II opens:

> Hang it all, Robert Browning,
> there can be but the one "Sordello."
> But Sordello, and my Sordello?
> Lo Sordels si fo di Mantovana.
> So-Shu churned in the sea.
> Seal sports in the spray-whited circles of cliff-wash,
> Sleek head, daughter of Lyr,
> eyes of Picasso
> Under black fur-hood, lithe daughter of Ocean;
> And the wave runs in the beach-groove:
> "Eleanor, ἐλέναυς and ἐλέπτολις!"
> And poor old Homer blind, blind, as a bat,
> Ear, ear for the sea-surge, murmur of old men's voices.
> (Pound 1998, 6)

Having read the first twelve lines of what is in fact a long poem, one can already realize that, while Canto II also opens as a sometimes complex tribute to literary predecessors, its poetic images behave very differently to those of Horace's metaphors or Tu Fu's parallelisms. While Pound's explicit ambition for this poem was to generate an impression of transition by metamorphoses, where more or less perceptible mutations arise among fragments and scenes with a family likeness, the montage of significant details that he offers generates more or less interruptive, kaleidoscopic, and ephemeral meaning events that overflow subjective anticipation in a way that the previous poetic tradition had not accustomed readers to. Thus, even when it comes to first and foremost clarifying the poet's intentions and possible ulterior motives, a work like Pound's Canto II requires one to supplement the consideration of what the poet wishes to say with consideration of what he means to do with language, even if the two can never be wholly separated. For it is above all by his determination to signify by making that Pound positions himself critically towards the poetry of his predecessors and the past as such.

On the face of it, one can start by noting how, in a strong authorial decision, Pound uses juxtaposition and fading to refer to numerous literary and artistic predecessors of different times and origins, from more subjective or more objective perspectives. Either juxtaposing without transitions (making meaning erupt as a shock effect from contrast) or cross-fading (projecting representation by means of subtle patterns of repetition and transformation), he shapes a series of references and allusions to key authors in the history of Western and Eastern poetry and of contemporary art, from which he was trying to forge a new kind of poetry. Pound starts, with a strong subjective perspective, by identifying his immediate literary predecessor, Robert Browning; if his rhythmic experiments and diction, the flexibility he brought to the dramatic monologue – particularly his mastery in rapid and unexpected allusions, in presentations *in medias res* and violent changes of subject – had opened up new possibilities for poetry in Victorian times, Pound also stresses the limitations of his predecessor's device, its subjectivism, which would explain his failed attempt to create a convincing portrayal of the troubadour Sordello. A new answer irrupts thus in a violent shift, objectively and imagistically presenting the decisive influences that enable Pound to correct such early poetic limitations and forge a mature poetic device: first of all, the techniques of fragmentation and juxtaposition characteristic of the dynamic image of classical Chinese poetry, and most particularly of the work of Li Po (alluded to in the reference to So-Shu), the translation of whose poetry in *Cathay* was the cornerstone of the poetic revolution wrought by Pound himself; and then contemporary art, where the "eyes of Picasso" draws attention to the protean capacity of the artist then pioneering the development of perspectivism and visual montage in the successive revolutions of analytical and synthetic Cubism. In the third vignette of this opening passage of Canto II,

in its turn, through a new change of perspective and texture, Pound signals what he considered the two vital wellsprings of lyric poetry in the West, whose musical technique he wanted to be reactivated in contemporary terms, those of archaic Greece and of the medieval Provençal troubadours, as already asserted in the play of words metamorphosing into each other: "Eleanor, ἐλέναυς and ἐλέπτολις" (giving rise by anamorphosis to the images of Eleanor of Aquitaine, daughter of the first known troubadour, Duke William, and Helen from classical mythology, as portrayed by Homer, from whom Pound had learned to create the ecstatic syncopated rhythms conveying the movement of the sea: "Éar, Éar for séa-súrge, múrmur of óld men's vóices").

Having recognized some of the basic references included by Pound, one can also recognize that, staged as they are as a montage of different perspectives and textures, as free-standing fragments capable of entering into multiple relationships, they generate meaning effects that are interruptive and not easily controllable by subjective intentionality, projecting a kind of kaleidoscopic representation. This habit of figuration, consisting of the isolation of meaningful fragments – which Pound would early on call the "Method of Luminous Detail" – and their juxtaposition on the basis of family likenesses and other criteria that do not abolish the particularity of the details entering into relation – which Pound, in direct dependence on Chinese poetics and grammatology, would call the "Ideogrammic Method" – projects an order that is neither a repetition of a fixed past nor a teleological referral of events to an ideal end, but a spatio-temporal simultaneity with epiphanic meaning events that answers to the newly felt incommensurability of reality itself.

In other words, if the unmanageable events of World War I had sanctioned the decisive crisis of teleologism – a conception built on metaphorical modes of projection, referring sensible dispersion to the unity of a final meaning – the new way of linking elements of the past and the present through the fragmentation and juxtaposition of montage came to answer two urgent demands made on historical representation, namely for more polyvalence and less intentionality, configuring a *sui generis* conception of transcendence in immanence that increasingly defines the contemporary world. From a perspective that examines the formal conditions of possibility for representation, it is above all on this level that the strong solidarity between poetic figuration and metaphysical configuration can once again be recognized: in the way the eruption of meaning generated by the paratactic form of montage is replicated in an interruptive configuration of the real.

Only a hundred years on from the first consistent artistic developments of montage, at a time when these forms of meaning and representation by montage are not only available as a poetic device, but dominate the whole of our daily lives, it may be said that their action and effect have become transcendental: that, as acquired and dominant figural habits, these forms of montage have increas-

ingly become the condition of possibility for an experience that is formed of the world, without being noticed in themselves (explaining, among other things, the contemporary cult of the event).

4 Coda: Figurations of the poetic image and metaphysical configurations of the real

> The links should be *superabundant*. […] This is what induces poets to employ figures. […] They are enriched by the similarities and contrasts they awaken: all this ultimately yields the idea of nature enchanted, subjected, as though by a spell, to the whims, the prestige, the powers of language. (Valéry 1957, 450; my translation, emphasis in original)

> The construction of a "world", taken as the totality of sensible or logical, real or ideal objects, can only take place in accordance with certain principles of composition and formation […]. "Conceiving" and "relating" show themselves to be […] correlates. (Cassirer 1998, 350; my translation)

The comparative experience of the transcendental outputs of language – of the way forms of poetic meaning explore the representation of the real and synthesize possible worlds – shows the extent to which the dominant figural habits of the verbal image determine not only how cultures conceptualize basic ideal aspects, but also how they project the characteristic metaphysical configurations whereby they answer the inevitable question of how and why the world is what it is (or, more precisely, what it is represented as being).

It is because of these differences in the dominant figural habits of poetic imagery that the three poems (Horace's ode, Tu Fu's octet, and Pound's canto, all of which seem to be more or less ambiguous tributes to strong literary predecessors) project and make us inhabit very different worlds, namely the topologies of the real characteristic of ontological dualism, correlative process, and interruptive immanence. Clearly, all three poets are strongly aware of the need to determine their own positions vis-à-vis a literary past that possesses an extraordinary inertia, and their poems are explicitly aimed and positioned in relation to the strong poet that preceded them and under whose influence they set out to find their own path (Pindar, Li Po, and Browning & Co.). But these poems do not just stage an archetypal relationship, a kind of tension between homage and resistance where the words of respect and praise, properly read, reveal what more than one critic would insist on calling the "anxiety of influence." What is striking about their twofold approach of respect and defiance is that they have no sooner described the objects of their tribute as incomparable and incommensurable than they set about figuring them by way of comparisons, correlations, and juxtapositions, staging arrangements of em-

phatic and characteristic images that project and invite us to inhabit alternative worlds. Thus, when attention turns to the actual behaviour of their poetic language, we can see the extent to which their foremost poetic figurations, which more broadly echo the habits of linguistic figuration dominant in their respective traditions – analogical metaphor in classical poetics, dynamic parallelism in Chinese poetics, and the fragmentation and juxtaposition of montage in contemporary poetics – project recognizable and differentiated metaphysical-temporal configurations. We encounter, that is to say, comparison and substitutive referral of the sensible image to the idea in Western ontology; the process of correlative unfolding or Tao in the Chinese tradition, with its vibratory parallelisms and correlations at all levels; and that conception of an epiphanic transcendence in immanence, interruption amidst simultaneity, which increasingly defines a contemporary conception of the world.

If language is not only a system of signs that can be used to communicate a shared representation of the world, but is, first and foremost, an organ of poetic synthesis that makes it possible to form a representation of the world (determining modes of perceiving, conceiving, and topologically structuring the real), then of all the myriad possible poetic forms – of all the different ways of projecting breaks and links that constitute representations of the real by accentuating and linking in language (lexicon, syntax, verbal music, contextual effects, and so on) – it is above all the dominant figurations of the verbal image that determine the ways in which different cultures conceptualize and configure their representations of the world. Starting with whatever is ideal and not tangibly experienced, such as feelings, values, time, and, ultimately, metaphysical topology.

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Andrés Claro (DPhil, Oxford) is an essayist and university professor. He teaches for the Doctorate in Philosophy (Aesthetics) programme at the Universidad de Chile. To a series of essays on poetics, theory of language, and culture – most recently the trilogy *La creación* (2014), *Imágenes de mundo* (2016), and *Tiempos sin fin* (2018) –, he has added two major books: *La Inquisición y la Cábala, un capítulo de la diferencia entre ontología y exilio* (1996, 2nd ed. 2009) and *Las Vasijas Quebradas, cuatro variaciones sobre la “tarea del traductor”* (2012).