

the cutting apart of things and me

物

我

分

離

a poem triggered by

## **Living Off Landscape**

### **: or the Unthought-of in Reason**

by Francois Jullien in translation by Pedro Rodriguez

And in translation again by Sue Cochrane

There has been criticism of Francois Jullien on the grounds that he engages in orientalist forms of ‘comparative philosophy’ – pitting “China” vs “Europe”. As I understand his work from my reading of it (& that only in English translation) his methodology is more interactive than simple comparison. In fact, his approach echoes more the diffractive intra-activity of Karen Barad. She explains it thus: “Diffraction as methodology is a matter of reading insight **through** rather than **against** ... to make evident the always-already entanglement of specific ideas in their materiality.”(my emphasis)

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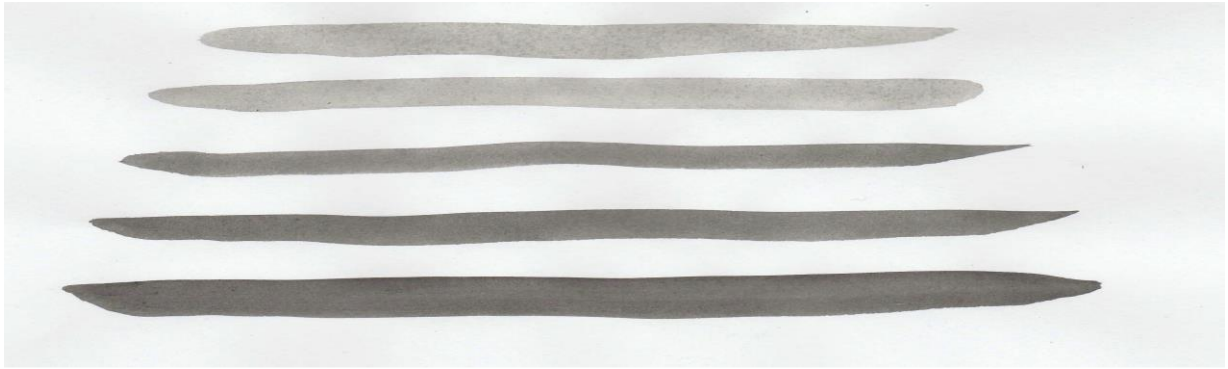
## **I Land – Landscape : Expanse, View, Cutoff**

Once there was no horizon

Our analyses lead us away from this, it is inconceivable  
where is the edge of the world if we do not draw it there?

silt obscures, settling into folds

muddying our backward glances toward a time when there was no horizon



We sold our landscape-thought, wanting to step away  
be at a remove  
mortgage our future by distorting our past.

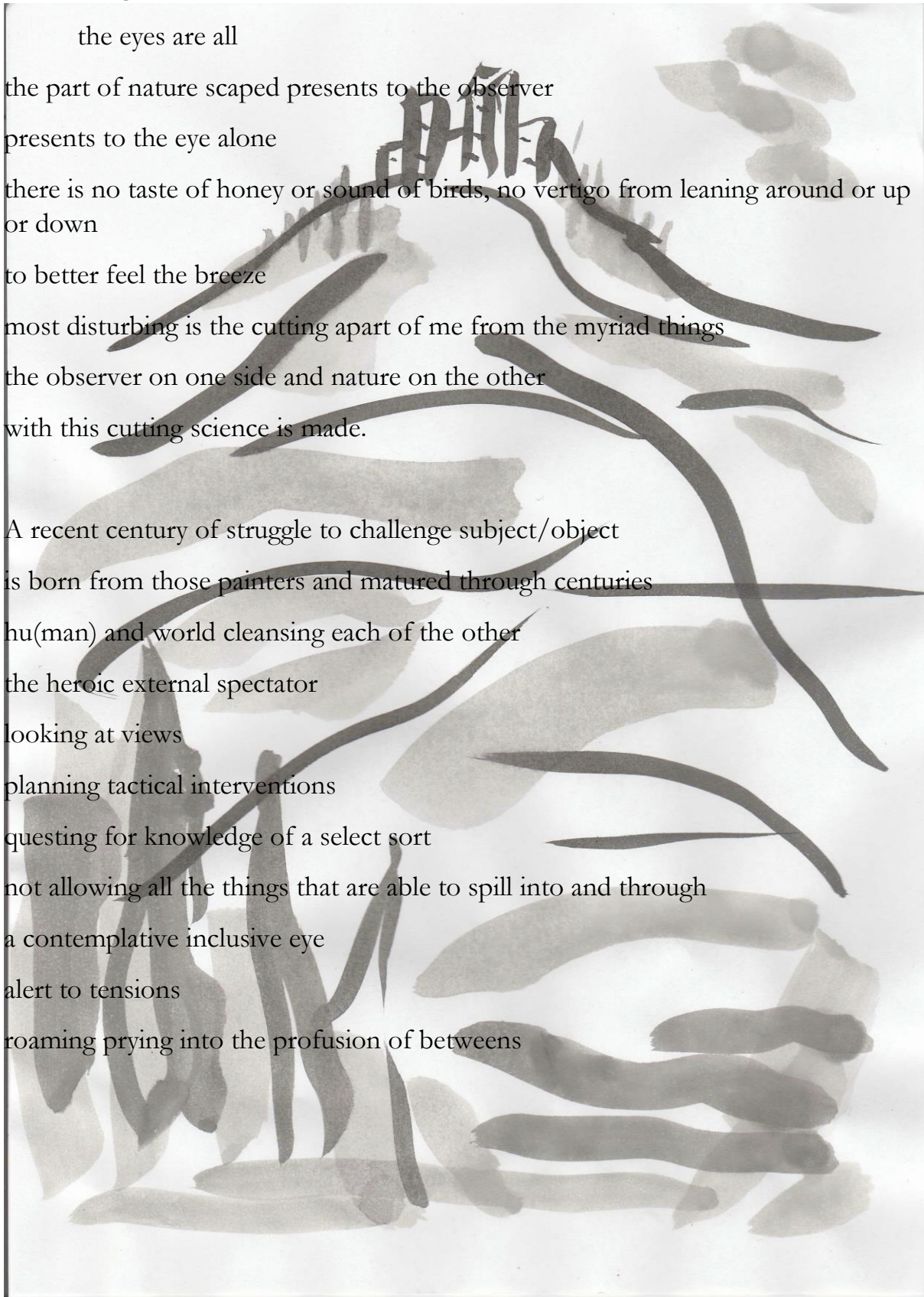
Lamplit Flemish masters in the fecund 16<sup>th</sup> painted nature to the fore  
the Italian masters echoed a landscape genre  
flipping north – south in a European way  
brushing nature from the empty corners  
placing Flemish fields and Italian mountains  
within our singular vision  
an object luring our thinking away  
tickling a pattern into being  
nudging a habit of thought away  
miring in a new future, thinkable  
but absent of belonging.

We must fashion a detour, be suspicious of the mire of habit  
we must push  
through  
thickening sucking mud  
clinging to obliquely angled boots  
glimpses of biases emerge

the landscapes show edges that locate the part within the whole  
a delimiting horizon shrouds and curtails the whole

the eyes are all  
the part of nature scaped presents to the observer  
presents to the eye alone  
there is no taste of honey or sound of birds, no vertigo from leaning around or up  
or down  
to better feel the breeze  
most disturbing is the cutting apart of me from the myriad things  
the observer on one side and nature on the other  
with this cutting science is made.

A recent century of struggle to challenge subject/object  
is born from those painters and matured through centuries  
hu(man) and world cleansing each of the other  
the heroic external spectator  
looking at views  
planning tactical interventions  
questing for knowledge of a select sort  
not allowing all the things that are able to spill into and through  
a contemplative inclusive eye  
alert to tensions  
roaming prying into the profusion of between



## II “Mountain(s)-Water(s)”

mountain(s)

water(s)

mountain(s)

water(s)

mountain(s)

water(s)

mountain(s)water(s)



formformless

verticalhorizontal

still/immobile/impassive

undulant/flowing/babbling

opaque/solid/stable

transparent/dispersive/fluid

look at the mountain

hear the flowing water

there is space to wander immerse soar slip

matrix of myriad tensions

we are inside

living

东西

对

paired

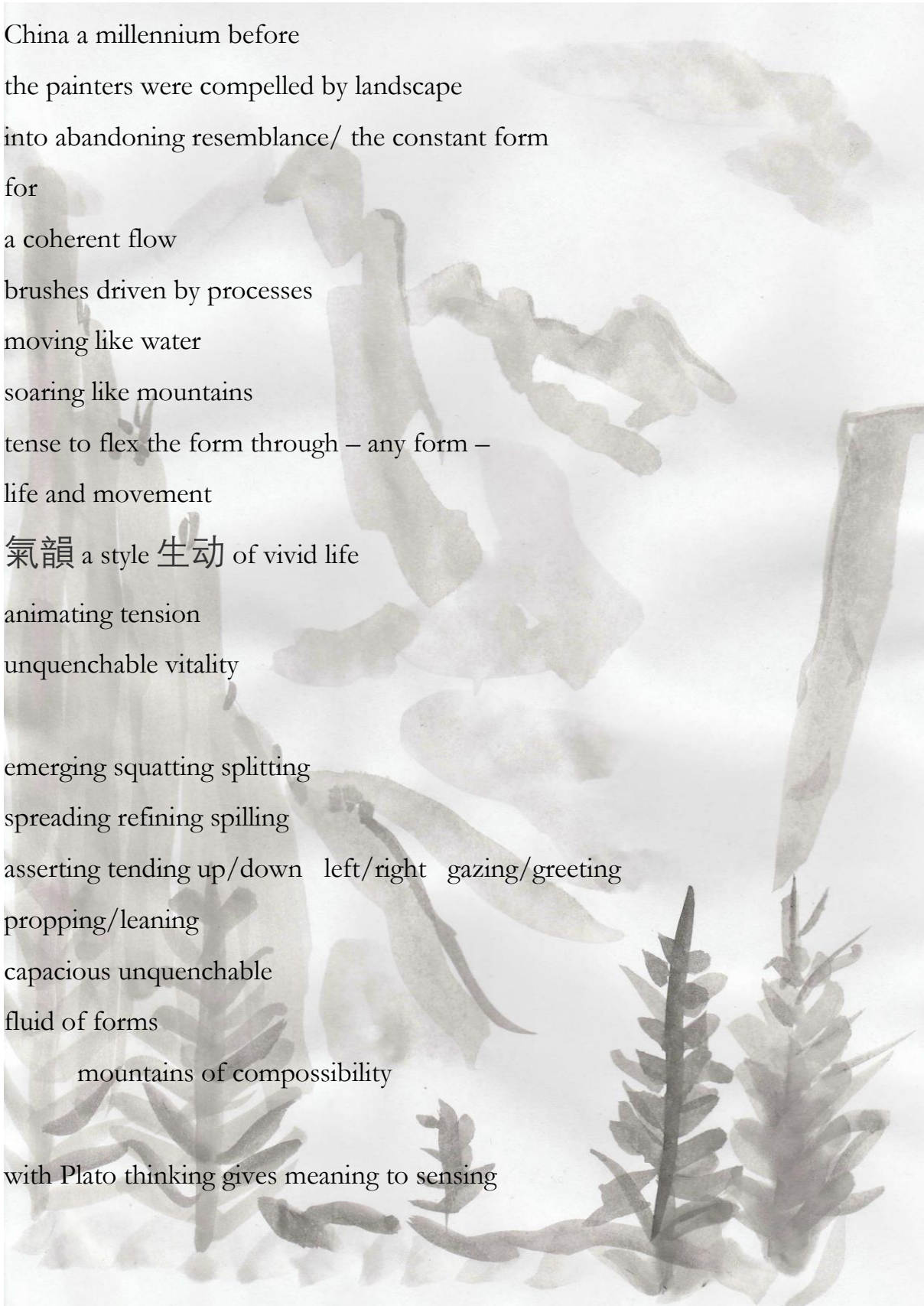
## III From a Landscape to Living

think of Europe captive to a God

squeezing depictions of land –

scaping narrow on the edges  
through windows glimpsed  
edging the secular into the canvas

China a millennium before  
the painters were compelled by landscape  
into abandoning resemblance/ the constant form  
for  
a coherent flow  
brushes driven by processes  
moving like water  
soaring like mountains  
tense to flex the form through – any form –  
life and movement  
氣韻 a style 生动 of vivid life  
animating tension  
unquenchable vitality  
emerging squatting splitting  
spreading refining spilling  
asserting tending up/down left/right gazing/greeting  
propping/leaning  
capacious unquenchable  
fluid of forms  
mountains of compossibility  
with Plato thinking gives meaning to sensing



so the sensible merely reflects  
the intelligible  
Chinese write and paint  
the opposing and responding  
tension  
in contrasting propensities  
    water too lives  
deeply swiftly with gush and swirls  
splashing smoothing bursting  
falling  
finding clefts in thrusting mountains  
misting their mass  
giving gleams to shadows  
a place for fisherpeople  
the vehicle of vitality  
bound to the anchor of the mountain  
stable rooting and fluid flow  
undoing stolid thingness

focus  
taken back to  
centred Europeans  
knowing real fixed truths  
unencumbered by movement  
and correlative tensions between mountains and waters  
embrace the heroic invention of the narrowing lines to the receding dot .  
place our seeing eyes back to the centre of action  
step outside immersion in the intra-active

turn the landscape to object and us  
supreme subjects composing  
having the measure of it  
man as the measure  
of all seen things  
making outside  
our remove  
singular  
pivoted on that single point  
not troubled by viewpoint

from below

from in front      from nearby

triangulated by three removes

the comes and goes of landscape

來 去

來往



萊 往

來 去

breathes in out

respiration

alive

Guo Xi is enough<sup>1</sup>

*Hills and crops: to feed his landed nature*

- *here he seeks always to dwell;*

*wellsprings and rocks: to whistle carefree*

- *in this he always delights;*

*fisherman and woodcutters; to withdraw in solitude*

- *to this he always tends;*

*monkeys and wild geese: to fly-cry*

- *this is the company he seeks always to keep.*

we are in our element

nourished

when retreat offers a way

to reclaim the vital

revitalise connection

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<sup>1</sup> This is (I presume) Francois Jullien's translation of part of Guo Xi's *Treatise on Landscape*

to seek absolutes of neither Truth nor Liberty  
but mountains and water  
shaping breath  
suspended in the to and fro  
joined.

without the landscape when  
embedded in the urban  
there are mountains – waters  
that one contemplates from afar  
the ink and paper evoked  
the vim of the brush.

#### **IV When the Perceptual Turns Out to be Affectual**

Standing outside viewing  
divided  
inevitably apart  
from the seen landscape  
separation  
cleaved into language.

Another way  
another language  
draws into the push and pull  
up and down  
in and out  
hard and soft

moving and standing  
the interior joining the exterior  
and this engaged polarity slips into language  
active vibrant  
alive.

Europeans too were moved by the grandeur  
the feelings drawn out, offered up by the moment  
of sunlight bathing a wooded hill  
of mist leaking from a crevasse  
of wind shivering a field of grasses  
of the roll of thunder clouds out of the west  
of light glowing through new leaves  
feelings generated from across the boundary  
of self and nature  
remained outside logic  
affects removed re-moved apart from perception  
no breach to the cleavage.

## V When "Spirit" Emanates from the Physical

What word to choose  
what phrase to use  
how to describe  
how to slide  
away  
from orthodoxy  
away  
from slippery misuses

away

from feathered dreamcatchers

colonial artefact

torn from a culture desiccated.

‘Spirit’ ...

a word burdened and distorted

a sprayed-on repellent for the heady thinkers

fearful of the messy cloying popular domains of spirit

new aged transcendence littered with purchased gods

hollowed of their origins

shaken loose of their cosmogonies

but

which word is more alive to

lively spirited shimmering

a glow within the material

emanations from within

emerging fully entwined

fully with

let landscape lead us through

through to where spirit resides within

within the substance

soaring infinite and never not physical

there is no break

no cutting apart

of the physical and the spirit

the material melts spirit into itself

and opens a way

a way

that clears-out and opens-up

dissolving Reality, the Absolute, Truth

floating free of imperatives

sucked back into their bodied beginnings

moving with

those mountains and those waters

together in tension.



## **VI Tension-Setting**

sea and headland animate each other  
the breath of day and night  
sun and rain  
winds that roar, mutter or whisper  
build a rhythm  
gully folds and shadows with bright clear-edged ridges  
condense the spirit in movement  
glimpses of clouds gathering and dispersing  
tense together  
not levelled into faux harmony  
balanced into unliving  
death the perfect balance  
breaking landscape's bond  
to liveliness  
to being nourished by being in  
with the propensity to  
    clear out  
    open up  
    soar

## **VII Singularization, Variation, Remove**

will any patch of dirt murmur 'thou' to your 'I'?  
will any view speak to you  
including you?  
which configuring tree or stream will take you in  
embrace  
dissolve  
smack the boundary aside  
make you porous to all others

will repeated beauty be enough  
at the meeting edges of lake and thunder  
mountain and plain  
sea and cliff  
grass and stream  
smooth concrete and rough hewn timbers  
which turbulent river plunging through a gorge  
will find you calm abiding  
becoming

drinking in a singular place speaks us  
into being  
    a smell  
    a sound  
    a texture  
    a glimpse from the corner of an eye  
pulls a sensible being out of our heads

vitality erupts  
from  
varied processes in tension  
this grove of trees, that folding plain melting away  
together and different  
engendering  
liveliness

being removed from boundaries unmoors thought  
widens deepens steps back and to the side  
and launches a flaring out beyond.

gardens bring joy  
they enclose and contain  
landscape opens to vagueness through  
a gradual unfolding

that moment in the Han opened to the possibility  
compossibility  
of mountains-water  
squirreled its way into the centuries  
of language and culture.  
that moment in the 16<sup>th</sup> drew a different line

a horizon a boundary a distance  
launched an object and a subject into being

## VIII Connivance

...[W]ith “land” I am knowledgeable, with a landscape I *return to a state of connivance*<sup>2</sup>....Thus there is “landscape”... when my capacity for knowledge shifts (inverts) into *connivance* and when my objectivating relation with the world changes into understanding and tacit communication.... a genuine transmutation. When land becomes landscape I am no longer indifferent to what I apprehend. What I see in the landscape beckons to me, “speaks to me” and “touches me”...there is landscape when the *place* suddenly becomes a “link”.

– Francois Jullien, 2018:107

Lying here with the vault of stars  
dark mountains edging the void  
the murmuring movement of leaves  
the munching wombat working her way through  
grasses  
which were always hers  
I am no longer  
my spirit is engaged  
my heart has been spoken to  
I am undone  
I am entrained in movement  
a hooked fish freed into waters' flow  
flows transport and enfold me  
place has captured my separateness  
swallowed it whole  
make of me  
yours

## Epilogue

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<sup>2</sup> Jullien uses ‘connivance’ here to mean the contradiction, opposite or reverse side of knowledge arguing that knowledge has become its own end by disengaging with the vital. I find this a difficult word to embrace – the only definition in English close enough to be meaningful is ‘Secretly privy or accessory to the act of another.’ I prefer ‘communion’ or ‘encountering’ – also words he (or his translator) uses

Chinese landscape-thought  
should we unravel ourselves to explore it  
burrows world-ness  
into our spaces and interspaces.

*“Conceive of transcendence that decants  
from the physical and ...remains  
physically processual.”*

This small blue dot  
requires rescue from  
our lack of intimacy with it.