DOI: 10.1111/oli.12273

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

ORBIS Litterarum WILEY

"Sound is essentially your path in"

Towards Gary Snyder's sound poetics

Yingying Deng[1] | **Joan Qionglin Tan**[2]

[1]Hunan University, Changsha, China

[2]Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, Shanghai, China

Correspondence
Yingying Deng, Hunan University, Changsha, China.
Email: shuihendyy@hotmail.com

Funding information
We are grateful to the National Social Science Foundation of China for supporting the project "Absorption, Adaptation and Acculturation of Chinese Discourse in the Process of American Ecoliterature" (No. 19BWW010) and the Social Science Foundation of Hunan Province in China for supporting a key provincial project "A Study of the Soundscape in Contemporary American Eco-literature" (No. 17ZDB004), from which this article arises.

Abstract

With the recent years' emphasis, in literature and culture, on sound studies, Gary Snyder's thoughts about sound and his creation of sound poetry become the critics' new perspective on understanding his ecological consciousness. To his mind, poetry is an art of sound, and voice is "a mirror of his own deepest self." His sound poetics is rooted in his evolutionary cognitive understanding of voice and sound, and aesthetically manifests itself in three characteristics: the emphasis on "suchness" and origination when sound is treated as an object of poetry; the presentation of immediacy and musicality when properties of sound are adapted as a component of poetic rhythm; the expression of nonduality when sound shows itself as a deconstruction of dualism. This article argues that Snyder conceptualizes his sound ethics—what may be understood as his "Way of Sound"—by affirming the sound of the wilderness in the subjectivity of natural speech and cultivating an ethical attitude of "no-self" and "inhumanism" in listening to inner whispers of the universe heard in religious meditation.

KEYWORDS

aesthetic characteristics, Gary Snyder, sound ethics, sound perception, sound poetics, sound writing

1 | INTRODUCTION

An enthusiastic member of the early San Francisco Renaissance, Gary Snyder read his poem "A Berry Feast" at an influential Six Gallery poetry reading in San Francisco on October 13, 1955. This poetry reading, along with many others, was in fact "a rejection of high modernist formalism" (Davidson, 1989, 31) and "a return to orality" (Snyder, 2000a, 327) inaugurated by Walt Whitman (1819–1892). It was, as Snyder notes, a literary attempt to build "something closer to a mass audience" (p. 327) via re-emphasizing the vital role of sound in expressing emotions and mirroring realities. Unlike other poets who voiced their discontent with Western civilization either by impassioned "spontaneous writing" or by hysterical "howl," Snyder drew inspiration from Mother Nature and the Great Subculture,[1] proposing his remedial prescription for the malaise of modern civilization in writings regarding sound and voice. In the 1990s, when Eliot Weinberger asked, "do you mainly write by ear?" Snyder answered, "[t]here is one sort of poem I write that is highly compressed and has a lot of ear in it" (p. 333). Snyder's reply demonstrates that sound and voice assume great significance in his literary production.

In "Poetry and the primitive," Snyder defines poetry as "the skilled and inspired use of the voice and language to embody rare and powerful states of mind that are in immediate origin personal to the singer, but at deep levels common to all who listen" (Snyder, 1969, 117). He asserts that poetry is an art of sound and "the vehicle of the mystery of voice" (p. 118) in the Buddhist tradition. Though employing the terms "voice" and "sound" interchangeably in his writings and interviews, Snyder characterizes the former more precisely: voice, "in everyone, is a mirror of his own deepest self" and "rises to answer an inner need" (p. 125). His preference for "voice" originates from his respect for the Goddess Vāk in Indian mythology, who holds that voice is a kind of cosmic energy that gives birth to the whole universe. Snyder's writings predominantly deal with various sounds (including inner voice) rather than merely "voice" in a mythological and religious sense; therefore, this article discusses sound in his writings in a broad sense and proposes the term "sound poetics" to summarize his literary production concerning sound and voice. Here, "sound" is broadly defined as "all elements that can invoke humans' auditory perception and imagination in poetry" (Luo, 2015, 61). These elements encompass the description and imitation of sounds in the natural and social environments, the recording and miming of human oral speech, "the pronunciation of words," "various phonetic elements implied in written signs, and the combination of musical and non-musical sounds" (p. 61).

Snyder's sound writing aims to arouse people's ecological subconscious and facilitate the deep ecologization of human thoughts, ideologies, language, and behaviors in a fluid and embodied manner. Through a close reading of his biography, interviews, and writings, this article introduces Snyder's evolutionary cognitive understanding of sound. It will expound its influences on formulating the aesthetic characteristics of Snyderian sound poetics and the establishment of his sound ethics in his writings.

2 | COGNITIVE EVOLUTION OF SNYDER'S SOUND PERCEPTION

Born in San Francisco in 1930 and raised in Washington and Oregon in the Pacific Northwest, Snyder spent his childhood in nearby fields and forests. Early in his teens, he roamed the second growth, walked the lowlands and crossed the swamp; he also hiked into "the old-growth stands of the foothill valleys of the Cascades and the Olympics," and climbed to the summits of Mt. Baker, Glacier Peak, Mt. Rainier, and the Olympics (Snyder, 2010, 125–126). In these early expeditions, what the young curious Snyder, with his immediate sensory perceptions, experienced was a living organic natural world. This childhood landscape apprehended on foot, like a map full of trails, pathways, and groves, was deeply inscribed in his mind and contributed to his understanding of self and place. As Snyder observes, "[t]he 'place' […] gave us far-seeing eyes, the streams and breezes gave us versatile tongues and whorly ears. […] The amazement gave us our kind of mind" (p. 31). He even claims that "wildness" was conveyed by "[t]he cry of a Flicker, the funny urgent chatter of a Gray Squirrel, the acorn whack on a barn roof" (p.

103). This adolescent close-to-nature lifestyle strengthened Snyder's sensibilities to sound, which resulted in his earliest initiation into perceiving natural sounds.

Snyder's intrinsic comprehension of sound begins with his academic studies of Oriental philosophy and religion, especially Chinese Daoism, Buddhism, and Indian mythology. In 1952, Snyder learned Chinese and Japanese at the graduate school of Oriental languages at the University of California, Berkeley. At that time, he studied ancient Chinese poetry and translated 24 Cold Mountain[2] (Han Shan) poems under the instruction of his Chinese teacher Shih-hsiang Ch'en (1912–1971). In 1977, Snyder recalled his translation process of Cold Mountain poems in a roundtable discussion on Chinese poetry. He recollected that when he first saw the word "pine-wind" in the poems, "I wasn't just thinking about the pine-wind in English and then the pine-wind in Chinese, but I was hearing it, hearing the wind" (as cited in Gray, 2006, 134). Snyder's synesthetic experience of pine-wind originated from his direct listening to the sound of the wind passing gently through pinewood when he was hired as a seasonal fire-watcher on the tops of Crater and Sourdough mountains in 1952 and 1953. This synesthesia was, then, intensified by his perusal of "Piping of Heaven," "Piping of Earth," and "Piping of Men" in Zhuangzi (*Chuang Tzu*) philosophy. When interviewed by a Chinese scholar Yangzi, Snyder said:

> I read *Tao Tê Ching* and found it great when I was twenty-one or twenty-two years old; later, I also read *Chuang Tzu* and some texts of *Confucius*, and gradually went through Buddhist literatures and sūtras—some of them are Indian; finally, I came to study Zen Buddhism.
>
> (Snyder, 2013, 9, our translation)

The title of Snyder's prose collection *The Great Clod: Notes and Memoirs on Nature and History in East Asia* (2016) is adapted from "The Great and Venerable Teacher" in *Zhuangzi*: "[t]he Great Clod burdens me with form, labors me with life, eases me in old age, and rests me in death. So if I think well of my life, for the same reason I must think well of my death" (Zhuangzi, 2013, 44). The idea of "the Great Clod" is explicated in "Discussion on Making All Things Equal" of *Zhuangzi*: "[t]he Great Clod belches out breath, and its name is wind" (p. 7). These quotations and adaptation suggest that Snyder perused this classical work.

In "Discussion on making all things equal," Ziqi explains what the piping of earth is to Ziyou:

> The Great Clod belches out breath, and its name is wind. So long as it doesn't come forth, nothing happens. But when it does, then ten thousand hollows begin crying wildly. [...] In the mountain forests that lash and sway, there are huge trees a hundred spans around with hollows and openings like noses, like mouths, like ears, like jugs, like cups, like mortars, like rifts, like ruts. They roar like waves, whistle like arrows, screech, gasp, cry, wail, moan, and howl, those in the lead calling out yeee!, those behind calling out yuuu! In a gentle breeze they answer faintly, but in a full gale the chorus is gigantic. And when the fierce wind has passed on, then all the hollows are empty again.
>
> (Zhuangzi, 2013, 7)

Ziyou concludes that "[b]y the piping of earth, then, you mean simply [the sound of] these hollows, and by the piping of man, [the sound of] flutes and whistles" (pp.7–8). Later, Ziqi remarks that the piping of heaven is "[b]lowing on the ten thousand things in a different way, so that each can be itself—all take what they want for themselves" (p. 8). The piping of earth, to put it specifically, refers to the sounds made by the interaction between "hollows and openings" on the earth and the wind. Pine-wind, as Snyder read in Cold Mountain poems, is the sound made by the wind passing through the pinewoods, which is a kind of the piping of earth (Tan, 2009, 93). Different hollows in nature, out of their different shapes, can sound very differently in the passing of the wind. Wind-generated, the piping of earth produces its own sounds naturally without human interference. Various as they are in sounds, there is no distinction in good or bad sounds in the piping of earth.

Snyder's translation of Cold Mountain poems is strongly influenced by his studies of the piping of earth, as well as by a direct "physical recall" in the mountains (Snyder, 2000b, 138). With a simple onomatopoeia "hum," he reproduces the low-pitched buzz as the breeze blows through the pine forest in the verse, "A hill of pines hums in the wind" (Snyder, 2009, 39). The original active sentence "微風吹幽松 (wei feng chui you song)" is translated into the noun phrase "Light wind in a hidden pine—," and the implied personal subject in the original line "近聽聲欲好 (jin ting sheng yu hao)" is artistically substituted with "sound" in "Listen close—the sound gets better" (Xiang, 2000, 62; Snyder, 2009, 43). These translations demonstrate that Snyder has understood Han Shan's spiritual realm and the implications of the piping of earth in Zhuangzi philosophy. In "The Mountain Spirit," Snyder cites Han Shan's "listen close, the sound gets better" to invite readers to listen to various sounds in the natural world, immediately after he depicts the scene of "needle-clusters shirring in the wind—" common in the Sierra Nevada mountains (Snyder, 1996, 144). In this poem, natural sounds made by pine needles are represented in a no-self way and embody existential and aesthetic values in their natural performances without the accreditation of human perception. The withdrawal of human subjects restores the sound of pine needles to a state of "suchness" or "thusness" (*tathātā*; Chinese: *zhenru*, 真如; Japanese: *shinnyo*), namely, things just as they are. The absence of human agency also expands the aesthetic subjects to all natural beings, suggesting that all natural beings can appreciate the earth's self-generated sounds at their own will. Snyder's English version and his direct quotation provide an illustration of his in-depth reading and poetic absorption of Zhuangzi's idea of the piping of earth.

In the 1950s and 1960s, American society experienced a fierce collision between old conformist cultural traditions and new multicultural traditions, when Zen Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism began to blossom and flourish among the confused American public. In this context, Snyder, in his twenties, read a lot of classic works of Mahāyāna Buddhism, such as *The Heart Sūtra*, *The Diamond Sūtra*, and *The Platform Sūtra*. In 1956, he travelled to Japan and began his 10-year-plus formal study of Zen Buddhism under the instruction of a Japanese Zen Roshi. Though mainly studying Rinzai Zen, Snyder also became familiar with the thoughts of other Buddhist schools, as he mentioned:

> I always was interested in studying all the different schools of Buddhism, and did not limit myself to strictly Zen view. I read sūtras and early history of Chan in China. And I acquainted myself with the *Mizong*, the Chinese Tibetan *mizong*. And I found myself respecting all of them [...].
>
> (Chung, 2009, 78)

Extensive reading and absorption of various Buddhist thoughts play an important role in Snyder's understanding of sound and in his writings about sound.

To Snyder, "[i]n Buddhism, though, they say the sense of hearing, the vehicle of sound, is the clearest and easiest and most appropriate vehicle for enlightenment. We proceed to learn from the sense of sound better than from any other sense, in the very specific terms of Zen enlightenment" (Martin & Snyder, 2014, 41). Amitabha Buddha in Sukhāvatī (the Western paradise of Mahāyāna) takes the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (Kuan Yin) as an active incarnation of its compassion in this *kalpa*. The name Kuan Yin, as Snyder notes, implies to "observe the sound, learn by hearing" (p. 41). Snyder's intuitive interpretation explicates the way how Kuan Yin saves human beings from suffering: after achieving enlightenment by practicing the dharma of edging her auditory faculty, Kuan Yin uses her acute auditory sense to detect sentient beings' prayers for salvation and save them from endless secular sufferings. "The voice of the Buddha arises, being called forth by the thought of the living beings" (Snyder, 1969, 125), which explains why Snyder always emphasizes that "sound is essentially your path in" (Martin & Snyder, 2014, 41). Snyder's Buddhist name 聽風 Chōfū / T'ng Feng / Listen Wind, conferred by Roshi Oda Sessō (1901–1966), is also inextricably bound up with sound and auditory faculty (as cited in Yamazato, 1987, 90). The natural phenomenon "wind" also denotes some ineffable qualities of a place, for example, the sounds of wind may indicate a specific climate in a certain time or geomorphic features of a certain place. "Listen Wind," therefore, provides a special way of knowing a place, that is, listening to where you are. According to his archived journals,

Snyder had been keen on listening to the wind in the Sierra Nevada mountains and recording these time-and-place-specific sounds since 1947. Snyder's frequent depiction of the sounds of pine needles or the cracking of fir-cones in his writings not only refines his bioregional sensibility to other nonhuman voices, but also cultivates his compassion for other beings, an essential step on the path to enlightenment.

As a graduate student in anthropology, Snyder was not only obsessed with Chinese Daoism and Zen Buddhism, but also interested in Indian religion and mythology. He went through *Upanishads*, *Vedas*, *Bhagavad-Gita*, and other classics of Indian literature in his college days (Snyder, 1980, 94). From December 1961 to May 1962, Snyder, along with his second wife, Joanne Kyger (1934–2017), Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997), and Peter Orlovsky (1933–2010), made a six-month pilgrimage to holy places in India, which was faithfully recorded in his edited travel journals *Passage through India*, first published in 1983. The recurrent quotations of Hindu scriptures and Indian mythological figures in his poetry collections *Regarding Wave* (1970) and *Mountains and Rivers without End* (1996) and prose collection *The Practice of the Wild* (1990) also confirm Snyder's extensive study of Indian religion and mythology. His thinking of voice as a kind of original cosmic energy, therefore, takes shape as part of his reading and engagement with these Indian contexts. Snyder absorbs the ideas that sound's original energy manifests itself in the physical forms of "wave" and "seed syllable," and "the chanting of seed syllables, is a way to take yourself back to fundamental sound-energy levels" (Snyder, 1995, 142). He cites his own chanting of "ōm mānī padme hūm," Avalokiteshvara's six-syllabled mantra in Sanskrit, as an example to illustrate this point. People, with their breathing rhythms, repeat these seemingly meaningless "seed syllables" again and again— "when most weary and bored"— "a new voice enters, a voice speaks through you clearer and stronger than what you know of yourself; with a sureness and melody of its own, singing out the inner song of the self, and of the planet" (Snyder, 1969, 123). In comparison to verbal energy generated within the semantic frames of rational logic, nonverbal energy contained in the unconscious voice can be more authentic in reflecting one's inner world. This may help us understand why Snyder reiterates that voice is "a manifestation of our inner being" (Snyder, 1980, 121).

Regarding the origin of poetry, Snyder suggests, "[t]he sense of the universe as fundamentally sound and song begins poetics," and "in Sanskrit poetics that the original poetry is the sound of running water and the wind in the trees" (Snyder, 1995, 142). Having personally experienced such scenes in his adolescence, Snyder is definitely not unfamiliar with such ideas. He proposes that "poetry is really song," and "[b]y 'song' we don't have to limit ourselves to the idea of lyric and melody, but should understand it as a joyous, rhythmic, outpouring voice" (Snyder, 1980, 121). Snyder's understanding of poetry's origin and its relationship to song, to some extent, accounts for the naturalness and freshness in his poetic creation, particularly his writings regarding sound and voice.

3 | AESTHETIC CHARACTERISTICS OF SNYDER'S SOUND POETICS

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word "aesthetic," originating from the Greek αἰσθητικός and the Latin *aestheticus*, is comprehended as impressions "of or relating to sense perception." "Sense" refers to the faculties of sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell, and so on. As human beings' aesthetic perception is mainly obtained through ocular and auditory organs, Snyder's sound writings inextricably bear the integrative influences of these two faculties. The aesthetic characteristics of his sound poetics can be summarized as follows: the emphasis on "suchness" and origination when sound is treated as an object of poetry; the presentation of immediacy and musicality when properties of sound are adapted as a component of poetic rhythm; the expression of nonduality when sound shows itself as a deconstruction of dualism.

3.1 | Suchness and origination

In the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition, "suchness" or "thusness" is identified with emptiness (*śūnyatā*; Chinese: *Kong*, 空; Japanese: *kū*), meaning "the lack or absence of intrinsic nature (SVABHĀVA) in any and all phenomena, the final nature of all things (DHARMATĀ), and the ultimate truth (PARAMĀRTHASATYA)" (Buswell & Lopez, 2014, 872). All phenomena, due to their lack of "an intrinsic nature characterized by interdependence and autonomy," can only arise dependently (p. 872). In this light, "suchness" or "thusness" is also synonymous with dependent origination[3] (*pratītyasamutpāda*; Chinese: *yuanqi*, 緣起). The phenomenon of sound, devoid of intrinsic nature, follows the doctrine of dependent origination, too. However, of all conditions that contribute to the arising of natural sounds, humans' auditory perception, in almost all cases, is not the pivotal one. Therefore, Snyder deliberately avoids superimposing human beings' discrimination or categorization in his depiction of sounds. Instead, he wishes to present sounds in their state of "suchness," namely, empty in self-nature and free of all conceptual elaborations, which is inherent in their physical forms. Meanwhile, Snyder suggests that sounds in his writings derive their meanings and values from their performance and interaction with others in the natural world instead of their usefulness to human beings.

In "Rainbow Body," Snyder, in his description of an authentic night-to-day soundscape, presents the universe as "a living, breathing organism" (Lavazzi, 1989, 43). When night falls, "[c]icada fill up the bamboo thickets: / a wall of twanging shadow," "Salt clouds skim the volcano [...] rumbles downwind / from the night gleam / summit [...]"; at dawn, "[t]he great drone / [i]n the throat of the hill / [t]he waves drum / [t]he wind sigh"; "to the falling call of the Akahige / we half-wake / in the east light / fresh" (Snyder, 1970, 26). In the poem, various sounds in the universe present themselves as speaking subjects, whereas the human poet retreats and acts only as a dedicated listener and recorder. Vigor and vitality in the natural world are appreciated, as readers, with their "eyes closed" (p. 27) and ears dazzled, meander along with the poet into this night-to-day soundscape. While in "dogs, sheep, cows, goats," human presence is further dissolved and natural creatures become the absolute subjects throughout the poem. Snyder records some audible natural sounds: "crackling in bushes" when dogs, sheep, cows, and goats are threading through the bushes; "chatters" or ear-pricking "small throat sounds" produced by various birds; "tinkle" of hooves "on creekbeds" and others (Snyder, 1986, 18). The poet then asks, "who fears a talk- / less landscape" (p. 18). The phrase "a talk-less landscape" in this rhetorical question indicates that Snyder aims to renew people's understanding of natural sounds, suggesting that there are many imperceptible and easily ignored sounds in a seemingly talk-less landscape. The falling of leaves "crowded with creatures," the crawling of undergrowth all night, the breathing sound of smelling "deep in the bushes," and the crouching sound "at the thorny stalks" are good cases in point (p. 18). The subtlety of the poem is also denoted in the title where Snyder artfully employs the form of direct quotation to create a scene where such natural creatures as dogs, sheep, cows, rabbits, and birds chat freely and animatedly. Unlike some initial-letter-uppercased titles implying a sense of hierarchy and human-centeredness, this all-lowercased title makes it clear that all beings are equal in Snyder's poetic world. These two sound poems are composed out of the poet's immediate experience of natural sounds. He juxtaposes diverse synchronically obtained images of natural sounds and develops them into a diachronically overlapping poetic structure in his poems; consequently, reading these poems is just like enjoying melodious natural concertos. The ambiguity or absence of subjectivities in his poetry dissolves an entrenched anthropocentric notion that whether sounds exist or not depends on humans' audiovisual perception. This ambiguity or absence also destabilizes the idea that the aesthetic value of sounds is judged by human beings' preferences. Snyder's poetry demonstrates that natural sounds can exhibit their existential value and aesthetic significance in a self-sufficient manner and their intrinsic life forces can thus be acknowledged in these exhibitions.

Apart from faithfully reproducing the natural soundscape, a direct depiction of sound images via onomatopoeia to convey his feelings and impressions of things also serves as a means for Snyder to affirm sound's "narrative agency" (Iovino & Oppermann, 2014, 8) and meaning-generating competence. By primary onomatopoeia, sound-meaning resemblances and original sound-pronunciation associations are emphasized in the imitation of

original sounds, which enhances readers' sensory perceptions and produces a vivid narrative effect. In Austin's lexicon, it refers to sound's "perlocutionary effect" (Austin, 1962, 120). The poem "The Canyon Wren" records Snyder and James and Carol Katz's experience of shooting-down at Stanislaus River in western California in 1981. The first two stanzas depict the speaker's and his friends' enjoyment of the thrill of rafting on the canyon rapids between precipitous cliffs, while a lingering song of a Canyon Wren over the roaring river is heard. Later, the rafts drift and rest on "a smooth stretch," when the Wren is singing a "delicate downward song," which Snyder onomatopoeically mimics as "ti ti ti ti tee tee tee" (Snyder, 1983, 110). The scene of the rafts suddenly running from the roaring stream to the smooth stretch is vocally reproduced in the Wren's song changing from sharp and short "ti" to soft and long "tee";[4] while the rafts' continuous bumps and occasional soaring over the rapid stream are synesthetically transformed into the white space between the two "ti ti." These sound descriptions and imitations approximate to Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's concept of "*Lautbilder*"[5] (Lévy-Bruhl, 1966, 142). Snyder has recurrently mentioned that sound is the "way in" to awareness and meditation (Hunt, 2004, 170). As the rafts slow down, the de facto invariable Wren's song changes from sharp scream to long-drawn-out sound in the speaker's ears, which inspires his meditation on the nature of water speed and water flow. The downward rapids are indeed speedy; however, when compared with the vast flow of the universe, the rapids move "with unspeakable slowness" and "for a moment, it all stand still" (Snyder, 1983, 111). The idea that mountains are solid and water is fluid remains deeply entrenched in the human mind; however, reading Dogen's "Mountains and Waters Sūtra" that "'[m]ountains flow / 'water is the palace of the dragon / 'it does not flow away" (as cited in Snyder, 1983, 111), the speaker comes to realize that just as the pace and length of the Wren's song is relative, so are the water speed and water flow. An ordinary rafting experience and the Wren's song enable Snyder to transcend his attachments to general knowledge about water and advance his understanding of the Buddhist teaching—"nonduality." At the end of the poem, the speaker, just like Han Shan, purifies his ears in the intermingled melodies of birds and streams "that are here and gone, / [h]ere and gone" (p. 111). Though Snyder never heard these melodies along the Stanislaus River again due to the construction of the New Mellones Dam (p. 112), the onomatopoeic "ti ti ti ti tee tee tee" and the accompanying enlightened meditation linger in his memory and poetry, which explains sound's profound "perlocutionary effect."

Sound—voice, manifesting itself as an energy wave—is also deemed the origin of all things in Snyder's poetic world. Snyder, with his great erudition and scholarship, first traces the origin of "voice" in the traditional Indian culture and Indo-European language. He postulates that "voice" is semantically bound to Vāk (Sanskrit: Vāc), a Vedic goddess of poetry, music and wisdom, and morphologically derives from the Latin word *vox*. In Indian mythology, Vāk is "the lover of Brahma[6] and his actual creative energy" (Snyder, 1969, 124). Brahma, "in a profound state of trance," creates Vāk in the form of a song, and Vāk hence becomes "the universe itself as energy," of which "all subenergies are born" (Snyder, 1995, 142). Then, the words "wife" and "wave" originate from the same root "wyf," meaning "vibrator," in Indo-European etymology (Snyder, 1969, 125). Therefore, Snyder writes the line "Wave wife / woman—wyfman—" in the poem "Wave" (Snyder, 1970, 3). These twofold textual researches provide cultural evidence for his idea of voice as a kind of original cosmic energy: "voice-Vāk-wife-wyf-wave-vibrator," whose interrelation is illustrated in the follow diagram Figure 1:

This diagram indicates that sound is a kind of primitive energy, which is produced by vibrations and manifests itself as wave. This understanding of sound is consistent with modern acoustics' investigations into sound waves, in which sound is defined as "a wave motion in air or other elastic media (stimulus) or as that excitation of the hearing mechanism that results in the perception of sound (sensation)" (Everest, 2001, 1). The mere difference lies in the fact that Snyder deduces his notion of sound from Indian mythology and Indo-European etymology and emphasizes the mythological dimension of sound, whereas modern acoustics defines sound by observing and describing its physical properties in an objective manner.

The conch shell, as Snyder states, "is an ancient symbol of the sense of hearing, and of the female; the vulva and the fruitful womb"; hence, "the mystery of voice becomes one with the mystery of body" (Snyder, 1969, 125). The most primordial transmission of sound energy between Brahma and Vāk is achieved through sexual intercourse.

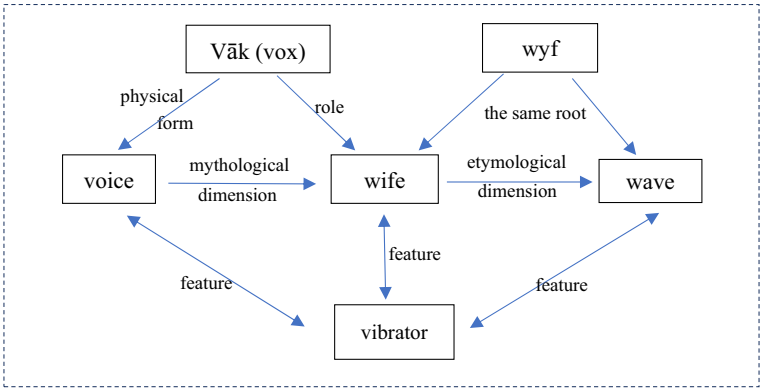

FIGURE 1 "voice-Vāk-wife-wyf-wave-vibrator" interrelation [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

The conch and wave-related images thus become the physical manifestations of sound energy, and sex is one of the channels through which sound energy is transmitted and released in Snyder's works. The sound-wave-energy-sex correlation is also evidenced by the front cover of his prose collection *Earth House Hold: Technical Notes & Queries to Fellow Dharma Revolutionaries* (1969) on which the conch is the key image. *Regarding Wave* is the poetic epitome where Snyder explicates and reinforces this correlation. In his response to Katherine McNeil's inquiry about the meaning of *Regarding Wave*, Snyder explains that "[i]f you translate the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara or Kuan Yin's name literally, it means 'Regarding the Sound Waves.' 'Kuan' means 'to regard intently,' and 'on' is 'sound waves'" (McNeil, 1983, 36, underlining in original). The opening poem "Wave" is a good case in point. At first glance, readers may find that "Wave" is an excellent piece of work in which Snyder's poetic creation skillfully internalizes the techniques of image juxtaposition commonly used in classical Chinese poetry; a closer reading reveals, however, that though these image clusters seem to be discursive in a logical sense, they also echo the title "Wave," a symbolic image of the flow, transmission, and release of sound energy throughout the universe. The image clusters in the first four lines, that is, "[g]rooving clam shell," "streakt through marble," "sweeping down ponderosa pine bark-scale," and "rip-cut tree grain" (Snyder, 1970, 3), are the traces left by the flow of energy. Though bearing no direct correlation to the image "wave," other dynamic images, such as "lava / flow," "sawtooth ranges pulsing," "veins on the back of the hand," "birdsfoot-alluvium / wash," "great dunes rolling," "—wind, shake / stiff thorns of cholla, ocotillo," and "racing zebra" (p. 3), fall into a heterogeneous category of isomorphism like "wave," a fundamental pattern in the universe. These "mutually metaphorical images" (Liu, 2001, 80) are all physical manifestations of energy waves, which mirror the endless flow and exchange of sound energy throughout the universe. For Snyder, the release and transmission of sound energy can be reduced to the sexual intercourse between man and woman. It is in the "veiled," "vibrating," and "vague" sexual wave that Vāk, through "trembling spreading radiating wyf," releases Brahma's original inner energy and converts it into various sub-energies which give birth to all beings in the universe (Snyder, 1970, 3). The word "vague," "with a pun on the French word for 'wave'," is doubly implied, depicting the vague state of man and woman in sexual intercourse while indicating that sex generates energy in a "wave-form" "pattern" (Almon, 1979, 36). At the end of the poem, Snyder acknowledges that his sex with his third wife, Masa Uehara, becomes his literary inspiration for this poem, "catch me and fling me wide / To the dancing grain of things / of my mind" (Snyder, 1970, 3).

The conch, a common dharma-vessel used in Tibetan Buddhism, represents the reverberant voice of the Dharma when Buddha preaches his teachings, as the *Vairocanābhisaṃbodhi Sūtra* records that "[f]rom today you turn the wheel of the world-saviors / And blow the unsurpassed Dharma conch, its sound all-pervading" (Giebel, 2005, 50). Readers can discern a range of conch-related Buddhist incantations in many of Snyder's poems, for he considers that incantation, composed of "seed syllable," is another channel for original sound energy to release

and transmit. "Seed syllable," also known as "Bīja," refers to "the spiritual elements stored in 'Alaya', the eighth storehouse consciousness in mind, that gives rise to various phenomena in the world" (Du & Huang, 2001, 313, our translation). "Seed syllable," an important component of the mystery of voice, often manifests itself in the forms of mantras and *dhāranīs*, and possesses generative and healing powers. "Regarding Wave" and "The Blue Sky" are typical poems in which Snyder explores the transmission of original sound energy via mantras or *dhāranīs*.

In "Regarding Wave," Snyder points out that "[t]he voice of the Dharma" has embodied itself as "a shimmering bell" that goes "through all" (Snyder, 1970, 35). This shimmering but enduring bell runs through everything that is essentially "turbulence patterns of the energy flow" (Snyder, 1980, 44) in the universe. It endows them with the power to generate and transform. Every hill, though seemingly "still," is brimming with energy flow and exchange; every tree is "alive"; all slopes "flow"; "old woods" sprout "new seedlings"; "tall grasses plumes"; "[d]ark hollows" radiate as "peaks of light"; "each leaf" is living on "[a]ll the hills" (Snyder, 1970, 35). What a fantastic and vigorous world! To the poet who is influenced by Tantric Buddhism, the energy of "the voice of the Dharma" is transmitted by Uehara as described in the verse "The Voice / is a wife / to // him still" (p. 35). "The voice of the Dharma," in fact, indicates the "seed syllables," "ōm ah hūm," at the end of the poem, which constitutes an important part of Tibetan Buddhist master Padmasambhava's Vajra Guru mantra. Such seed syllables as "ōm," "ah," and "hūm" symbolize a Buddha's pure exalted "body," "voice," and "mind" respectively. A repeated chanting of this mantra purifies the poet's mistaken attachment to forms (hills), sound (bell), and common sense (the immovability of mountains and the flux of water) and leads him to rediscover the pure and perfect luminosity of his own self-nature. Mantra-chanting restores the tradition of listening to the primordial inner voice, during which the poet achieves his enlightenment and comes to realize the "emptiness" of all phenomena, namely, various shapes and forms in the universe are, in essence, merely the exchange and transmission of sound energy.

In "The Blue Sky," Snyder quotes "The Spell of the Master of Healing" to illustrate the *dhāranīs*' healing power:

> Namo bhagavate bhaishajyagura-vaidurya-
> prabharajaya tathagata arhate samyak
> sambuddhaya tadyatha om bhaishajye
> bhaishajye bhaishajya samudgate
> svāhā
>
> (Snyder, 1996, 41)

These incantations, when sung separately, are meaningless and unintelligible, while attentive chanting can "circulatively transmit mind-produced sounds to the ear and answer the call of the mind" (Shi, 2006, 356, our translation). In this way, the practitioners' auditory faculties are sharpened and their inner attachments, desires, and delusions are extinguished; they will thus gradually follow their inner voice and return to a state of true suchness. Snyder cites Japanese poet Ono-no-Komachi's (825–900) anecdote to evidence the healing power of *dhāranīs* on human's souls:

> [W]hen Ono-no-Komachi the strange girl poet
> was seventeen, she set out looking for her father
> who had become a Buddhist Wanderer. She took ill
> on her journey, and sick in bed.
>
> (Snyder, 1996, 42)

We cannot determine for sure that Komachi suffers solely from the long and arduous journey, but it is certain that her illness is not unrelated to her eagerness to find her father. One night, she dreamed that the Medicine Master "told her she would find a hotsprings /[…]/ that would cure her; and she'd meet her father there" (p. 42). In fact, the Medicine Master's *dhāranīs* are not a panacea for curing Komachi's physical illness, but the *dhāranīs* can help her let go

of her attachment and desire to find her father and return to her own pure self-nature, symbolized by the hotsprings in the poem. When Komachi extinguishes her ignorant and conditioned mind, her true nature manifests itself; naturally her physical illness is cured without any treatment. She finally finds her father who has converted to Buddhism. These incantations quoted in Snyder's poetry explicate how primordial sound energy produces forceful "karma power" by taking the forms of mantras and *dhāranīs*, and guides sentient beings to cleanse their defiled mind and eliminate their discriminations and attachments, thereby curing their physical and spiritual illness.

3.2 | Immediacy and musicality

Primordial sound is undisputedly a linear time-dependent phenomenon and thus irreversible. Therefore, early sound writings pay special attention to "the fleeting, the transient, the event-like" phenomena, and demand the writer's "acute attention to the moment, becoming aware of the one-off" and "openness to the event" (Welsch, 1997, 157). This comprehension of sound, coupled with the influence of jazz's improvisation and contingency, enables Snyder to particularly notice and record fleeting sound phenomena in his daily life, such as oral speech, intuitive and immediate events, which become an important source for his literary creation (Snyder, 1980, 59). As Keith Lampe remarks, Snyder's "careful attention to the immediate represents rather the intensification of an attitude of mind" (p. 7) to quotidian experience. In his latest poetry volume, *This Present Moment: New Poems* (2015), Snyder's aphoristic verse can be taken as his best interpretation of the transience of time phenomenon.

> This present moment
> that lives on
> to become
> long ago
>
> (Snyder, 2015, 67)

Snyder acknowledges in his interview that, though he does not deliberately borrow jazz rhythms to compose his poems, "the rhythms and the sounds that are playing in my subconscious are jazz rhythms" (Allen, 1977, 38). Therefore, he is always "working with a very close ear to the line and paying a lot of attention to sound and rhythm and internal rhythm" and following "a kind of syllabic prosody" (Bilbro, 2011, 439–440). This article considers Snyderian poetic composition as a kind of "poetry of immediacy,"[7] which emphasizes immediacy, orality, and musicality in his poems. Snyder's poetic immediacy is reflected in the fact that some of his poems bear the imprint of sketching, whereas his poetic orality and musicality are mirrored in the process when he adopts phonological features and prosodic rhythms to reproduce immediacy. These poetic techniques, in Robert Kern's words, are a kind of "colloquial mental shorthand" (Kern, 1991, 111). Snyder's "poetry of immediacy" will be delineated in the following two examples.

The exemplary poem "Everybody Lying on Their Stomachs, Head toward the Candle, Reading, Sleeping, Drawing" (hereafter "Everybody Lying on Their Stomachs") reworks and gives shape to "the energies of its original moment of coming-into-being" (Breslin, 1984, 67) by capturing and sketching the fleeting moments of lashing winds and rain, lightning, and thunder outside the window, and flashes of human inspiration. The gerunds "Lying," "Reading," "Sleeping," and "Drawing" in the title imitate the situated acts of occurrences, which dissolves the temporal category originally connotated in verbs; consequently, the accompanying events lose their diachronic dimensions and are fixed in the immediate moment. Then, except for one full stop after the line "[w]ind-bent bamboo" (Snyder, 1970, 28), the absence of other punctuation marks throughout the poem further proves Snyder's utilization of a sketching technique in composing this poem (p. 28). The only full stop divides the poem into two parts: the transient moments both in the outer and inner worlds. The poem depicts a soundscape at the beginning, which is the poet's most intuitive auditory perception in the house.

The corrugated roof
Booms and fades night-long to
million-darted rain
squalls and
outside
lightning
Photographs in the brain
Wind-bent bamboo.

(p. 28)

In a flash of lightning and thunder outside, the poet's eyes act as a camera exposed to the moment and photograph "[w]ind-bent bamboo" into the brain (p. 28). Here, the poet deliberately places the words "outside" and "lightning" in the middle of two separate lines and leaves blank space between lines, which topographically and visually reproduces a transient scene of a jagged branch-like bolt framed by the window. At the same time, the poem suggests that the transient moment of human inspiration is just like the moment when the camera's shutter is pressed to expose. In this context, the poet comes to realize how the transient in the outer world can be transformed into the eternal in the inner world through the medium of poetic memory. The poet juxtaposes images of "lightning," "photographs in the brain," and "the plank shutter" to reiterate the analogy of the camera's exposure, through which he manages to impress upon readers that these seemingly independent fleeting moments of natural lightning and human inspiration are cognitively interconnected.

Rhythm and rhyme are flexible and variant in "Everybody Lying on Their Stomachs," except for two end-rhymes in four lines: "and" in the fourth line and "outside" in the fifth line; "bamboo" in the eighth line and "through" in the ninth line. The sudden burst of a forcefully-articulated plosive /d/ at the end of the fourth and fifth lines creates a sense of urgency and immediacy in this fleeting moment of natural lightning when the poem is read aloud. The end-rhyme of the long vowel /u:/ in the eighth and ninth lines conveys an impression of lingering, thereby producing a continuous rhythm extending from the word "bamboo" to the word "through," which also fits neatly into the semantic connotations implicit in the preposition "through." Though the full stop after the word "bamboo" may cause semantic fragmentation, this continuous rhythm manages to achieve an integration of the external and internal fleeting moments on the phonological level.

Another poem that serves to exemplify Snyderian "poetry of immediacy" is "24: IV: 40075, 3:30 PM, n. of Coaldale, Nevada, A Glimpse through a Break in the Storm of the Summit of the White Mountains," collected in *Axe Handles* (1983). The long title establishes with absolute accuracy the moment (the Neolithic dating system, 24: IV: 40075, 3:30 PM as 3:30 PM on April 24, 1975), place (north of Coaldale, Nevada), and cause (storm at the summit of the White Mountains) for recording the poet's sudden enlightenment (Snyder, 1983, 71). The juxtaposition of noun images in the first three lines and the absence of punctuation mark throughout the poem show that this poem is also composed by means of the technique of sketching. In the first line, the apostrophe "O Mother Gaia" is introduced into the poem, which is the poet's intuitive reaction after seeing the earth mother Gaia's dramatic changes in the storm. The second line, imitating the technique of image juxtaposition in ancient Chinese poetry, presents the scene of a coming storm with five short nouns separated by white space "sky cloud gate milk snow": dark clouds are gathering above the sky; suddenly the sky door opens, and torrential rain pours down from the snow-capped mountains like milk. Such a sight is as fleeting as sound, so that the poet only has time to jot down a few key words in a hurry. The quick juxtaposition of these noun images, however, produces unexpected effects. Reading this verse aloud, the repeated plosives /k/, /d/, /g/, and /t/ rhythmically reproduce a momentary scene of torrential rain breaking through the sky gate to pour out, and the full-voiced opening diphthongs /aɪ/, /aʊ/, /eɪ/, and /əʊ/ phonetically represent the poet's surprise at seeing this scene. The third line further clarifies the poet's enlightenment process with three juxtaposed images "wind-void-word": the enlightened poet seems to hear a whistling sound from the torrential rain, bringing secret words from the void. The hyphens in "wind-void-word" link these three seemingly

unrelated images together and visually produce a similar "heterogeneous isomorphic" aesthetic experience, allowing readers to feel vigor and vitality flowing in this hyphenated imagery. A simultaneous utilization of alliteration and end-rhyme in "wind-void-word" imagery adds to the sense of musical rhythm and embodies the immediacy of transient scenes. For readers who possess some Buddhist knowledge, the continuum "wind-void-word" explains the emptiness of self-nature whose existence is contingent on certain causes and conditions in the phenomenal universe. Therefore, "wind" and "word" are nothing more than contingent sonic manifestations in the void. The last line, "I bow in roadside gravel," expresses the enlightened poet's gratitude and reverence for Mother Earth Gaia. The whole poem achieves poetic orality and musicality with phonological features and prosodic rhythms while taking the immediacy of poetic contents and semantic connotations into account. This exemplifies Snyder's endeavor to explore a kind of innovative poetic structure by absorbing sound's fleeting and transient features.

3.3 | Nonduality

In discussing "nondual hearing and seeing," David Loy articulates that nondual experience in hearing is obtained in a complete dissolution of subjective listener and objective sound-producing source into the sound itself (Loy, 1988, 70–71). This nondual auditory perception is just what T. S. Eliot (1888–1965) describes in his *Four Quartets* (1971):

> […] or music heard so deeply
> That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
> While the music lasts.
>
> (Eliot, 1971, 44)

Loy and Eliot base their discussions of nonduality on human hearing and emphasize the nonduality of human auditory perception. Snyder never explicitly elaborates the relationship between sound and nonduality in his interviews and poetry. However, as a devout Zen Buddhist, he has accepted "nondual" as his fundamental guiding principle in understanding the universe. Sound writings, thus, also become a territory where he explores and attempts to construct a nondual cognitive model. Snyder cancels the justification for the existence of sound dualism in an ontological sense; meanwhile, he deconstructs sound–silence dualism—a key representation in sound dualism—from a phenomenological perspective. In this respect, the article maintains that Snyder's interpretation of nonduality in his sound writings is more comprehensive and thorough than that of Loy and Eliot.

Snyder contends that "[t]he sense of the universe as fundamentally sound and song begins poetics" (Snyder, 1995, 142). Having thoroughly reviewed Snyder's published poetry volumes, it is not difficult for us to discern that some of his poems seem to have nothing to do with sound, with the exception that they are entitled "song" or "music." However, the recurrent employment of sound-related words in his poetry is Snyder's poetic effort to re-understand, re-imagine, and reconstruct the world through the lens of sound. The German postmodern philosopher Wolfgang Welsch (born 1946) believes that vision "sets things at a distance and holds them fixed in their place. It is the objectivizing sense through and through" (Welsch, 1997, 158). Mankind, out of visual instinct, makes the distinction between self and other, and between subject and object. In Loy's words, that is "an experiencing self that is distinct from what is experienced, be it sense-object, physical action, or mental event" (Loy, 1988, 25). The self–other dualism, or the subject–object dualism, is fundamental in dualistic thinking. Welsch quotes Helmuth Plessner's claim that "[t]one penetrates, without distance"[8] to support his statement "[h]earing, […], does not keep the world at a distance, but admits it" (Welsch, 1997, 158). Hearing is "intimate, participatory, communicative" and "[s]ounds do not stop at the boundaries set by the egocentric body" (Levin, 1989, 32). Sound's penetrating power and its irresistible effect on hearing, to some extent, deconstruct the

subject–object dichotomy generated by visual perception, and lay the foundation for forming a multi-dimensional consciousness of merging the self into things. Snyder's poetry opens up the possibility of gaining such a consciousness by permitting people a different perceptual and cognitive experience of the world from an auditory aspect.

In the poem "All the Spirit Powers Went to Their Dancing Place," Snyder sketches a world picture from a sonic viewpoint:

> Floods of men
> on foot, fighting and starving, cans rusted
> by the roadside.
> Clouds swirling and spiraling up the sky,
> men fighting with scythes.
> Wild beings sweeping on cities—spirits and ghosts—
> cougar, eagle, grizzly bear, coyote, hummingbird
> intelligences
> directing destructing instructing; us all
> as through music:
>
> (Snyder, 1970, 62)

Wild beings "direct" human beings to "destruct" the shackles of self–other dualism and shake off the tangle and tumble for survival common in the human world, and "instruct" "us all" to view the world "as through music." In this sense, everything on earth is a manifestation of sounds: "songs filling the sky"; "[t]he earth lifting up and flying like millions of birds / into dawn"; "[h]ills rising and falling as music"; "long plains and deserts / as slow quiet chanting" (p. 62). This sonic cognition of the world is similar to the string theory in modern physics. The string theory postulates that the fundamental objects in the universe "are tiny strings with a length on the order of the Planck scale" (McMahon, 2009, 13). "These fundamental strings can vibrate and vibrations at different resonant frequencies (excitations of the string) give rise to particles with different properties," which is like "the way that a violin string can vibrate at different frequencies" (p. 14). Therefore, no essential distinction can be made between matter and energy in nature. Humans, birds, earth, mountains, plains, and deserts are just the cosmic string's different vibrations at different resonant frequencies. This hypothesis in the string theory is epistemologically consistent with the "emptiness of great elements (*mahābhūta*)"[9] (Buswell & Lopez, 2014, 493) in Buddhist philosophy. This Buddhist teaching advocates that "everything in the world, including human bodies, are illusory forms which are contingently composed of all four great elements (earth, water, fire, and air), in greater or lesser proportion" (Ci & Yong, 2014, 2154, our translation). These two scientific and philosophical investigations share their emphasis on emptiness, indiscrimination, and equality among all things in the universe. Snyder poetically deconstructs the ontological basis that underpins self–other antagonism, between "listening subject" and "listened object," thereby manifesting an essentially equal and nondual consciousness (p. 1275). In Snyder's poetic world, "[s]wift beings, green beings, all beings—all persons; / the two-legged beings" (Snyder, 1970, 62), as chords in a symphony, live in harmony with each other and perform their life dances freely in the dancing places of air, fire, water, and earth.

The sound–silence relationship provides another angle of view to understand Snyder's stance on nonduality. Jane Hirshfield (born 1953), a contemporary American Zen poet, wrote in her poem "Everything Has Two Endings" that "[a]s silence is not silence, but a limit of hearing" (Hirshfield, 2011, 47). Like Hirshfield, Snyder also suggests in his poetry that sound and silence do not stand in complete opposition; instead they are nondual. To him, silence within humans' auditory perception is another manifestation of natural sounds, just as "[n]ature is orderly," and what "appears to be chaotic in nature" within human's visual perception is "a more complex kind of order" (Snyder, 2010, 100). Furthermore, Snyder seems to agree with Calvin Coolidge's saying that "[t]he silences of Nature have

a discipline all their own"[10] (Fuess, 1940, 36). Anthropocentrism and the limitation of human's physiological perception are the deep-rooted causes that account for the dualistic antagonism between sound and silence in the common sense.

In an interview with John Jacoby, Snyder clearly articulates that his political position is "to be a spokesman for wild nature" (Snyder, 1980, 49), which, importantly, presupposes a recognition of wild nature's physical presence and its linguistic competence. To deconstruct the sound–silence dualism in an anthropocentric context, then, becomes Snyder's significant endeavor to refute institutionalized preconceptions that nature is a "social construction" and "part of culture" (Snyder, 2000a, 387–389), and that "nature is silent in our culture" (Manes, 1996, 15). Natural speech often adopts the forms of "silence" and "tranquility" that are easily neglected by human beings or beyond human perception, for example, "the voice of the Dharma" in the Buddhist philosophy and "the faintest notes of great music"[11] in Daoist philosophy. With this in mind, Snyder, aligning with the tenets of "sincerity" and "objectification" claimed by "Objectivist Poetics" (Duplessis, 2015, 93), reproduces natural talk-less but not soundless landscapes after human voices fade out. He thus explicitly negates human-alleged silence and destabilizes the sound–silence dualism. In "dogs, sheep, cows, goats," Snyder, following William Carlos Williams's dictum "no ideas but in things," precisely represents various imperceptible sounds of different creatures in the natural world (Williams, 1951, 233), which, to arrogant humans, is likely to be ignored and hence deemed "silent" landscape. Nevertheless, these subtle "biophonies" and "geophonies"[12] are important health indicators of the natural ecosystems and also part of the ontological evidence for nature's physical presence (Farina, 2014, 1). In this sense, we may argue that Snyder's political impulse of speaking for wild nature is actualized in his poetic subversion of human's established concept of "silence" as absence of all sounds within one's perception.

Some natural speech is well beyond humans' limited auditory perception and requires a completely different experience to capture. Snyder, inspired by Buddhist and Daoist philosophy, suggests practicing a "deliberate stillness and silence" (Snyder, 1995, 109) to enter a state of "unconditioned mind-in-the-moment" (Snyder, 2010, 76), so as to hear "the inner song of the self, and of the planet" (Snyder, 1969, 123). In the poem "The Hump-backed Flute Player" (1971), Snyder registers how he visualizes the scenes where the missionary monk Hsüan Tsang (602–664) travels from China to India for Buddhist teachings, the hump-backed Kokop'ele of Native American folklore wanders around the Great Basin while playing his soundless flute, and Black Coyote sees the whole world in Wovoka's empty hat. The composition of this poem is a reflection of his meditation practice in which he gains a deeper understanding of "the flowing interconnections of emptiness" (Hunt, 2004, 160) and enters a state of "unconditioned mind-in-the-moment." Towards the close of the poem, the enlightened poet opens himself up to the sonorous sounds of all beings in silent meditation, as the poem describes:

> The ringing in your ears
> is the cricket in the stars.
> […]
> it was whispered to me
> by the oldest of trees.
> By the Oldest of Beings
> the Oldest of Trees
> Bristlecone Pine.
> And all night long sung on
> by a young throng
> of Pinyon Pine.
>
> (Snyder, 1996, 84)

The reproduction of subtle natural speech heard in meditation is far from the true implications of speaking for wild nature, which Snyder has been committing himself to. Such reproduction, though greatly unsettling the dominant assumption that "only humans can act as speaking subjects" established since the Middle Ages and Renaissance, does not substantially give credence to natural entities' linguistic competence and still bears an anthropocentric tint (Manes, 1996, 19). As a result, Snyder further deconstructs the predominant position of human speech in his later published "Little Songs for Gaia" (1979), where humans' physical bodies are pictured as "a whole tube of air vibrating" and even as "all voice" (Snyder, 1969, 123), as the poem presents:

> As the crickets' soft autumn hum
> is to us,
> so are we to the trees
> as are they
> to the rocks and the hills.
>
> (Snyder, 1983, 51)

This kind of pantheistic sound transmission implies fluid and diffuse subjectivities, which poses a great challenge to humanist self-centered subjectivity and also reminds humans of their due place, not being the only speaking subject but being equal in nature to all other entities in the universe. This is exactly what Manes asserts: "human speech is not understood as some unique faculty, but as a subset of the speaking of the world" (Manes, 1996, 18). Ultimately, Snyder disintegrates dualistic antagonisms between sound and silence, between human beings and nonhuman beings, and explicates what it means to be an authentic spokesman for wild nature through various lenses of physical properties, religious meditation, and perceptual realities.

4 | CONCLUSION: TOWARDS GARY SNYDER'S SOUND ETHICS

With the constant invasion of mechanical noises and the increasing "silencing" of natural sounds, humans' auditory acuity to natural sounds and inner voices is gradually fading and even growing numb. Snyder's inherent sensibilities as a poet enable him to perceive "other voices than simply the social or human voice," and "like an early warning system," he "hears the trees and the air and the clouds and the watersheds beginning to groan and complain a little bit" (Snyder, 1980, 71). Meanwhile, his mythological and etymological investigations into "voice" seem to coincide with Derrida's assertion that "[t]he voice is being close to itself in the form of universality, as con-sciousness [*sic*]. The voice is consciousness" (Derrida, 2011, 68). Hence, sound and voice become Snyder's further path into understanding nature and self-nature. He formulates his own sound ethics or "Way of Sound" in his longtime wilderness practice, Zen meditation, and literary production. Snyder's sound ethics consist of two dimensions: on one hand, it invites modern people to affirm the sounds of the wilderness in the subjectivity of natural speech and integrate them into democratic discourses; on the other, it appeals to modern people to pay attention to authentic inner whispers of the universe heard in meditation.

Grounded on his perceptual reciprocity with speaking nature, Snyder's sound ethics proffers practical approaches to celebrating the subjectivity of natural speech. His representation of natural sounds is not a "Romantic use of the trope of speaking nature" (Gilcrest, 2002, 40), which renders "nature as an object in the self-constitution of the poet as speaking subject" (Murphy, 1991, 49), but a recognition of nonhuman entities as subjects of autonomy and agency with their own voices and sounds. Then, the subjectivity of natural speech is also indirectly affirmed in Snyder's exploration of the earthly nature of human language in "Tawny Grammar," where he claims that "the primary existence of language ('tongue') is in the event, the utterance. Language is […] a curl of breath, a breeze in the pines" (Snyder, 2010, 74). This assertion suggests that human speech, preceding the birth of written

language, has its real genesis in the sounds of the wilderness, thereby denying the supposed assumption that language is a unique human faculty and emphasizing the linguistic competence of the more-than-human world. However, it should be noted that Snyder's move to affirm the sounds of the wilderness goes well beyond interspecies communication towards the inclusion of speaking nonhuman entities as legitimate representatives into democratic discourses and practices (Gilcrest, 2002, 40), which is what his "new definition of democracy" and "ecological conscience" (Snyder, 1974, 106) really imply. Here, Snyder's ethical consideration becomes entwined with his political stance.

Snyder's sound ethics also involves a renewed attentiveness to inner whispers of the universe heard in meditation. This seems to be epistemologically nonsensical, inasmuch as the authenticity of inner whispers and the degree to which human beings may be said to identify and comprehend such whispers remain problematic. However, what counts is the underlying ethical orientation towards developing a new mode of perceiving oneself and the universe, and the potential ethical responsibilities we should undertake for sound and voice, an instantiation of "the Other." The otherness of sound and voice usually takes the form of human-conceived "silence," unheard inner whispers in this case. These inner whispers are elusive; nevertheless, they may be "dialogized" nonverbally when one releases "all sense of the 'I' as experiencer" (Snyder, 1995, 110) and stays "open as the myriad things experience themselves" (p. 113) during the meditation. Snyder's sound poetics introduces religious meditation as a means to surpass the limitations of humans' subjective consciousness and discern these inner whispers in the nondual universe, which in turn provides a special dialogical context for a critical examination of the self. Humankind's subjective consciousness or, rather, human-centeredness entraps man into an ontologically wrong notion that places human beings in an oppositional relation with the universe. In listening to inner whispers, the gradual removal of egocentric experiences and the increasing opening-up of oneself put human beings on an equal footing with all other things, which advances their comprehension of the essential equality, indiscrimination, and interdependence among all things in the universe. Human subjectivity is dissolved in Snyder's intricate, yet innovative sound poetics, through which the poet stands at the vanguard of aesthetic and ethical approaches to advocating and cultivating a sense of "no-self" and "inhumanism."[13] The cultivation of an attitude of "no-self" and "inhumanism," then, serves as a means for modern people to transcend the self–other dualism, a fundamental cause for today's ecological crisis. When modern people genuinely begin to follow Snyder's "Way of Sound" with a humble and appreciative attitude, they will, sooner or later, acquire a brand-new understanding of themselves and the whole universe.

ORCID

Yingying Deng https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7000-4726
Joan Qionglin Tan https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7909-3462

ENDNOTES

[1] The Great Subculture, according to Snyder, represents some heretical and esoteric schools of thought and practice that "were usually suppressed, or diluted and made harmless, in whatever society they appeared," for example, "[p]easant witchcraft in Europe, Tantrism in Bengal, Quakers in England, Tachikawa-ryū in Japan, Ch'an in China" (Snyder, 1969, 115).

[2] Han Shan is a legendary Chinese hermit-poet of the Tang Dynasty and a famous monk in Daoist and Buddhist traditions. He took his name 寒山(Han Shan) from his place of seclusion, Cold Mountain, and his dates of birth and death are unknown.

[3] Dependent origination, also called "conditioned origination," and "origination by dependence," is one of the core teachings in Mahāyāna Buddhism, indicating "the conditionality of all existence" (Buswell & Lopez, 2014, 669). This notion is normatively described in a sequence of causation involving 12 interconnected chains: ignorance, volitional actions, consciousness, name, and form, the six internal sense-bases, sensory contact, sensation, attachment, clinging, existence, birth, old age, and death (p. 669).

[4] There are two ways to understand the change of the Canyon Wren's song from sharp and short "ti" to soft and long "tee." The first explanation is that the Wren responds to the rapid streams in the canyon and makes short screams naturally, while it follows its own nature and makes soothing and crispy sounds on the smooth streams. Empirical

ecological evidence is necessary to verify this explanation further. The second explanation comes from the realization that changes do not occur in the pace and length of the Wren's song, but in the poet's auditory perception when the rafts' speed and place vary. When shooting downriver, the poet can only hear the Wren's short screams due to fast speed, whereas drifting slowly on the smooth stretch, the poet can naturally hear the Wren's long and soothing sounds. This article follows the second explanation.

[5] Lucien Lévy-Bruhl defines *Lautbilder* as a kind of "delineations or reproductions" "obtained by means of the voice" (Lévy-Bruhl, 1966, 142).

[6] Brahma is the Creator deity in the Hindu tradition and is supreme in the triad of great Hindu deities, the other two being Shiva and Vishnu.

[7] This article's definition of "poetry of immediacy" refers partially to James E. B. Breslin's definition of "poetics of immediacy" in his monograph *From Modern to Contemporary: American Poetry, 1945–1965* (1984). It emphasizes "poetic forms that could capture temporal immediacy" (Breslin, 1984, xv), the poet's immediate and unmediated quotidian experience (p. 65), and the close connection of the self to the moment (p. 71). This article contends that Snyder's "poetry of immediacy" mainly registers his unmediated quotidian experience captured in temporal immediacy and his active participation in the moment, which is explicated by his poetic content and colloquial expressions. The definition in this article focuses more on the influences of sound's fleeting characteristics on Snyder's poetic content, structure, and language.

[8] The German version of Plessner's claim is "Töne dringen ein," translated by Andrew Inkpin in Wolfgang Welsch's *Undoing Aesthetics* (Plessner, 1980, 344).

[9] The word *mahābhūta*, a Buddhist term in Sanskrit and Pāli, indicates the "great elements" or "major elementary qualities" of which "the physical world of materiality or form (RŪPA) is composed." Abhidharma holds that these elements include not only the common manifestations of "earth," "water," "fire," and "wind," but also "the fundamental qualities of the physical world that these elements represent" (Buswell & Lopez, 2014, 493).

[10] In one recent personal communication with one of the authors, Snyder cites Calvin Coolidge's saying "silences of Nature have discipline all their own" at the end of the email (personal communication, July 29, 2019).

[11] This translation is adapted from Arthur Waley's rendition: "[g]reat music has the faintest notes" (Waley, 1994, 193).

[12] "Biophonies" and "geophonies" are two acoustic terms first coined by Almo Farina in his monograph *Soundscape Ecology: Principles, Patterns, Methods and Applications*. "Biophonies" refer to "the results of animal vocalizations (song, contact and alarm calls, voices)," whereas "geophonies" indicate "the result of sonic energy produced by nonbiological natural agents such as winds, volcanoes, sea waves, running water, rain, thunderstorms, lightning, avalanches, earthquakes, and flooding" (Farina, 2014, 1).

[13] Though the term "inhumanism" is borrowed from Robinson Jeffers (1887–1962), Snyder's understanding of "inhumanism" goes beyond the original misanthropic implication and the failure to "give humanity a role in nature commensurate with people's active potential" denoted in Jeffers's poetry (as cited in Murphy, 1989, 63). Snyder's "inhumanism" does not reject the human, but acknowledges "human beings as part of nature" (as cited in Suiter, 2002, 41), thus transcending the dualism between man and nature.

REFERENCES

Allen, D. (Ed.). (1977). *On bread & poetry: A panel discussion with Gary Snyder, Lew Welch & Philip Whalen*. Bolinas, CA: Grey Fox Press.

Almon, B. (1979). *Gary Snyder*. Western Writers Series. Boise, ID: Boise State University.

Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. London, UK: Oxford University Press.

Bilbro, J. (2011). Helping people love the world: An interview with Gary Snyder. *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, *18*, 431–441.

Breslin, J. E. B. (1984). *From modern to contemporary: American poetry, 1945–1965*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Buswell, R. E., Jr., & Lopez, D. S., Jr., (Eds.). (2014). *The Princeton dictionary of Buddhism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Chung, L. (2009). *Chinese Zen and American literature*. Beijing, China: Capital Normal University Press.

Ci, Y., & Yong, B. (Eds.). (2014). *Foguang Buddhist dictionary*. Gaoxiong, China: Foguang Publishing House.

Davidson, M. (1989). *The San Francisco Renaissance: Poetics and community at mid-century*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Derrida, J. (2011). *Voice and phenomenon: Introduction to the problem of the sign in Husserl's phenomenology* (L. Lawlor, Trans.). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Du, J., & Huang, M. (Eds.). (2011). *Dictionary of Buddhism*. Shanghai, China: Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House.
Duplessis, R. B. (2015). Objectivist poetry and poetics. In W. Kalaidjian (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to modern American poetry* (pp. 89–101). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
Eliot, T. S. (1971). *Four quartets*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Books.
Everest, F. A. (2001). *The master handbook of acoustics* (4th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
Farina, A. (2014). *Soundscape ecology: Principles, patterns, methods and applications*. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer.
Fuess, C. M. (1940). *Calvin Coolidge: The man from Vermont*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown & Company.
Giebel, R. W. (Trans.). (2005). *The Vairocanābhisaṃbodhi Sūtra*. Berkeley, CA: Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai & Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research.
Gilcrest, D. (2002). *Greening the lyre: Environmental poetics and ethics*. Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press.
Gray, T. (2006). *Gary Snyder and the Pacific Rim: Creating countercultural community*. Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press.
Hirshfield, J. (2011). *Come, thief*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.
Hunt, A. (2004). *Genesis, structure, and meaning in Gary Snyder's mountains and rivers without end*. Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press.
Iovino, S., & Oppermann, S. (Eds.). (2014). *Material ecocriticism*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
Kern, R. (1991). Silence in prosody: The poem as silent form. In P. D. Murphy (Ed.), *Critical essays on Gary Snyder* (pp. 105–122). Boston, MA: G. K. Hall & Co.
Lavazzi, T. (1989). Pattern of flux: The "torsion form" in Gary Snyder's poetry. *American Poetry Review*, *18*(4), 41–47.
Levin, D. M. (1989). *The listening self: Personal growth, social change and the closure of metaphysics*. London, UK: Routledge.
Lévy-Bruhl, L. (1966). *How natives think* (L. A. Clare, Trans.). New York, NY: Washington Square Press.
Liu, S. (2001). The Chinese cultural implications in Gary Snyder's poetry. *Foreign Language Education*, *22*(4), 77–81.
Loy, D. (1988). *Nonduality: A study in comparative philosophy*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
Luo, L. (2015). Poetics of sound in African American poetry. *Foreign Literature Studies*, *37*(1), 60–70.
Manes, C. (1996). Nature and silence. In C. Glotfelty & H. Fromm (Eds.), *The ecocriticism reader: Landmarks in literary ecology* (pp. 18–22). Athens, GA: Georgia University Press.
Martin, J., & Snyder, G. (2014). *Nobody home: Writing, Buddhism and living in places*. San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press.
McMahon, D. (2009). *String theory demystified*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
McNeil, K. (1983). *Gary Snyder: A bibliography*. New York, NY: The Phoenix Bookshop.
Murphy, P. D. (1989). Beyond humanism: Mythic fantasy and inhumanist philosophy in the long poems of Robinson Jeffers and Gary Snyder. *American Studies*, *30*, 53–71.
Murphy, P. D. (1991). Prolegomenon for an ecofeminist dialogics. In D. Bauer & S. J. McKinstry (Eds.), *Feminism, Bakhtin, and the dialogic* (pp. 39–56). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
Plessner, H. (1980). Anthropologie der Sinne. In *Gesammelte Schriften* (Vol. III, pp. 317–393). Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Suhrkamp Verlag.
Shi, D. (2006). *An introduction to the pure land school*. Shijiazhuang, China: Ordnance Engineering College Publishing House.
Snyder, G. (1969). *Earth house hold: Technical notes & queries to fellow dharma revolutionaries*. New York, NY: New Directions.
Snyder, G. (1970). *Regarding wave*. New York, NY: New Directions.
Snyder, G. (1974). *Turtle island*. New York, NY: New Directions.
Snyder, G. (1980). *The real work: Interviews & talks 1964–1979* (W. S. McLean, Ed.). New York, NY: New Directions.
Snyder, G. (1983). *Axe handles*. San Francisco, CA: North Point Press.
Snyder, G. (1986). *Left out in the rain: New poems 1947–1985*. San Francisco, CA: North Point Press.
Snyder, G. (1995). *A place in space: Ethics, aesthetics and watersheds*. Washington DC: Counterpoint.
Snyder, G. (1996). *Mountains and rivers without end*. Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint.
Snyder, G. (2000a). *The Gary Snyder reader: Prose, poetry, and translations, 1952–1998*. Washington DC: Counterpoint.
Snyder, G. (2000b). Reflections on my translations of the T'ang poet Han-shan. *Mānoa*, *12*(1), 137–139.
Snyder, G. (2009). *Riprap and cold mountain poems* (50th Anniversary ed.). Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint.
Snyder, G. (2010). *The practice of the wild*. Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint.
Snyder, G. (2013). *Selected poems of Gary Snyder* (Yang, Z., Trans.). Nanjing, China: Jiangsu Literature and Arts Publishing House.
Snyder, G. (2015). *This present moment: New poems*. Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint.
Snyder, G. (2016). *The great clod: Notes and memoirs on nature and history in east Asia*. Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint.
Suiter, J. (2002). *Poets on the peaks: Gary Snyder, Philip Whalen & Jack Kerouac in the North Cascades*. Washington, DC: Counterpoint.
Tan, J. Q. (2009). *Han Shan, Chan Buddhism and Gary Snyder's ecopoetic way*. Brighton, UK: Sussex Academic Press.
Waley, A. (1994). *The way and its power: A study of the tao tê ching and its place in Chinese thought*. New York, NY: Grove Press.

Welsch, W. (1997). *Undoing aesthetics* (A. Inkpin, Trans.). London, UK: Sage Publications.
Williams, W. C. (1951). *The collected earlier poems of William Carlos Williams*. Norfolk, CT: New Directions.
Xiang, C. (Ed., Rev., & Com.). (2000). *Han Shan shi zhu (The annotations of Cold Mountain poems)*. Beijing, China: China Publishing House.
Yamazato, K. (1987). *Seeking a fulcrum: Gary Snyder and Japan (1956–1975)*. Unpublished –dissertation, University of California, Davis, CA.
Zhuangzi. (2013). *The complete works of Zhuangzi* (B. Watson, Trans). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Yingying Deng (shuihendyy@hotmail.com), born in 1990, is a Ph.D. candidate of English Language and Literature at School of Foreign Languages of Hunan University, China and a research fellow in the Center for Gary Snyder Studies. Her academic interests include Buddhist American Ecopoetics, landscape-soundscape studies and Gary Snyder studies. She has co-authored two articles: "Refuge: Polyphony of memory and multidimensionality of landscape," *Foreign Literature Studies*, *1*, 47–60 (2018) and "Revolution of unconsciousness: Gary Snyder's practice-based pantheistic reflection on deforestation," *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles*, *Notes and Reviews* (2020, forthcoming). She has also written an article entitled "Metaphorical thinking of 'Tawny Grammar': A cognitive interpretation of Gary Snyder's ecological wisdom," *English and American Literary Studies* (2020, forthcoming). Her Ph.D. dissertation focuses on Gary Snyder's poetics of nonduality.

Joan Qionglin Tan (joantan@hotmail.co.uk), born in 1966, is chair professor of English Language and Literature at School of Foreign Studies of Shanghai University of Finance and Economy, China and director of the Center for Gary Snyder Studies. She has published *Han Shan*, *Chan Buddhism and Gary Snyder's Ecopoetic Way* (2009) and about 30 articles on ecoliterature, in particular Snyder's works. She has also translated Snyder's representative works and co-edited one special issue on *Gary Snyder Studies* (2017) and one special issue on *Green Religion and American Literature* (2020).

How to cite this article: Deng Y, Tan JQ. "Sound is essentially your path in". *Orbis Litter*. 2020;75:260–278. https://doi.org/10.1111/oli.12273