

Walt Whitman, Gertrude Stein, and the Poetry of Bodily Habitat

Sarah Fantini

B.Com/BA Hons. (Syd)

Macquarie University

Department of English

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Abstract

The environmental humanities have recently experienced a 'material turn', and are increasingly considering the active role of matter in all discursive practices. Placing an emphasis on the relationship between human corporeality and textuality, this thesis applies a material ecocritical methodology to a comparative study of Walt Whitman's 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* and Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons* (1914). Attentive to the ecocritical imperative to emphasise the physical world in literary analysis, this thesis examines the ways in which Whitman and Stein integrate the human body, the text, and the material environment to assert a poetics of bodily habitat which is increasingly relevant to the literary and environmental concerns of the present day. This thesis argues that Whitman and Stein's poetic innovations propose a human self constituted through its relationships with organic and inorganic matter.

Declaration

I, Sarah Fantini, declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institute of tertiary education. Information derived from the published and unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and provided for in the list of works cited.

Signed:



Date: 9/10/2015

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Introduction

Climate change, toxicity in living bodies, pollution of oceans, air and soil are a few of the many features of environmental degradation increasingly witnessed in the twenty-first century. Given that each of these occurrences can be linked wholly or in part to human activity, the way in which we, as humans, think about ourselves and our place within the world cannot be entirely disaggregated from our environmental predicament. Ideas and texts, including studies of literature, are implicated in 'the imperilment of the biosphere' (Rigby 154), and as material ecocritic Stacy Alaimo argues, there is a 'troubling parallel' between 'the immateriality of contemporary social theory and the widespread disregard for nonhuman nature' (*Bodily* 2). The way in which we read and think about our world affects the way we behave. Ecocritic Cheryll Glotfelty points out that 'literature does not float above the material world in some aesthetic ether, but, rather, plays a part in an immensely complex global system, in which energy, matter, *and ideas* interact' (Glotfelty 'Introduction' xix, italics in original). In this thesis I aim to demonstrate that ideas are not separable from matter. Our thoughts, our language, our texts, have a real, material, and creative presence in the world. This thesis works to present new ways of reading Walt Whitman's 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* and Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons* (1914) in order to develop further connections between their texts and the material world than have previously been attempted. The two texts have been chosen for their particular radicalisms, and their attentiveness to the orientation of the human body among nonhuman forms. In this thesis, with a methodology informed by material ecocriticism, I will demonstrate how both Whitman and Stein use textual innovations to reveal a human self constituted through its relationships with organic and inorganic matter.

This thesis reflects on the poetry of two literary innovators, who wrote poetry in differing historical contexts which both experienced rapid environmental change. Whitman wrote the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* over several years during the early 1850s, jotting lines in notebooks and scraps of paper while he was working as a carpenter and living in New York. During this time,

antebellum America saw rapid population growth and increased urbanisation, with Whitman's New York experiencing sanitation crises, the continuing development of areas such as Brooklyn and Long Island from rural into urban locales, excesses of livestock and refuse in the already crowded streets, and rising death rates due to regular outbreaks of diseases such as cholera, smallpox and tuberculosis, with sanitary and medical infrastructure inadequate to support population growth (Reynolds 306-307, 331). Stein began to write *Tender Buttons* while on vacation in Spain in 1912, commencing with short observations on everyday life which were expanded and collected to form the book. Over the time she completed *Tender Buttons*, she was living in Paris at 27 Rue de Fleurus with her life partner Alice B. Toklas. At the turn of the twentieth century, Paris was 'the world capital of culture', and was 'unusually transnational' following increasing international migration patterns before the outbreak of the First World War (Spahr 116-117), a trend facilitated by rapid industrialisation and developments in technologies such as motors and machinery, which transformed transport and communication.

Although written before the advent of late-twentieth and early twenty-first century environmental movements and their publicising of the impacts human behaviour can have on environmental damage, Whitman and Stein's poetic innovations nonetheless provide a language for reorienting a consciousness of place within material environments. Whitman and Stein articulate the human self as a bodily presence, integrated into the nonhuman environment, of which it is a part. Whitman textualises the human body as co-constituted with natural forms and urban locations, Stein formulates the human body as a relational entity within domestic spaces. A study of these two poets together explores a diverse range of locales, textual strategies, and methods of engaging with the external world, which converge on a shared textuality of the bodily habitat.

Over recent decades, ecocriticism has risen from a relatively marginal position in academic discourse to a thriving interdisciplinary field. At its core is an 'awareness of environmental crisis and a desire to be part of the solution' (Glotfelty 'Preface' ix). While Kate Rigby suggests that 'ecocritics seek to restore significance to the world beyond the page' (154), their focus is largely on the

significance of the natural nonhuman world alone, and conventional ecocriticism often pays predominant attention to writers and texts with natural themes. But as Timothy Morton has argued, 'the idea of nature is getting in the way of properly ecological forms of culture, philosophy, politics, and art' (1). He suggests, 'Putting something called Nature on a pedestal and admiring it from afar ... is a paradoxical act of sadistic admiration' (5). With an awareness of the limitations of an exclusive focus on natural themes and nature-centric texts, this thesis analyses Whitman and Stein's poetry with a consciousness of the place of the human within the entire matrix of nonhuman forms: roast beef, leaves of grass, the pavement, buttons, suns and moons, a seltzer bottle, a poem. The analysis of the chosen texts therefore applies a methodology informed by the emergent field of 'material ecocriticism', as titled by its major proponents Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, which brings 'new materialist' ontologies to the ecocritical study of texts. While its critical framework is still emerging and multivalent, the central tenets of material ecocriticism can be summarised in the three following propositions: the posthumanist assumption of the interconnected materiality between human and nonhuman bodies; the belief that all matter is agentic; and the ethical implications of these entangled agencies (Marland 856).

The 'new materialisms' have emerged from a range of disciplines, such as political science, gender studies and science studies. They have been influenced by the work of such thinkers as Bruno Latour and Donna Haraway, and recent contributions including Karen Barad's *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (2007), Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010), Stacy Alaimo's *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (2010), and Diana Coole and Samantha Frost's edited collection *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (2010). New materialist critics Coole and Frost have argued that the predominant conceptualisation of matter in twenty-first century Western thinking is still indebted to Descartes, who defined matter in the seventeenth century as passive, 'uniform, and inert', and the ontological opposite of the thinking subject, the 'cogito': 'I think' (7, 8). This understanding of matter also provided a basis for the Newtonian physics of 'solid, bounded

objects that occupy space' and only move 'upon an encounter with an external force or agent' (Coole and Frost 7). This Cartesian-Newtonian understanding of matter as passive and immutable is not benign, but has far-reaching consequences within our physical reality, as the 'corollary of this calculable world ... was a sense of mastery bequeathed to the thinking subject ... [which] thereby yields a conceptual and practical domination of nature' (Coole and Frost 8). If 'human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption' are in any way responsible for the state of environmental degradation in which we find ourselves (Bennett *Vibrant* ix), the defining principles of the human subject are therefore implicated in the future of the earth's ecosystems.

In Whitman and Stein's sociocultural contexts, the Cartesian-Newtonian understanding of nature was even more pervasive than it is today. In early to mid-nineteenth Century America, before Charles Darwin published his breakthrough study of natural selection *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, scientists saw nature as following 'laws of progress' in which the universe 'developed constantly toward man' (Reynolds 233, 242). Lamarckian evolutionary theory was among these progressive views, and understood evolution to occur by the inheritance of behavioural traits, positioning man at the evolutionary apex. At the turn of the twentieth century, the natural sciences increasingly focused on empirical techniques for measuring and describing 'objective' reality, and differentiated themselves from the supposed 'subjectivity' of social sciences and humanities disciplines. Stein herself was 'inscribed in the discursive tradition of Western scientific epistemology with its attendant subject/object dichotomy' through her education in psychology at Radcliffe College and a brief time studying medicine at Johns Hopkins (Will 22). However, in differing ways late Romantic and modernist ideologies provided critiques of Enlightenment thinking during each of these respective eras. Whitman and Stein's corresponding engagement with each will be discussed further throughout this thesis.

Given recent findings in transdisciplinary fields of enquiry, the Cartesian-Newtonian separation of matter and the human subject is no longer tenable. Developments in particle physics have shown us that the underpinning operations of our universe are very different to our everyday

experience of the predictable calculable world which was reflected in Newtonian physics, and its certainties are now 'obsolete'. (Coole and Frost 12). Studies in animal behaviours such as elephant ritual mourning have demonstrated the presence of culture in nonhuman communities and provided a posthumanist conception of culture (Feder 230). Biosemiotics has provided a posthumanist understanding of language, arguing that 'life is, down to its most fundamental levels, organised by sign processes', and that 'the capacity to interpret' is 'an intrinsic property of [all] living matter' (Maran 263). Biologists are beginning to reconceive organisms 'not as discrete entities or closed systems but rather as open, complex systems with porous boundaries' (Coole and Frost 15). The human body is also understood as an open system, as 'interactions with its environment significantly shape its neurochemical functioning', where diet or environmental pollutants may have impacts on judgment, social behaviour and criminal activity (Coole and Frost 18). These developments present a very different picture of the relations between human and nonhuman to that imagined by Descartes. There are no longer clear or intrinsic differentiations between mind and body, subjects and objects, culture and nature, human and nonhuman, text and world.

In light of these discoveries, new materialism has provided new ways of thinking about human subjectivity and matter. Part of its project has been to separate the idea of agency from human subjectivity, intention or will. Twentieth century poststructuralism similarly presents a challenge to Cartesian epistemology and Humanism in its 'radical critique of individualist ontologies, especially as found in the notion of the liberal humanist subject' (Barad 410), and much new materialist thought has drawn upon the work of such thinkers as Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. However, for new materialist thinkers such as Karen Barad, poststructuralist accounts of matter remain ultimately anthropocentric, focusing on 'the discursive constitution of the subject', and attributing agency exclusively to the human (Barad 410). Many poststructuralist thinkers are seen to continue to 'honor the nature-culture binary' (Barad 146). The isolation of 'nature' from 'culture' is one of the boundary-making practices that material ecocriticism seeks to disrupt, a development to which

Donna Haraway contributed with her introduction of the term 'naturecultures' in her *When Species Meet* (2008).

The new materialist understanding of matter more closely resembles Baruch Spinoza's 'conatus': As described by new materialist thinker Jane Bennett, 'every nonhuman body shares with every human body a conative nature', a 'trending tendency to persist' – 'even a falling stone' endeavours to continue its trajectory (*Vibrant* 2). All material forms live a strange life of their own, independently of human desire, intention or will – and the human intention is itself subject to the competing and contradictory forces of other bodies. Bennett proposes that agency is 'distributive', where a subject is not 'the root cause of an effect', but there is 'always a swarm of vitalities at play' (*Vibrant* 32). In the new materialist reconceptualization of matter, all matter is agentic. Yet this does not mean that each body is its own independent agent. Agency is described by Coole and Frost in the following way:

According to the new materialisms, if everything is material inasmuch as it is composed of physicochemical processes, nothing is reducible to such processes, at least as conventionally understood. For materiality is always something more than "mere" matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable. (9)

Events and effects occur through the collaborative agency of multiple material bodies. Even the human 'self' operates only as an assemblage of organs, systems, microbial forms. This reconceptualization of matter and agency means 'the human species is being relocated within a natural environment whose material forces themselves manifest certain agentic capacities' (Coole and Frost 10). Whitman and Stein's poetry contributes to this discussion, as these poets present a picture of the human as constituted through and with the matter of the body and the environment, natural and synthetic.

While material ecocriticism presents an underpinning methodology for this thesis, its tenets are not directly applied to my textual analysis of Whitman and Stein, which engages most closely with current literary scholarship. This thesis does not argue that Whitman or Stein's poetry pioneers or directly pre-empt this twenty-first century theoretical framework. Rather, it explores the ways in

which their poems contribute a language for thinking about the connections between the human self and the material world. Material ecocriticism provides a larger critical background within which the texts of Whitman and Stein are read, and this thesis considers the proximity between the theory and the poetry, generating insights into each in order to argue that Whitman and Stein present the self as continuous with its material environment. Within their poetry the human body is a central locus for exhibiting these material interconnections, so that the self is co-extensive with a bodily habitat.

This thesis examines the connections between Whitman and Stein's poetry and the material world, and its discussion thematically centres around considerations of the human body, as an intermediary material site of interaction between text and world. This discussion of the body in the poetry of Whitman and Stein differentiates itself from the abundant examples of previous scholarly work which has considered a similar theme, the chief contributions to which proliferated around the late 1980s and 1990s and focus primarily on the implications of the body in sexual politics.¹ The majority of prior scholarly work has centred on constructions of femininity, masculinity, and queerness, and consequently, most of these studies have 'been confined to the analysis of discourses *about* the body' (Alaimo and Hekman 3), such as cultural constructions of femininity and masculinity, rather than a greater focus on the matter of the biological body and its bearing on the text. Given that Whitman and Stein were both homosexual poets, a discussion of queerness may be conspicuously absent from this analysis of the relationship between the body and the text. However, the topic of queerness has been well covered in scholarship on Whitman and Stein,² and is a line of

¹ A notable example regarding Whitman is Mark Maslan's *Whitman Possessed: Poetry, Sexuality, and Popular Authority* (2001) which discussed Whitman's homosexual eroticism in relation to poetic authority. Also see Michael Moon's *Disseminating Whitman: Revision and Corporeality in Leaves of Grass* (1991), and M. Jimmie Killingsworth's *Whitman's Poetry of the Body: Sexuality, Politics, and the Text* (1989). In discussions on Stein, Lisa Ruddick provides a notable contribution to studies of the body with her *Reading Gertrude Stein: Body, Text, Gnosis* (1991), which reads *Tender Buttons* as a unique example of feminist Gnosticism. Also see Ruddick's essay 'A Rosy Charm: Gertrude Stein and the Repressed Feminine' (1986), Catherine Stimpson's 'The Somagrams of Gertrude Stein' (1985), and Elizabeth Fifer's 'Is Flesh Advisable?: The Interior Theatre of Gertrude Stein' (1979).

² For example, Catherine Davies traces a lineage of the homosexual epic from Whitman to twentieth century American poets in her *Whitman's Queer Children: America's Homosexual Epics* (2012). Also see Maslan (2001).

enquiry outside the parameters of this thesis. This study engages scholarly discourses on both 'the body' in the poetry of Whitman and Stein and recent ecocritical work on each of the two poets, where available. This hybrid approach reflects an interdisciplinary method which draws insights from the intersection between literary studies of the body and the transdisciplinary study of ecocriticism.

As material ecocriticism is still an evolving critical field, there have been very few studies undertaken on literary texts which intersect with its theoretical framework, a gap in the field this thesis seeks to fill. No work has yet been carried out on Stein, while only Jane Bennett has been the first to pioneer such attempts in the study of Whitman. Her essay 'The Solar Judgment of Walt Whitman' (2010) explores Whitman's textual strategies such as listing, and use of 'the middle voice', as demonstrating 'distributive' agency across multiple human and nonhuman bodies. She argues that with these techniques, Whitman's poetic self 'apprehends its outside' to 'detect the voices of peoples, pavements, and leaves of grass, and then to note how some of these voices have been literally, physically incorporated into one's own body' ('Solar' 138). Bennett's 'Of Material Sympathies, Paracelsus, and Whitman' (2014) presents Whitman's sympathy with his environment as a physical stance of 'leaning toward' the vitality of other bodies ('Sympathies' 244).

Bennett's work is the first of its kind, and demonstrates how Whitman's modes of embodiment register interconnected vitalities in human and nonhuman forms. This thesis is intended to use Bennett as a foundational framework from which to further examine Whitman, by analysing a greater range of examples from Whitman's poetry and engaging more broadly with Whitman criticism, and to use these original findings to attempt the first instance of a material ecocritical or new materialist approach to Stein. Australian poet and critic Astrid Lorange draws a connection between Stein and new materialism by discussing Karen Barad's 'posthumanist performativity' in her *How Reading is Written: A Brief Index to Gertrude Stein* (2014), claiming that 'the objects in Stein's poems argue for the dynamism of matter' (149). However, she does not follow the implications of this dynamism to its ecological outcomes, as I intend to do.

Regarding Stein, see Elisabeth A. Frost *The Feminist Avant-Garde in American Poetry* (2005). Astrid Lorange also includes a chapter on 'Queering' in her *How Reading is Written: A Brief Index to Gertrude Stein* (2014).

While the work of Bennett is the first to be undertaken on Whitman directly informed by new materialism, Whitman has been a focus of ecological enquiry for some time. Ecocritical studies of Whitman are fewer than those on his contemporaries, particularly Thoreau and Emerson (Killingsworth 'Nature' unpag.), but several studies have appeared within the last decade. M. Jimmie Killingsworth has provided numerous contributions to this discussion. Of these, the most relevant is his monograph *Walt Whitman and the Earth: A Study in Ecopoetics* (2005), which examines how Whitman's changing approaches to nature throughout his career forms 'a powerful record of life in an aging body, in a war-torn nation, and in an increasingly troubled landscape', connecting the insights gained from this record to a contemporary context (*Earth* 10). Angus Fletcher also provides a notable contribution with his *New Theory for American Poetry* (2004). His book examines the presence of the environment in Whitman's poetry not as subject-matter but as constitutive of form, claiming that Whitman's phrasing simulates the experience of being within an environment (9). Recent essays, such as Maria Farland's 'Decomposing City: Walt Whitman's New York and the Science of Life and Death' (2007) and Paul Outka's '(De)Composing Whitman' (2005), have also relevantly explored Whitman from an ecocritical perspective and pay particular attention to the body's relationship to its material environment.

Stein's work has rarely been studied in relation to ecology, and is an example of the general trend in ecocriticism to pay little attention to modernism, which Anne Raine understands as the result of the tendencies of some versions of modernism to define themselves in opposition to nature ('Ecocriticism' 99). Stein's subject matter rarely focuses on nature, and *Tender Buttons*, situated within a domestic space in Paris, is particularly devoid of any reference to what is conventionally identified as the natural world. However, its preoccupation with the object-world and the relation of the human self to its material environment makes this a profoundly ecological text.

Stein herself recognised the inescapable presence of the natural world in human existence, having made the comment, 'anybody is as their land and air is ... It is that which makes them and the arts they make and the work they do and the way they eat and the way they drink and the way they

learn and everything' (*Narration* 46). And Bonnie Marranca further observes that 'the world of Stein's words is biocentric, encompassing with equanimity the lives of all species in a continuous present of boundless space and time' (xiv). While Stein, and particularly *Tender Buttons*, is not a typical subject for ecocriticism, her work contributes to an expansion of ecocriticism from a focus on nature to include the entirety of the nonhuman physical world, and displays the integration of the human body within a modern, urban environment. *Tender Buttons* is divided into three sections, 'OBJECTS', 'FOOD' and 'ROOMS'. While this thesis considers the book in its entirety, it focuses primarily on the first two sections, 'OBJECTS' and 'FOOD'. Rooms may seem a fitting subject for a study of 'habitat', however the focus here is Stein's practice of object-portraiture, and the ways in which bodies create place, rather than the space which surrounds them.

Anne Raine has pioneered ecocritical studies of Stein with her essay 'Science, Nature Work and the Kinaesthetic Body in Cather and Stein' (2008). Here Raine argues for a link between Stein's writing and the philosophy of the 'new kinaesthetic', by which 'natural landscapes were thought to have particular visual and aural rhythms that shaped the characters and cultural forms of their human inhabitants' ('Science' 805). According to this view, Stein's practice of portraiture is able to 'participate' in 'the rhythms of the natural world' ('Science' 815). Additionally, while not an ecocritical study, in his *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (2008), Peter Nicholls supplies indirect contributions to many ecocritical themes. He has pointedly identified that Stein's innovations in modernism discover 'a form of writing that reveals continuities between self and world', and suggests that the pleasure Stein takes 'in the artistic medium is the result of felt connection with a world rather than of mastery over it' (198,203).

In addition to providing a new argument for the entanglement of Whitman and Stein's poetry within bodily habitats, this thesis also provides one of the first formal comparative studies of these two poets. Whitman and Stein have rarely been studied together. Aside from passing comparisons, the only two full-length articles which examine them both exclusively are G. Thomas Couser's essay 'Of Time and Identity: Walt Whitman and Gertrude Stein as Autobiographers' (1976), and more

recently, Matt Miller's 'Makings of Americans: Whitman and Stein's Poetics of Inclusion' (2009). Miller attributes the paucity of prior study considering both Whitman and Stein to the tendency to view Stein as 'an oppositional figure', isolating her from literary tradition to 'preserve' for her 'an idealized autonomy from her peers and antecedents' (39). This isolation has implications for prescribing the ways in which Stein's work is read. As Deborah M. Mix argues, 'Read as either hermetic or altogether nonsensical, Stein and her work are set aside as tangential or even irrelevant to literary history' (5). Miller claims it is 'remarkable' that Whitman and Stein haven't been studied together more frequently, given Stein's numerous and largely favourable remarks made of Whitman in her lectures and comments (39). There is a productive value in exploring Stein's writing alongside Whitman's in the interests of enriching the ways in which we might read the work of each of the two poets. Their markedly different styles and the distance between their contextual backgrounds provide a diverse language for articulating the interactions between the human body, the text and the material world.

Whitman and Stein may seem like an unlikely pair. While they each lived in very different times and places, they also showed very different poetic instincts and concerns, for example, Whitman favouring long exuberant lines where Stein produces a playful vocabulary. However, they share a number of productive similarities. Couser opens his essay with a summary of key connections between the two poets in art and in life, the comparisons that will most greatly inform my thesis being the following: 'Both were aesthetic innovators, concerned with expressing the relationship between the subjective self and the objective world, and both experimented with language in order to express their new vision' (787). This thesis draws on Whitman and Stein's similarities as poetic innovators to explore the way their texts convey the relationship between the human self and the material world.

In Chapter 1, I will begin the discussion of Whitman and Stein's poetry of bodily habitat by exploring how they challenge the ontological distinction between subjects and objects through emphasising a lateral relationship between words and things. This is accomplished through the use

of non-representational techniques which highlight the materiality of language and engage directly with the object world, resisting the representational opposition between word and thing. In the case of Whitman, this occurs through the use of innovations in metonymy and free-verse form which evince a literal contiguity between the text, the human body, and the environment. In the case of Stein, this occurs through the elevation of the material status of the signifier through sonic, semantic and visual play, where words are treated as objects with both meaning and tangible substance. Both poets produce a horizontal relationship between word and thing, in contrast with the hierarchical relationship which occurs in representation. Through these lateral connections, they challenge the distinction between the materiality of the physical world and the immateriality of meaning, demonstrating instead that matter is meaningful and dynamic.

Chapter 2 investigates the ways Whitman and Stein demonstrate the interconnected nature of the human body, as it is constituted through material exchanges across its surfaces. This is illustrated in tracing the movement of food into and out of the body through digestion, and the invasive transformations of disease, perception and inspiration. Informed by the differing ways in which Whitman and Stein understood consciousness to be embodied, the movement of substances into and out of the body is also here recognised as constitutive of thought. Whitman and Stein show that mind is integrated with the bodily habitat, as consciousness is formed through physical sensory and emotive responses to the environment. This is conveyed most clearly in erotic themes which are developed through encounters with external objects. Whitman erotically engages with the natural world in order to be penetrated by it and receive it as poetic inspiration. Stein's erotic themes are developed through her exploration of the limits of the conscious body as it encounters the 'Objects' amongst which it is situated, 'Food' which passes into and out of it, and the 'Rooms' it occupies. For both poets, the text is implicated within the perpetual interchanges between the body and the world. The text responds to stimulation from outside the body, is generated within the mind, and is re-externalised on the page as a bodily production.

Chapter 3 considers the ways in which Whitman and Stein's texts have a direct access to matter through encounters with the bodies of readers. These are direct material engagements which affect the reader's stance, emotive state, behaviour, and sensory response to the text through the visual, oral and aural apparatuses of the body. The text's ability to directly engage with the material world through the matter of the reader's body defies the possibility of a fundamental distinction between text and world, and demonstrates how culture is able to intervene into nature in powerful and arresting ways. For both poets, these encounters are facilitated in an egalitarian spirit, by which the poetry is designed to engender a response from all readers, and not a select few. Couser points out that 'both were committed to egalitarian principles in life' (787). Their texts display this same egalitarianism, and demonstrate a willingness to share their insights. Whitman and Stein's innovative textual strategies not only awaken readers to the nature of their own selves as co-constituted with their environment, but also demonstrate the presence of the text within human material ecologies, as it forms part of the bodily habitat.

In these three ways, through challenging the bifurcation of the world into the post-Cartesian oppositional primaries of word and thing, mind and body, and culture and nature, Whitman and Stein present a comprehension of the human self as thoroughly imbricated with its material environment. As such, their poetry informs and is informed by a new materialist ontology as it engages with the material world in ways which deny an essential segregation of matter from the thinking subject.

Chapter 1: Material Language, Material World

Developments in quantum physics have presented us with a very different picture of the material world to the predictable realities we encounter every day. Karen Barad demonstrates that at the particle level, the observable properties of phenomena are altered by the observing apparatus, and as such, 'quantum theory exposes an essential failure of representationalism' (106, 124). The belief that the world can be accurately represented, for example in data, image, or text is no longer tenable. Like quantum theorists, but in vastly different ways, poets have long acknowledged the failure of representation, and Whitman and Stein are among them. As Whitman claims in the 1856 poem 'Poem of the Sayers of the Words of the Earth' (finally titled 'A Song of the Rolling Earth'), 'The best of the earth cannot be told anyhow' (1856 330). And Stein suggests the futility of attempts at representation in her lecture 'Poetry and Grammar': 'why after a thing is named write about it. A name is adequate or it is not. If it is adequate then why go on calling it, if it is not then calling it by its name does no good' (*Lectures* 210).

It is a truth inherent in language that representations will always fail to bring the reader in touch with the things they represent. Systems theorist Hannes Bergthaller claims that a system, including language, 'can refer to its environment only by *simultaneously* referring to itself' (Bergthaller 43). Killingsworth similarly observes, 'when we use language to describe the impressions we receive from the environment, we inevitably begin to talk about something other than the things that present themselves to us' (*Earth* 43). This can in part explain the proliferation of critical approaches to 'nature' in literature, as outlined by Lawrence Buell, which seek to understand nature as 'an image, a symbol, a projection, a vestige' (86), everything other than the materiality of the physical environment itself. Representations follow Cartesian-Newtonian principles, which hold matter at a distance, as something 'out there' which language would seek to observe, define, and replicate. For both Whitman and Stein, the desire to engage their poetic language directly with the material world they encounter leads them away from efforts to represent and toward strategies that

foreground the material properties of language – so that the text does not abstract from, but enhances, a direct bodily engagement with matter.

In his first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman draws on many features of Romantic poetic traditions. These included formal experimentation, the establishment of an ‘unmediated connection with nature’, resistance to religious institutions, and a critique of the Enlightenment thinking which alienated the human self from nature (Fraser Hodder 593). Yet in many ways he departed from Romanticism. In particular, he introduced a greater egalitarian physicality to this ideology, resisting what he perceived as the overly decorative and elitist qualities of the British Romantic poets and the Emersonian Transcendentalist conception of nature as a “symbol” of spirit’ (French 76; Fraser Hodder 593). It has been observed by many readers that Whitman’s poetry corporealises the spiritualistic and disembodied ideals of Romanticism and Transcendentalism (Meehan 98-99). Through his embodied poetry, Whitman participates in the Romantic critique of post-Enlightenment thought, while producing an ecological model of human physicality which re-materialises the self, and breaks apart the oppositions by which subjects and objects are deemed to be ontologically separate.

In Whitman’s ‘Song of Myself’, the distinction between the observing subject and the observed object is challenged by the identification of Whitman’s self-dramatised speaker with nonhuman bodily forms.³ Throughout the poem, the speaker’s body is characterised as a fusion of human, animal, vegetable and mineral forms. Whitman declares, ‘I find I incorporate gneiss and coal and long-threaded moss and fruits and grains and esculent roots, / And am stucco’d with quadrupeds and birds all over’ (1855 34). Observing this bodily fusion, Maria Farland argues that in Whitman’s poetry, ‘however different in scale and shape, the body of the earth and the body of the poet assume an equivalent morphology in a metaphors of radical corporeal identity between human and natural forms’ (817). However this ‘radical corporeal identity’ is not just a metaphor, it reflects an actual rather than figurative connection. As Paul Outka suggests,

³ Malcolm Cowley introduces the idea of the speaker of the 1855 ‘Song of Myself’ as an idealised dramatization of Whitman’s self (viii).

Whitman insists that our perception of outer natural beauty is a perception of the same thing inside us ... Whitman understands this "something inside" not as an immaterial essence, but as material: "blood" and "brains," real objects made of the same stuff as the animals and geographic features. (50)

The speaker's bodily identity with nonhuman forms is further exemplified in the following passage of 'Song of Myself':

If I worship any particular thing it shall be some of the spread of my body;
Translucent mould of me it shall be you,
Shaded ledges and rests, firm masculine coulters, it shall be you,
Whatever goes to the tilth of me it shall be you,
You my rich blood, your milky stream pale strippings of my life;
Breast that presses against other breasts it shall be you.
My brain it shall be your occult convolutions,
Root of washed sweet-flag, timorous pond-snipe, nest of guarded duplicate eggs, it
shall be you,
Mixed tussled hay of head and beard and brawn it shall be you,
Trickling sap of maple, fibre of manly wheat, it shall be you;
Sun so generous it shall be you,
Vapors lighting and shading my face it shall be you,
You sweaty brooks and dews it shall be you,
Winds whose soft-tickling genitals rub against me it shall be you,
Broad muscular fields, branches of liveoak, loving lounge in my winding paths, it
shall be you. (1855 30)

The passage begins with a description of the self, which appears at first to draw upon metaphors of the natural landscape as a self-description, with 'You my rich blood, your milky stream pale strippings of my life'. But if this is understood as an example of metaphor, by 'Winds whose soft-tickling genitals rub against me it shall be you', it is unclear which is the tenor and which is the vehicle: the human body, or nature. The human body is here conflated with environmental imagery so that body and environment merge, leaving no distinct outline where the human body starts and ends, whether 'sweaty brooks and dews' or 'broad muscular fields' are features of the natural landscape or of the poet's body. This conflation indicates a material equality between the body and its nonhuman environment. The hierarchical relationship which imagines the human subject as a differentiated observer of the nonhuman object is breached by recognising an actual presence of the nonhuman within the human body. As one of many examples of Whitman's cataloguing technique, this passage lists disembodied parts in a blason of the poet's own human-nature body: blood, breast,

brain, pond-snipe, eggs, vapors, hands, face. The epistrophe of 'it shall be you' includes all objects in a horizontal connection to 'some of the spread' of this body. These lines merge human and nonhuman by privileging their interconnections and mutual constitution.

While at first glance the passage above appears to rely on metaphor, and use of figurative language, it in fact bears more in common with what Sean Ross Meehan describes as the 'contiguity and sequence' reflected in metonymy, as opposed to the 'context-free symbolism of similarity and simultaneity' that is characteristic of metaphor (102). Whitman's recognition of the material contiguity between the human and the earth can be understood as a reconceptualization of Emerson's disembodied poetics of connection with the material world. As he claimed in his lecture 'The Poet' which Whitman attended in 1842: 'All things are symbols ... We say of man that he is grass, that he is a stream, a house' ('Lecture' 86-87). Ed Folsom claims that while Emerson emphasises a metaphorical relationship between a man and grass, Whitman recognises a metonymical one, 'witnessing instead the literal ways that a man is transformed through natural cycles' ('Transcend.' 5). In 'Song of Myself' Whitman observes that the grass is 'the beautiful uncut hair of graves' and, 'The smallest sprout shows there is really no death' (1855 16,17), following the processes by which human corpses feed the grass. As Folsom points out, Whitman 'generates an ecological set of connections that renders as metonym what we previously thought of as metaphor: We are not like these things in nature; we are these things, given time and space enough' ('Transcend.' 5). Whitman therefore takes Emerson's disembodied 'symbolism of similarity and simultaneity' characteristic of metaphor, and casts it as an embodied physiological contiguity through metonymy (102).

Metonymy is used as a literary technique, but it also characterises Whitman's poetics, whereby 'metonymy means poetry and physiology are convertible terms' as the text is a substitute for the author's body, yet is a material product of that body (Meehan 101-102). Whitman's poetic form shares a metonymic contiguity with natural forms. As Whitman argues himself in his 1855

Preface, the matter of poetic form is proximal to the non-textual matter of natural bodies, pointing out a material equation between word and thing:

The profit of rhyme is that it drops seeds of a sweeter and more luxuriant rhyme, and of uniformity that it conveys itself into its own roots in the ground out of sight. The rhyme and uniformity of perfect poems show the free growth of metrical laws and bud from them as unerringly and loosely as lilacs or roses on a bush, and take shapes as compact as the shapes of chestnuts and oranges and melons and pears, and shed the perfume impalpable to form. The fluency and ornaments of the finest poems or music or orations or recitations are not independent but dependent. All beauty comes from beautiful blood and a beautiful brain. (1855 v)

This passage connects the material properties of poetry, its form, in its 'rhyme' and 'metrical laws' in 'uniformity' with the natural forms of 'lilacs', 'roses', 'chestnuts' and 'oranges'. The final phrase, 'All beauty comes from beautiful blood and a beautiful brain', stresses that poetry is 'dependent' on matter, and arises from the body of the poet. Poetry both depends on matter for its creation, and in its form takes shape amongst other bodies. Whitman's recognition of his poetry as an intervention of new forms into nature parallels the claim made by Emerson in his essay 'The Poet', that a poem is made of 'a thought so passionate and alive that like the spirit of a plant or an animal it has an architecture of its own, and adorns nature with a new thing' (*Essay 3*). While Emerson himself may not have meant this literally, Whitman's passage quoted above depicts the poem as a material adornment of nature rather than a metaphorical one, and includes poetry within a material ecology.

Whitman's new adornment occurs in the form of free-verse, the poetic form closest to common speech and the 'free growth' of 'lilacs or roses on a bush'. In contrast to the formality and figurative ornament that Whitman opposed in traditional British Romantic poetry (French 76), Whitman's long, flowing and irregular lines are designed to exhibit a greater sympathy with the material world and human reality. Drawing from Angus Fletcher's characterisation of Whitman's phrasing as analogous with wave motions, Killingsworth suggests, 'The prominent figure of anaphora, for example, in which the beginning of a line is repeated and the end altered ... suggests the landing of waves on the shore' ('Nature' unpag.). Fletcher likens Whitman's phrases to 'linguistic particles', while 'his main larger effect is to create waves of expression and meaning' (Fletcher 144).

This 'wave-particle' understanding of Whitman's verse structure is not merely an oceanic metaphor, but identifies a correspondence between the motions, matter, patterns and forces that underlie quantum mechanics and the very structure of the universe. The speaker proclaims his own status as 'integral with' the sea: 'I too am of one phase and of all phases' (1855 27). As twentieth century quantum physics has demonstrated, 'wave-particle duality' is a feature of 'both light and matter' (Barad 100). Whitman's 'undulant form' is responsive to, and participates with, the 'motions of liquids, sounds, and light' (Fletcher 147), and the accumulation of bits and fragments into observable known forms.

Whitman's free-verse form is not analogous with the sea but is 'integral with' it. The poem's 'wave-particle' structure follows the same behaviour of the sea and all matter, as it takes shape in its own material form. Jane Bennett argues that 'the sound and sense of free verse' was for Whitman the means by which 'nonhuman vitalities that, despite their independence from human subjectivity, might be cajoled into assemblages with human endeavours' ('Sympathies' 240). In this case, the endeavour is the poem, and Whitman's stylistics and use of form operate in sympathy with the wave-particle foundation of the universe.

Whitman's poetry further expresses sympathies with nonhuman beings by *resonating with* them. Throughout 'Song of Myself', the idea of 'resonance' recurs as a technique of embodied listening which is captured in the poem's creative imperative. Resonance is the vehicle by which the messages of matter are sent and received, and is a term introduced by Whitman in the following passage of 'Song of Myself':

The blab of the pave . . . the tires of carts and sluff of bootsoles and talk of the promenaders,
The heavy omnibus, the driver with his interrogating thumb, the clank of the shod horses on the granite floor,
The carnival of sleighs, the clinking and shouted jokes and pelts of snowballs;
The hurrahs for popular favorites . . . the fury of roused mobs,
The flap of the curtained litter—the sick man inside, borne to the hospital,
The meeting of enemies, the sudden oath, the blows and fall,
The excited crowd—the policeman with his star quickly working his passage to the centre of the crowd;
The impassive stones that receive and return so many echoes,

.....
What living and buried speech is always vibrating here . . . what howls restrained
by decorum,
Arrests of criminals, slights, adulterous offers made, acceptances, rejections with
convex lips,
I mind them or the resonance of them . . . I come again and again. (1855 18)

Within this passage, 'resonance' registers the 'living and buried speech [that] is always vibrating here', speech that Killingsworth describes as 'nondiscursive but nevertheless palpable' (*Earth* 44). According to Bennett, 'The doggedly *horizontal* lists that frequent *Leaves of Grass* model a world where human beings are positioned not as potential masters of, but as co-participants with, other bodies in a world that vibrates' ('Solar' 136). Horizontality is expressed in this passage by linguistic features such as the frequency of plurals, noun suffixes on verbs, and syntactic parallelisms, by which objects and actions (human or nonhuman) become conflated, so that the pave is blabbing and rejection is convex lips. It is significant that 'speech' here is at once 'living', 'buried' and 'vibrating', foregrounding not the pitch, tonal, melodious, lyrical or rhythmic qualities of sound, but its waves of energy that shake and move the matter around it. This sensation is 'resonance': materially, 'the reinforcement or prolongation of sound ... by the synchronous vibration of a ... neighbouring object', or figuratively, a 'sympathetic response' (OED). Resonance is an embodied listening to matter. Through physical contact with the environment, the observer gathers meaning from other bodies in physical proximity, feeling the effects of their vibrations in his or her body. By sensing these vibrations, the listener is able to hear the 'buried speech', 'the voices or frequencies of nonhuman objects', and, according to Bennett, therefore 'perceive the nonhuman agencies operating *alongside* human actants... [and] *within* the self' ('Solar' 136, 138). The physical experience of resonance is inextricable from its figurative one, by which the significance of things registers as affect.

Presenting an alternative to representation, and the observation from a removed and distant position that characterises it, Whitman's poetry seeks sympathy with its environment by recognising the contiguity of his body, his poetry, and proximal other bodies. As Emerson suggests, 'The poet, by

an ulterior intellectual perception, gives [things] a power which makes their old use forgotten, and puts eyes and a tongue into every dumb and inanimate object' (*Essay 7*). Whitman does this literally, seeing through the eyes and hearing the voices of inanimate objects. The contiguity of the poem with the bodily forms the poet encounters – the pave, crowds, the waves of the ocean, leaves of grass – reflects the way in which Whitman's poem is able to resonate with the things of the earth. Through establishing a metonymic relationship between world, body and text, Whitman's language, in its undulant free-verse form, maintains a sympathetic engagement with nonhuman vitalities.

In *Tender Buttons*, Stein similarly displays a relationship of the text to the world through means other than representation by producing a portraiture of objects without description. As she claims in her lecture 'Portraits and Repetition', the 'words which were the words that made whatever I looked at look like itself were not the words that had in them any quality of description' (*Lectures* 191). Stein therefore differentiates mimesis from relationality between word and thing. While others have argued for the self-sufficiency of Stein's words as concerned more with the 'texture' of language than with meaning (Nicholls 198), it is clear that the text was concerned not just with the matter of language but also with the physical world. Stein's word-objects are deployed to reinstate the sensuous presence of things. By Stein's own account, *Tender Buttons* was composed through a process of interaction with material objects:

I began to make portraits of things and enclosures that is rooms and places because I needed to completely face the difficulty of how to include what is seen with hearing and listening and at first if I were to include a complicated listening and talking it would be too difficult to do. That is why painters paint still lives. You do see why they do.

So I began to do this thing, I tried to include color and movement and what I did is what you have all either read or heard of, a volume called *Tender Buttons*.

... You see what I mean, I did express what something was, a little by talking and listening to that thing, but a great deal by looking at that thing. (*Lectures* 189-190)

Tender Buttons is concerned with the observation of entities that exist outside the text, and 'express[ing] what something was' (*Lectures* 189-190). But for many readers, the words which make up Stein's text bear little, if any, connection to the material world. As Charles Bernstein suggests:

The words do not represent something outside of the context in which they are performed and where meanings are made in and through composition and arrangement. The sections of the work are not 'about' subjects that are discussed but are their own word objects (verbal constellations). Meaning in these works is not something to be extracted or deciphered but rather to be responded to. (259)

Bernstein's approach is among the more radical prioritisations of Stein's semiotic play, and privileges the object-status of the text over its responsiveness to objects outside it. Others have taken a more balanced approach, such as Elizabeth A. Frost, for whom 'signification coexists equally in Stein's text with materiality' (Frost 10-11), and Peter Quartermain, who argues that 'the writing circles within and among a plurality of semantic, syntactic, sonic, and referential fields, playfully moves in and out of referential and linguistic priorities' (Quartermain 23). For yet others, such as Karen Jackson Ford, Stein's language is directly representational, albeit obscure. She understands Stein's innovations as a strategy which 'gave her a unique language in which to verbalize her unorthodox relationship with Toklas' (Ford 78). But a reading which approaches Stein's *Tender Buttons* as wholly representational is made impossible at the points where Stein most obviously favours the material properties of words.

There are various instances where words are seemingly used not to convey meaning but to explore the sonic properties of language. For example, in two out of the four poems entitled 'CHICKEN', the primary concern appears to be rhyme and the repetition of sound:

CHICKEN.

Alas a dirty word, alas a dirty third alas a dirty third, alas a dirty bird.

CHICKEN.

Stick stick call then, stick stick sticking, sticking with a chicken. Sticking in a extra succession, sticking in.

The first poem quoted is primarily concerned with the 'ir' sound, also contained in 'word', whereas the second poem is concerned with the 'ick' sound in 'chicken', combined with its 'n' sound. The first and second poems are in dialogue, with the 'ick' sound of the second poem recalling a reaction of disgust, which makes 'chicken' a 'dirty word' in the first. The chicken as a physical being, a 'bird', is

connected to the 'word', 'chicken', not just through the representational relationship which connects word and thing, but also by the material relationship between word-objects, and the rhyming repetition of sound in 'word' and 'bird'. The word-objects are not meaningless, they bear semantic significance, as 'sticking with a chicken' could also indicate an act of eating, but the choices in this example seem to favour an examination of the word 'chicken' over the physical entity as a bird species, or meal.

While the above examples demonstrate that the portraits of *Tender Buttons* cannot be deemed as efforts to represent an object-world encountered, I do not follow Bernstein in proposing that Stein's language is purely self-referential, its only connection to the material world being the object of language itself. For example, 'A BLUE COAT' is clearly *about* a blue coat, while refraining from describing it in any distinct way apart from its blueness:

A BLUE COAT.

A blue coat is guided guided away, guided and guided away, that is the particular color that is used for that length and not any width not even more than a shadow. (TB 17)

As Markus Poeszsch demonstrates, 'The deictic emphasis on *that* particular colour and *that* length, neither of which is seen except by the author, foregrounds both the distinctiveness of the object and the vagueness that requires a perceptual leap for the reader in order to 'see' it' (948). But as Stein avoids 'any quality of description' (*Lectures* 191), relying only on deixis to point to an object, 'she invariably draws the reader beyond the text to the circumstances and moments of perception itself' (Poeszsch 949). This moment of perception is the point at which the poet's body, the perceptive apparatus, encounters the object – an encounter which is then textualised. *Tender Buttons* is, therefore, a practice of portraiture which seeks to relate to objects without representing them.

Stein's portraiture can be understood as a radical revision of William James' theory of 'knowledge of acquaintance', such as knowledge of the colour blue, which cannot be described or imparted to someone who has never seen blue, but can only be shared with others by pointing or directing someone to it (James *Principles* 221). While a psychology student at Radcliffe College from

1893 to 1897, Stein studied under William James and was exposed to many of his theories (Meyer 'Writing' 134-135). Steven Meyer claims that in Stein's "portraiture," as she called it, description was replaced by compositional procedures designed to ... do what James says can't be done: impart acquaintance to someone who hasn't already experienced it' (*Dictation* 6). Stein's object-portraits, therefore, function not to recall the observable characteristics of the object perceived, but to capture its sensuous presence. As Nicholls argues, Stein's 'shift away from representation deliberately invests language with 'bodily' values' (Nicholls 199). Through a technique such as deixis, she textualises the object's proximal relation to her body, and avoids the oppositional distance from the body that is required in observation and implied through representation. Resembling Karen Barad's 'posthumanist performativity', Stein's object-portraiture 'takes account of the fact that knowing does not come from standing at a distance and representing but rather from *a direct material engagement with the world*', as 'within and as part of it' (49, 88). Stein's object-portraiture portrays the perceptive body as within and as part of the portrait, and therefore 'the compositional process [is] an object for study' (Lorange 153).

Stein's linguistic disruptions draw from, and contribute to, Modernist artistic discourses which investigated the fundamentals of knowledge through experimentations in form. Peter Nicholls emphasises Stein's radical interventions into Modernist poetics: 'Stein developed a modernism at odds in almost every respect with that of Pound, Eliot and Lewis ... discovering a form of writing that reveals continuities between self and world ... by circumventing the image altogether' (198). While departing from the projects of contemporary writers, Stein joins Cubist painters in their critique of nineteenth century form. As Michael Kaufmann claims, for Stein, language and print were a means of 'perpetuating the seamless totality, of covering difference', used not as 'an instrument of perception' but as 'an instrument of culture that obscures perception' (*Textual* 57; 'Re-Vision' 448). By foregrounding the materiality of language and producing innovative ways of using it, Stein engages in a radical Modernist project which hopes to rupture 'the habits of perception' and become aware of the ways language uses us, rather than us using it (Kaufmann *Textual* 57). She

achieves this by highlighting the material status of words as objects rather than tools of exact replication. By challenging the expected word-to-object referentiality of naming, Stein challenges us to think about the ways in which we know the world.

Within Stein's style of portraiture, there are no clear markers by which a reader may distinguish representations from objects represented. This becomes most pronounced where Stein disrupts the act of naming, as names would usually form a clear textual or verbal representation of a thing encountered. A key example of this occurs in *Tender Buttons* when the titles of Stein's 'portraits of things and enclosures' (*Lectures* 189), suggest but do not follow through on the promise of an ordinary model of word-to-object referentiality – by which the title of the poem, often a noun, would be followed by a description of that thing named. For example, in the 'FOOD' section of *Tender Buttons*, the relationship between title and poem does not always announce the subject:

SAUCE.

What is bay labored what is all be section, what is no much. Sauce sam in.

SALMON.

It was a peculiar bin a bin fond in beside. (*TB* 57)

Here, 'sauce sam in' sounds curiously alike 'saw salmon', or similar, perhaps 'source salmon'. While it could be any number of combinations, Stein's lexical indeterminacy creates enough doubt that the 'subject-matter' of this poem includes sauce at all. This reading is reinforced by the fact that the poem which follows immediately after these final words is titled 'SALMON', and this creation of English words through sounding out is also a common technique used by Stein. The poem 'ORANGE', which follows 'SALMON', opens with the question, 'Why is a feel oyster an egg stir', transforming 'oyster' into 'egg stir' (*TB* 57). And earlier, 'VEAL' is transformed into 'very well very well' (*TB* 53). This use of the word 'sauce' in 'SAUCE', indicates that the title's emergence may not have been from sauce itself, where the representation (the name) would have followed the actual or figurative observation of the object. Instead, the word may have been generated by the mutated transcription of 'saw salmon', whereby the signifier precedes the signified. Rather than being a meaning

represented or conveyed through the medium of language, semiotic play and its accidents produces the name of the thing and calls forth its image-presence in the mind of the reader. The content of the poem precedes its title, so that the poem produces the presence of the condiment through the word-object 'sauce'.

Stein's inversion of the naming process removes the mastery of the observing subject that is tied up in the name. As Schwenger suggests, the act of naming is a form of human dominance: "'Adam established his lordship over the animals'" when "'he gave them a name, i.e., he nullified them as beings on their own account'" (Hegel qtd. in Schwenger 100). The possibility that the concept of sauce may not be meant by the words, but produced by accident, detaches the meaning of language from the mind of the subject, and relocates it to the matter of language itself. Ordinarily, naming has a definitional function, by which the '(ap)perceiving subject' materialises objects out of an 'amorphousness' (Brown 5). The name creates a boundary which distinguishes one object from another, but also, under a Lacanian view, identifies the subject, which is defined in opposition to the object, 'an opposition that is indeed necessary for the subject's separation and definition' (Schwenger 101). By removing the '(ap)perceiving subject' from the name, and relocating its emergence to the chance operation of language as image and sound, Stein challenges the inherent subject/object definitional process wound up in the practice of naming, and therefore unties their inherent dichotomy. By foregrounding the materiality of words, Stein avoids the mastery of naming, and restores to her language a horizontal relationship with material things.

Stein's avoidance of representation links her writing not only to the objects in the room, but also to the rhythms of the nonhuman natural world. Stein creates portraits which do not 'resemble' because resembling is remembering and 'remembering is repetition' (*Lectures* 179). For Stein, in life, as in language, absolute repetition is impossible, there is only 'insistence' (*Lectures* 167), which she recognises as a material vitality and a function of movement:

It is very life a frog hopping he cannot ever hop exactly the same distance or the same way of hopping at every hop. A bird's singing is perhaps the nearest thing to repetition but if you listen they too vary their insistence. ...

I remember very well first beginning to be conscious of this thing. I became conscious of these things, I suppose anybody does when they first really know that the stars are worlds and that everything is moving. (*Lectures* 167-68)

Stein's resistance to description in the portrait is in fact a resistance to 'repetition', paradoxically situated within a vocabulary that often reads and sounds repetitive. As she claims, 'there is only repetition when there are descriptions being given of these things' (*Lectures* 170-71). Stein's non-representational techniques create a continuity between her poetry and evolutionary vitality. In the process of writing, Stein claims to seek to express the 'rhythm of the visible world' (*Toklas* 127).

Post-Darwinian evolutionary theory had been influential on modernist thought. As Anne Raine argues, the belief in the origin of the human species as a 'chance' product 'of material processes of natural selection' saw human and nonhuman as entwined, and 'suggested a new intimacy or continuity between human consciousness and material nature' ('Science' 804-5). Stein recognised this continuity in her explicit statement, 'anybody is as their land and air is ... It is that which makes them and the arts they make and the work they do and the way they eat and the way they drink and the way they learn and everything' (*Narration* 46). Stein recognises the interconnectedness between humans and their environment, and how these interrelationships register in artistic practices and bodily behaviours.

Stein's avoidance of representational techniques therefore serves to situate her language within a material ecology. By studying the texture of language, Stein's text immersively engages with the material world, rather than observing it from a distance, or de-materialising it through description, image and symbol. As Nicholls suggests, 'the pleasure' Stein takes 'in the artistic medium is the result of a sense of felt connection with a world rather than of mastery over it' (203). Through techniques which foreground the materiality of language, Stein also presents a horizontality between text and world. In so doing, she divorces language from subjectivity. Language is the very thing which constitutes the subject, through the definitional process by which it delineates the object. When language comes itself to be a material object, the subject/object duality is no longer a necessary essence of being. Similarly, Whitman resists the bifurcation of the world into oppositional

categories, which he achieves through formal and stylistic strategies that harness metonymic relations between material forms, as opposed to metaphoric ones.

Whitman and Stein find ways of accessing the material 'outside' of text by foregrounding the text's own materiality, and therefore provoking the recognition of the text's location amongst other material beings. In so doing, they avoid perpetuating an oppositional relationship between word and thing which would arise in standing apart from the earth to represent it, and present textuality as an immersive encounter with the things of the earth. This provides a way of engaging with the world in text, as opposed to representational techniques which would perpetuate the view of humans as at 'an abyssal remove from all other life' (Westling 234). Louise Westling suggests that the 'humanist elevation of humans to a semi-divine status essentially distinct from the rest of creation' is 'the kind of *hubris*, or arrogance' that has been blamed for 'the present environmental crisis' (239). Whitman and Stein demonstrate how the re-materialisation of the word corresponds with a re-materialisation of the subject, challenging the essential dualism which maintains the removal of the human from the nonhuman world. Whitman and Stein both express a felt connection with the nonhuman forms they find around them: Whitman, by achieving 'sympathy' with them and harnessing their 'resonance'; and Stein, through her practice of object-portraiture, which employed an interactive approach of 'talking and listening' to develop an intimacy with things in order to learn and 'express' their being.

The poetics of both Whitman and Stein reflect on the failure of representational strategies to capture the experience of the physical world. For both poets, this failure intensifies a concentration on the materiality of language, and the discovery of the horizontal relationship between word and thing – as both are material and meaningful forms. The self-consciously material text challenges a pre-existing distinction between human subjects and nonhuman objects by foregrounding the object-status of the language which provides the human subject with meaningful access to the external world. In this way, rather than observing the world at a distance, attempting to repeat it, remember it, symbolise it, Whitman and Stein's poetry presents textualisation as an immersive

encounter with linguistic matter that is laterally related to the physical environment which is felt as present.

Chapter 2: The Limitless Interior

The adoption of political positions which are adequate to the current environmental predicament requires 'the recognition that "the environment" is not located somewhere out there, but is always the very substance of ourselves' (Alaimo *Bodily* 4). This recognition begins with examining the substance of the human self, as accepting that the human subject is integral with its environment requires first acknowledging the integration of human body and mind: that the human subject is not 'ontologically other than matter' (Coole and Frost 8). Both Whitman and Stein understood consciousness to be embodied. For Whitman, this occurred through a pseudo-scientific phrenological understanding of the connection between the physical formation of the brain and character. For Stein, it stemmed from the influence of William James' 'radical empiricist' psychology, which understood all conscious processes to be based on physiological ones. Whitman and Stein explore knowledge, consciousness, and emotion as processes which occur through material interchanges across the surfaces of the body, such as in erotic encounters, food consumption and textual production. This chapter demonstrates the ways in which Whitman and Stein's poetry textualises these understandings of consciousness as embodied, and in turn recognises the role of the environment as constitutive of the self.

Turning first to Whitman, phrenology was 'the pseudoscience that taught that all beliefs and character traits were produced by specific brain "organs"' and 'the nineteenth century's version of psychology' (Reynolds 246). These brain organs were believed to manifest as bumps on the skull, which could be read by phrenologists to assess the traits and characteristics of an individual. Orson and Lorenzo Fowler were at the centre of this craze in America, and Whitman was also an adherent, after hearing Orson Fowler lecture in 1846, and having his own skull examined in 1849 (Reynolds 247). But it was not only the skull that served as an indication of character and well-being, 'Everything about a person – the walk, the laugh, the lips, the eyes, skin, voice, gestures – betrayed character' (Reynolds 248). In the hands of the Fowlers, phrenology became more than the

‘intellectual fad’ it had been in Europe, but took on the status of ‘an all-defining system of self-help’ (Reynolds 246).

Whitman’s phrenological understandings are displayed in his poetry as a form of physiognomy, whereby Whitman’s speakers encounter the exterior appearances of the bodies around them as forming part of their interior selves. A key consideration when examining Whitman’s phrenology is his understanding of the matter of the body as evidence of the character of the individual. This is exemplified in ‘Song of Myself’ with the claim, ‘My gait is no faultfinder’s or rejecter’s gait’ (1855 28), where physical motion and shape express character and behaviour. Phrenology functioned as a ‘natural language’ (a term employed frequently by the Fowlers), bearing more in common with the ‘substantial words’ of the rolling earth than with the ‘lines and dots’ of lexical words (1856 322). As claimed in the 1856 poem ‘Poem of the Sayers of the Words of the Earth’,⁴ ‘Human bodies are words, myriads of words’ (1856 322). Notably, Anton F. Borst argues that Whitman does not see the body as a ‘sign’, an outward expression that reflects an inner being, but instead ‘has in mind the body as self-evidence, as a solid mass, a filled space, not a surface to be read for what lies beneath’ (93). Whitman presents his body as both sign and substance in the 1855 ‘Song of Myself’ with: ‘Writing and talk do not prove me, / I carry the plenum of proof and every thing else in my face, / With the hush of my lips I confound the topmost skeptic’ (1855 31). Here, ‘every thing’ is carried in the matter of the body, in this case, the face, which serves as self-evident.

In the 1855 poem later titled ‘Faces’, the face stands alone as a realisation of the entire human being, where the entirety of the individual mind is palpable in its exteriority. By a metonymic substitution, faces are sufficient to stand for people:

SAUNTERING the pavement or riding the country byroad here then are
faces,
Faces of friendship, precision, caution, suavity, ideality,
The spiritual prescient face, the always welcome common benevolent face,
The face of the singing of music, the grand faces of natural lawyers and judges
broad at the backtop. (1855 82)

⁴ This poem was finally titled ‘A Song of the Rolling Earth’.

As the poem continues, the 'hunters', 'infants', the artist or the mother are not observed as full-bodied entities that possess faces, rather it is the very faces themselves that are 'sauntering the pavement or riding the country byroad'. These faces are disembodied parts which evince the qualities of the entire individual, and suggest the materiality of character. D. H. Lawrence's assessment of Whitman's poetry as, 'a certain horrible pottage of human parts' highlights the grotesque and mechanistic aesthetic of disembodied parts acting independently of the embodied whole (unpag.), such as in Whitman's description of people as 'beautiful curious breathing laughing flesh' (1855 79). Informed by Whitman's understandings of phrenology, this corporeal reduction of the human character becomes more than a figurative synecdoche. With his cataloguing technique in 'Faces', Whitman collects faces together in a way that turns a crowd of people into a collection of *things*. The reduction of the human to parts reduces the differentiation between a human individual and a nonhuman object, and turns interiors into exteriors by breaking a whole into parts.

In Whitman's 'natural language', bodies are not reflections of immaterial selves but are productive and co-constitutive of character. But where phrenology understands mental attributes to depend on the features of the body, this approach risks the kind of material determinism that Lawrence argues is present in Whitman's poetry, suggesting that Whitman 'is mechanical', that he 'reminds one of a steam-engine. A locomotive' (unpag.). Borst claims that 'by equating mind and brain and claiming the existence of innate, inheritable faculties, phrenology raised the possibility of biological determinism, unsettling seemingly essential beliefs in the soul, agency, and moral responsibility' (iv). But Whitman's own particular brand of phrenology differed from the more deterministic strand, as while he 'appears to adopt a substantially materialist view', he also allows for 'plasticity of the brain' (Borst 30). Lamarckian evolutionary theory, which posited that traits acquired through effort could be passed onto offspring, was popular in America around the time of the publication of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* (Folsom 'Learning' 28). As Reynolds points out, Lamarckism suggested that 'humanity could constantly progress through self-control', and a form of this theory was 'interwoven into the phrenological teachings of Orson and Lorenzo Fowler' (246). For

example, the Fowlers regularly advised control over consumption habits, recommending 'avoidance of meat, coffee, tobacco and alcohol' to keep 'the various brain sections and other bodily functions in equilibrium' (Reynolds 248-249). Material substances entering the body were seen to impact physiology and behaviour, not unlike our contemporary understandings of diet and substance abuse. However, discourses in Whitman's context emphasised not the biochemical reactions of such material interchanges, but the agencies of external forces which, if unmoderated, could take control of the body and subjugate the will of the individual over his or her own behaviour.

Understandings of the body's permeability were widespread not just in phrenology but in the entire discourse on health in antebellum America. Disease had not yet been discovered to result from microorganisms, but was known to result from environmental interactions which passed matter across the body's surfaces, thought to emerge from 'miasma' emanating from waste products. A common belief in Whitman's society was that 'the soil was teeming with disease' (Farland 803). The discourse of desire was also aligned with that of disease, where persistent sexual desire was believed to be 'possession' by outside forces. Mark Maslan interprets this discourse in the following way: 'lust entered the body from the outside, disabled the will, and set about operating the machinery of the body for its own ends' (46). These beliefs indicated there was a general fear of the porosity of the body in its exposure to environmental substances, and belief in the capacity of nonhuman agencies to disrupt the sovereign agency of the individual by transgressing its borders. The persistence of material interchanges with the environment were accepted as necessary for survival (such as in eating, drinking, breathing and reproduction), yet posed risks for a loss of autonomy and self-control, a weakening of the body, and even death (Maslan 31).

It is significant, then, that Whitman's speaker in 'Song of Myself' seems to passionately embrace an erotic bodily openness toward the earth and to the bodies of others, given that both openness and pervasive desire signalled potential danger, as material transactions 'might introduce debilitating substances into the body or drain vital energy from it' (Maslan 31). Whitman's speaker is

unrestrained in his physical contact with the bodies of the earth, where, using erotic imagery, the poet describes the earth and sea:

Earth of the limpid gray of clouds brighter and clearer for my sake!
Far-swooping elbowed earth! Rich apple-blossomed earth!
Smile, for your lover comes!

Prodigal! you have given me love! . . . therefore I to you give love!
O unspeakable passionate love!

Thruster holding me tight and that I hold tight!
We hurt each other as the bridegroom and the bride hurt each other.

You sea! I resign myself to you also . . . I guess what you mean,
I behold from the beach your crooked inviting fingers,
I believe you refuse to go back without feeling of me;
We must have a turn together . . . I undress . . . hurry me out of sight of the land,
Cushion me soft . . . rock me in billowy drowse,
Dash me with amorous wet . . . I can repay you.

Sea of stretched ground-swells!
Sea breathing broad and convulsive breaths!
Sea of the brine of life! Sea of unshovelled and always-ready graves!
Howler and scooper of storms! Capricious and dainty sea!
I am integral with you . . . I too am of one phase and of all phases. (1855 27)

This passage evokes a violent passionate sacrifice of the body to the wiles of its environment, with 'we hurt each other', and 'I resign myself to you'. This speaker is not at all afraid of the destructive potential of bodily exchange with the wild forces which thrust at his exterior in a threat to arrest his autonomous agency. In fact, he seeks its dissolution. In a time when shipwrecks with large losses of life were common, Whitman praises the sea for its 'always-ready graves', and asks to be absorbed within it: 'hurry me out of sight of the land'. Seeking to penetrate and be penetrated, this speaker participates in the 'merge', with 'the procreant urge of the world' evoked earlier in the poem (1855 17, 14), becoming 'integral with' the sea. The speaker seeks contact and immersion in the things of the earth, relinquishing control over his own destiny.

The speaker's search for material transactions with his environment participates in the Romantic discourse of poetic inspiration, which, in its quest to arrest autonomous agency, deployed a similar language to that which described disease. Maslan argues that Whitman 'identifies sexual

penetration with the ingress of poetic voice' (8-9), drawing a connection between Whitman's inclination toward possession by external environmental forces and the Romantic conception of inspiration as a force arising from the poet's 'interactions with nature', nature which poets such as Coleridge and Wordsworth believed humans had been divorced from by post-Cartesian dualism (5). According to the Romantic view, poetic authority 'derives not from the poet's self but from its temporary annulment', and, 'To be inspired is to be authorized to speak by and for another, whether that other be natural or supernatural' (Maslan 4). In his figuration of the speaker's erotic connection with natural forms, Whitman highlights the transfer of substances between bodies as a necessity for poetic creativity. 'Inspiration', literally meant, is the act of breathing in. The environment is a creative agent and is implicated in the formation of the text, accessing the mind of the poet through material interchanges across the surfaces of the body. For Whitman, it is not just interactions with the things of the natural world that enable inspiration, but also the resonating pave, bootsoles, omnibus, sleighs and litter which inhabit the city streets.

Stein similarly looked to the external world as a site of creativity. While Whitman's speaker engages erotically with nature to depict the interpenetrative bodily exchanges which constitute his textual productions, Stein's object-portraits engage erotically with food and domestic items as part of an investigation of embodied consciousness.

In the following passage from 'ROASTBEEF', which opens the 'FOOD' section of *Tender Buttons*, the matter of roast beef and domestic textiles is tied to sensuality, intimacy, and conscious states, with 'feeling' a recurring motif:

In the inside there is sleeping, in the outside there is reddening, in the morning there is meaning, in the evening there is feeling. In the evening there is feeling. In feeling anything is resting, in feeling anything is mounting, in feeling there is resignation, in feeling there is recognition, in feeling there is recurrence and entirely mistaken there is pinching. All the standards have steamers and all the curtains have bed linen and all the yellow has discrimination and all the circle has circling. This makes sand. (TB 33)

This passage awakens the 'FOOD' section of *Tender Buttons* to an object-erotics, playing on the multiple suggestions that arise from the idea of resting flesh. The association in this passage of

‘feeling’ with the rhythms of ‘morning’, ‘evening’, and ‘sleeping’, and the objects ‘curtains’, ‘bed linen’, and roast beef, places these objects in a central position within domestic intimacy and the associated rhythms of the body. Bernstein says of this passage that ‘Stein brings [mood] into a dynamically diurnal intimacy with the feeling of time passing, from morning to evening’ and the associated changing states, by which we recognise ‘a view from “outside” ourselves and “inside” ourselves’ (263). By following the changing states of ‘feeling’ through the passage of time, Stein traces the synchronicity of internal with external dynamism. While ‘sleeping’ inside corresponds with ‘reddening’ outside, feelings – experiences of the interaction between body and mind – are located in relation to the fluxion of external objects.

In *Tender Buttons*, Stein often explores erotic interactions through the theme of food, which provides an opportunity for ‘the fusion of oral and genital imagery’, and therefore is ‘the clearest introduction to her intermingling of all natural functions’ (Fifer 480). Observations of the mutability of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ states are central qualities of these encounters with food. Food is subject to ongoing alteration in preparation, cooking, eating and digestion. The body is clearly implicated in these transformations, which occur as it passes into and out of the threshold of the body. Christopher Schmidt points out that ‘consumption and digestion are ... a thoroughgoing obsession’ for Stein, food being ‘the most material, most physically present object to cross the threshold of the body— wherein it is transformed into waste’ (37). Stein’s attention to the dynamics of matter challenges an acceptance of stasis and the fixity of forms. As argued by Michel Delville, in *Tender Buttons* ‘the unstable, liminal quality of food questions the limits of the body which, in turn, tends to be perceived as a precarious, unfinished entity, an organic factory ingesting, processing, exuding and excreting substances which are alternately inside and outside’ (45). In the voice of Alice, Stein claims that in 1912, around the time she commenced writing *Tender Buttons*, her ‘style gradually changed’ from being ‘interested only in the insides of people’, to ‘mixing the outside with the inside’, describing ‘the inside as seen from the outside’ (*Toklas* 127, 165). This interplay of inside and outside is not only present in the subject of food, it pervades her whole approach to the object-world in

Tender Buttons. By engaging with 'the rhythm of the visible world' (Toklas 127), Stein is able to engage with the interiorities of objects through contact with the outside, by talking and listening. Exteriors do not just enclose an inside but betray it, through the continual movement of 'mixing' surface and substance. Stein's explorations into food, objects, and rooms present the sensory encounter with the domestic world as an investigation into the matter of consciousness.

Stein's understanding of consciousness as embodied was influenced by the work of William James. James explicitly claims to have shared with his students, during the years Stein studied psychology at Radcliffe, his theory that the idea of a disembodied entity called 'consciousness' is 'fictitious', as there is 'no aboriginal stuff or quality of being, contrasted with that of which material objects are made, out of which our thoughts of them are made' ('Consciousness' 491, 478). For James, consciousness is differentiable from objects only as a particular 'function', and its undifferentiability as substance challenges a fundamental dualism by which 'object-plus-subject is the minimum that can actually be' (James 'Consciousness' 478). James was at the forefront of cognitive science in America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Having studied what was then known as 'physiological psychology' in Germany, he emphasised the physical basis of psychological processes, and contributed to the transition of American psychology from a philosophical activity to a scientific discipline (Cairns Watson 37-38). James posits that both material object and thought are substance, as 'thoughts remain embodied and as such are experienced as feelings, that is, as a function of the body' (Meyer *Dictation* 17). Steven Meyer argues that this view explicitly pervades Stein's *Tender Buttons*, which he believes was composed in the same spirit of 'radical empiricism', whereby intellect is not to be dissociated from feeling (*Dictation* 28). Stein's Jamesian understanding of consciousness challenges the notion of mental interiors as immaterial essences captured within an exterior body. Rather, thoughts and body are both material. Without a clearly defined difference of substance which marks the duality of inner and outer, the ways in which the body transacts with its exterior world are directly formative of conscious states.

The embodied consciousness within *Tender Buttons* designates objects as implicated with knowledge, whereby a feeling, a reaction to external stimuli, is intimately tied to the thing reacted to. It is widely accepted in scholarship on Stein that 'the object world' of *Tender Buttons* is 'the domestic world of women, an everyday household world ... of cooking and cleaning, sewing and mending, dressing and dining' (Perloff 145). Divided into three sections, 'OBJECTS', 'FOOD', and 'ROOMS', the everyday household items which populate *Tender Buttons* are already situated within the space of the private room. In their intimate situation, these 'everyday objects and the domestic space itself' are already 'saturated with the erotic character of the loving domestic relationship' between Stein and Alice B. Toklas (Retallack 35). The objects examined, and their names that are 'adored' and 'caressed' as loved objects (Stein *Lectures* 231), are not layered disguises for the illicit erotic body of the beloved, as argued by those who view Stein's text as an encoded language of 'disguised autobiography' (Fifer 472). Rather, Stein's objects (including food), are co-inhabitants of the domicile. Stein's object-erotics demonstrate how the externality of the surfaces of objects explicates the inside of private erotic intimacies which are supposedly hidden from view.

Household items, consumables, textiles, are occupants of the space under, over, inside, beside, covering and between human bodies in their most intimate dealings. They are implicated with the private daily rhythms of the human body, through all its natural functions: consumptive, productive, and restorative. For Delville, in the 'still lifes' of *Tender Buttons*, 'Stein's project [is] to encompass the total habitus of our everyday lives by attending to the world of objects' (37), his view indicating that objects tell stories and are more than a mere mute presence. An exploration of the items that co-habit a room is naturally an exploration of the human body, as together, both human and non-human occupants co-create the domestic space in an ongoing interaction. *Tender Buttons* and its recurring themes, sounds and suggestions explore 'a particular patterning of language in its relation to a particular kind of experience ... the domestic eros of Gertrude and Alice' (Retallack 9). This 'patterning of language' can be seen in recurring images which are suggestive of a feminine erotic, foregrounded through this very repetition. For example, the poems from the 'OBJECTS'

section, 'A SUBSTANCE IN A CUSHION', 'NOTHING ELEGANT', 'A RED STAMP', 'A PETTICOAT', and others, signal this recurring theme, with persistent ruminations on dirtiness and cleanliness, necessity and sufficiency, fabric, grace and disgrace, and the colours red and white. Many of these connotations are evoked in the following excerpt from 'A SUBSTANCE IN A CUSHION':

A sight a whole sight and a little groan grinding makes a trimming such a sweet singing trimming and a red thing not a round thing but a white thing, a red thing and a white thing.

The disgrace is not in carelessness nor even in sewing it comes out out of the way... (TB 11)

Variations of the words 'red' and 'white' appear forty-six and forty-three times, respectively, throughout *Tender Buttons*. While the book uses a full spectrum of colours, these two appear more frequently than any other, with 'green' the next closest appearing twenty times. In a context of trimmings, ribbons, petticoats and roses, red and white are suggestive of a Caucasian feminine body, alternately flushed and pale. While whiteness signals nudity and purity, red is erotic. Red and white mixed make the more tender feminine 'pink'. For Lisa Ruddick, the clusters of images around dirt and versions of red, including pink and rose, have definite associations with an erotic or reproductive female body. As she suggests, 'Red and roses, for example, are used to suggest menstrual blood, sometimes with a negative association of something shameful or dirty' ('Rosy' 226).

While I agree with Schmidt that such 'one-to-one decoding would betray Stein's multiplicative poetics of excess' (Schmidt 30), readings of Stein's work as a referential code highlight the capacity for exclusive attention to objects to be suggestive of a pervasive sexuality, even in cases where the body is never directly referred to. Stein generates an erotics not by pointing to the body but by pointing to objects, such as red ones and white ones. In Stein's object-portraiture, the objects in the room are contiguous with feminine flesh, and an erotics is generated through interactions between the surfaces of the body and of objects. This is not the 'lesbian fetishism' characterised by Elizabeth A. Frost, by which the 'fascination with ordinary objects', is a coded 'displacement of the erotic onto the objective world' (3, 15). Rather, Stein investigates the exteriors of objects as the actual fluctuating limit of the body, a site of fleshly contact, denying the assumption of the body's

enclosure which marks it as separate from the external world. As food is converted into bodily energy through eating, objects are converted to feelings through interactive encounters. Stein claimed her process of engaging with the subjects of her object-portraits was by 'talking and listening to that thing' (*Lectures* 190). Stein's erotic themes signal this direct material engagement, as the body's transactions with the surfaces of objects constitute the sense-impressions, feelings, and thoughts which underpin her object-portraiture.

As a Jamesian notion of consciousness integrates mind with body, Stein's object-portraiture observes the integration of domestic items into the emotive logic of the household. In *Tender Buttons*, material objects are co-constitutive of meaning and feeling, and are implicated with the 'insides' of the human mind. Similarly, in examples from Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, material interchanges with substances at the body's exterior form the character of consciousness. For both poets, emotion is a vehicle connecting body to mind, and text to world. It unifies mental and sensory experience. Erotic themes portray this most explicitly, as sexuality shows clearly the physicality of emotion. Responsive to both internal and external stimuli, emotion operates as a passage between the interior and exterior of the self, by demonstrating the integration of mind, body, and environment.

Demonstrated by the intensely passionate nature of Whitman's speaker's 'merge' with the earth, emotive force acts as a vehicle through which material transfers can take place. This is enacted explicitly in 'As a Child Went Forth', where a material transformation is effected through an impassioned engagement with the external material world.

THERE was a child went forth every day,
And the first object he looked upon and received with wonder or pity or love
or dread, that object he became,
And that object became part of him for the day or a certain part of the day . . . or
for many years or stretching cycles of years. (1855 90)

It is the force of 'wonder or pity or love / or dread' which activates the power of 'receiv[ing]' the things of the world, and this emotive response enacts a process of integration. A physical change occurs which is simultaneously of incorporation and dissolution, as the child becomes objects, and

they become part of him. These objects vary from the small things of nature, the 'early lilacs', to people, 'the old drunkard staggering home', to man-made things, 'the streets themselves', to the far-reaches of the nakedly observable world, 'the strata of coloured clouds' (1855 90-91). As Christine Gerhardt points out, 'this self, the child's being human, is itself lost in the process; it is a child that becomes indistinguishable from the world around it (79). The child is diluted, expansively identifying with all and in the process losing an autonomous identity. 'As a Child Went Forth' enacts an extreme form of the porosity possible in Whitman's contemporary discourses of poetry, phrenology, disease and desire, where transactions with the environment through the body could transform an individual through both destruction and poetic inspiration.

The process of writing was instrumental in facilitating these transformations. Amongst the doctrines of the Fowlers' phrenology, an 'all-defining system of self-help', Whitman admired Orson Fowler's idea that 'any mental faculty could be developed through exercise' (Reynolds 236, 247). One of these exercises, and which Whitman himself practised, was 'vigorous self-reprimand' (Reynolds 249). Suggested as a remedy for addiction or vice (such as masturbation), Fowler proposed 'capitalization' as a way of writing commands to oneself, a technique of self-reprimand exhibited in Whitman's own notebooks (Reynolds 249). Language, and written text, therefore were seen to have the ability to change the balance and constitution of the substance of the brain, by adjusting its 'bumps', and in turn affecting the whole body. The examples of Whitman's poetry discussed, such as in 'As a Child Went Forth', demonstrate this understanding of the alteration and improvability of the mind through physical interactions with the external world. Language has a key role to play in this interaction. By consciously recognising his own 'merge' with his environment, as demonstrated in his becoming 'integral with' the sea, Whitman was able to be inspired by it, so that its substance was seen as a creative force in the generation of the poem.

With a greater focus on the act of writing, Stein similarly explores the involvement of textual production in the interactions between the human body and the world. This is made most evident where her poetry highlights the complementarities between the process of poetic composition and

the biological mechanics of digestion. For Schmidt, 'sex, excretion, and textual completion' are 'three activities ... imbricated in Stein's imagination' (43-44). Ruddick also connected organic waste to Stein's creative process, claiming Stein sees her writing as 'secretions', the product of 'writing with the body', which could include specifically feminine secretions such as 'menstrual blood', or a generalised mark, or excrement, 'as the pun "excreate" in *Tender Buttons* (excrement/create) suggests' ('Rosy' 228). The body is a site of transformation, whereby inputs are transformed into outputs, food into waste, and sense-impressions into writing.

The interrelation between textual production and organic waste is explored in the poem 'A LEAVE'. The title of the poem is a curious hybrid, not quite verb (to 'leave'), not quite noun (a 'leaf'), not quite singular, not quite plural ('leaves'). This indeterminacy conflates the natural object, the composition, and decomposition: a natural leaf, a leaf of the page, or a 'leaving'. These possibilities simultaneously suggest the physical world encountered, the text, and that which is left by the body: a residue, or remains. The poem signals its connection to an embodied act of writing:

A LEAVE.

In the middle of a tiny spot and nearly bare there is a nice thing to say that wrist is leading.
Wrist is leading. (TB 27)

Recalling 'an ink spot, a rosy charm' (TB 22), which Ruddick reads as simultaneously menstrual and textual ('Rosy' 228), the 'tiny spot' is a bodily mark left behind, an imprint. The poem also indicates the act of writing, with the repetition of 'wrist is leading' privileging the body as the primary actor, suggesting the physical mechanism of automatic writing, and paralleling the unconscious movements of peristalsis.

While Stein studied automatic writing as a psychology student, given that she claimed it 'was a delusion' and that she never performed it (Meyer 'Writing' 139), it is significant that she appears to reference it here. But as Anne Raine points out, Stein's experiments in automatic writing were formative in her understanding of consciousness, that it is tied up with a 'feeling of relation to bodily movements' ('Science' 810). This feeling characterised Stein's theory of "'consciousness without

memory”’, a form of immediate awareness which she developed out of her attempts to write ‘automatically’, and finding she could not do so entirely without remaining conscious of her behaviour (Will 22). As described by Barbara Will, “‘Consciousness without memory’ ... is unrelated to conscious intention or will ... [it] lies outside the persona, [and] emerges through the process of automatic motion’ (Will 22). It is a state of mind that originates through the movements of the body and not from subjective agency. ‘Wrist is leading’ describes the consciousness that arises from the feeling of bodily movement, and not that of intention. Writing here is integrated with bodily processes, and exhibits the intertwined natures of inside and outside, self and world, as writing is produced of an embodied consciousness, which leaves a physical mark on the page. The mark is the poem, an object, a word, but also a ‘spot’, a bodily ‘leaving’, organic waste.

‘A LEAVE’ demonstrates not only a Jamesian notion of the embodied nature of consciousness, as explored through the physical process of writing and its material result, but also the process by which the productions of the body are re-externalisations of what was once outside, but was transformed on the inside. The productions of the body: ideas, words, waste, are created by both the interior of the body, and the exterior material world. Similarly, Whitman’s poetry draws on Romantic understandings of inspiration, phrenological understandings of embodied psychology, and antebellum scientific understandings of disease, to present nature as an invasive material force. This physical world is also a creative force which radically transforms body and mind, and is present in the words of Whitman’s poetry. Both Whitman and Stein explore the unfixed boundaries between the insides and outsides of human and nonhuman bodies. This investigation is informed by their understandings of consciousness as embodied, and hence subject to the influence of substances which pass into and out of its threshold. From this awareness of the body’s porosity, the objects with which it interacts – being the things of the earth, or household items – can be acknowledged as co-constitutive of the human body and of human thought.

Whitman and Stein’s poetry of bodily integration serves to present the human self as materially interconnected with its surrounds. The human individual is constituted in and through its

environment, and cannot be extracted out of it as an isolable entity. This approaches Stacy Alaimo's 'trans-corporeality', a new materialist conception of the way in which 'the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world', whereby 'the substance of the human', both its body and its subjectivity, 'is ultimately inseparable from "the environment"' (Alaimo *Bodily* 2). For Alaimo, this 'thinking across bodies' can assist in counteracting 'a widespread, popular disregard for nonhuman nature' (Alaimo *Bodily* 3, 2). It is unclear where the human body ends and where nonhuman nature begins, as 'the environment' is continually passing into and out of the body (Alaimo *Bodily* 12). Whitman and Stein present ways of 'thinking across bodies' through poetry, as they textualise the embodied self, registering the dynamic boundaries of the body in its perpetual interchanges with the external world. In this way, their poetry is concerned with bodily habitat, a sense of embodied place, where the human individual is both a creator and an extension of its location amongst other material forms.

Chapter 3: The Creative Text

As developed in Chapter 1, the key method by which Whitman and Stein's poetry engages with the object-world is through foregrounding the materiality of language with the use of textual strategies alternative to representation. And as developed in Chapter 2, bodies, objects, and other material forms in Whitman and Stein's poetry are not static, but are in dynamic shifting relations. In this chapter I will demonstrate the ways in which Whitman and Stein share the sense of bodily integration with their environments through the matter of the poem. Here, the text itself betrays its own material agency, making meanings in assemblages with other bodies. Iovino and Opperman point out that the root of the word 'poetry', 'resonates with the Greek root of "poiesis," implying a literal sense of "making"' (14). The text is both a cultural form and a material intervention into nature. In this chapter, I examine the creative capacities of Whitman and Stein's poetry not to simply reflect on the world but to actively participate in its ongoing formulation, which starts with their language's direct material influences on the bodies of readers.

The background of Whitman's phrenological understanding of psychology, discussed in Chapter 2, provides insight into the possible effects Whitman's poetry could be understood to have on readers of multiple eras. In his treatment of the physical world as subject-matter, Whitman seeks 'to indicate more than the beauty and dignity which always attach to dumb real objects' (1855 10). According to Whitman, the reader can see this for his or herself, by simply looking, and being amongst these objects. The poet's role is then to draw new connections, 'to create an energy flow, a poetic ecology, that draws strength from the earth and passes it on to the reader' (Killingsworth *Earth* 46). Poetry can change the ways in which a reader engages with his or her environment. For example, Angus Fletcher argues that Whitman creates an 'environment-poem', which aspires to 'surround the reader', such that to read his poems 'is to have an experience much like suddenly recognising that one actually has an environment, instead of not perceiving the surround at all' (9). In Fletcher's conception, the experience of Whitman's poetry can be alike the experience of

observing the natural world and the place of the embodied self within it. The concept of the 'environment-poem' is an example of how Whitman does not attempt mimetic depiction of his own environment, but to instead evoke for the reader a sense or awareness of his or her own material surrounds through poetic form. Accessing the vibrancy and vitality of the material world, Whitman does not seek to show his readers what he sees: 'You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me', but to teach them a way of seeing, which they must draw from their own bodies: 'You shall listen to all sides and filter them from yourself' (1855 14).

Through poetry, Whitman seeks physical contact with the bodies of readers. As claimed by Michael Moon, within the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman attempted the impossible task of projecting his 'actual physical presence in a literary text', to come into 'loving' contact with readers (5-6). Moon argues that Whitman is ultimately successful in his effort to contact readers: 'his own body *can* be successfully projected through, and partially transformed into, his printed text' (69). This is achieved through a substitution by which 'the body' attributed to the author comes to stand for the reader's body, the author providing "'models" of bodiliness' to make 'the reader's own body available to him/herself in a way that it has not been available before' (Moon 71). This is exemplified in Whitman's instruction, 'All I mark as my own you shall offset it with your own, / Else it were time lost listening to me' (1855 25). And at the opening of 'Song of Myself' the poet instructs, 'what I shall assume you shall assume, / For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you' (1855 13). The speaker's body is a placemaker for the reader's, where the speaker's 'I' is in part a dramatisation of Whitman's embodied self, but also an opportunity for the reader to address, and indeed insert, his or her embodied self within the poem.

In my reading of Moon, this substitution of the reader's body for Whitman's focuses on 'the body' as a site of political power, where 'embodiment' is a perception of the ways a body can be used, and Whitman's 'model' acts to empower 'readers to reject to some degree the system of controls over their bodies that their culture enforces' (Moon 72). My understanding of Whitman's "'models" of bodiliness' differs in that it emphasises the materiality of the body, and its actual

physical and sensory entanglement with its material environment. In addition to the model of a culturally inscribed body liberated from sexual oppression proposed by Moon, Whitman provides a model of a material body as a component of, and responsive to, its physiocultural habitat. If Whitman can achieve actual physical connections with the bodies of readers, then he can cause them to recognise their position within broader networks of economic, political, cultural and biological interchanges.

In the final passage of 'Song of Myself', the speaker explicitly passes 'the body' to the reader by vacating his human form in favour of a nonhuman one, and directly referring to the reader's human, booted, body:

I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,
If you want me again look for me under your bootsoles.

You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,
But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,
And filter and fibre your blood.

Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,
Missing me one place search another,
I stop some where waiting for you (1855 56)

The poet hopes to have a physical impact on the reader, being 'good health to you', and to 'filter and fibre your blood', but also to send the reader outside to search for the poet in the dirt and grass, under the reader's feet. The poet already instructed the reader in the Preface to 'read these leaves in the open air every season of every year of your life' (1855 vi). The ideal of the poem is to create the ideal reader, reproducing the speaker's own body in the bodies of others by materialising changes in their bodies through the text; creating bodies that are healthy, and brimming with vitality, and consciously engaged with their social-material habitats.

Whitman recognised the continuity between an embodied connection with the environment and democratic participation. Robert J. Scholnick observes that 'Whitman's urgent summons to his fellow citizens to adopt the practices of healthy living constituted a significant portion of his agenda for America', as Whitman expresses a belief 'that a healthy body is a metonym for a healthy nation

and, the converse, that an enfeebled body reflects a failure within the body politic' (249, 248). As Scholnick points out, he wrote in 'Poem of Many in One' (finally titled 'By Blue Ontario's Shore'), 'All comes by the body / only health puts you [sic] rapport with the universe' (1856 181). Whitman's 'cult of vigorous health' risks excluding and alienating those who do not meet this ideal of physical perfection (Scholnick 254). However, this apparent prejudice conflicts with the role as 'healer' that the speaker takes on in many parts of the 1855 *Leaves of Grass*, such as, 'I am he bringing help for the sick as they pant on their backs' (1855 45), and the role of advocate for the 'voices of the diseased and despairing', and 'of the rights of them the others are down upon' (1855 29). Scholnick explores Whitman's 'complex, sometimes contradictory, and shifting treatments of the concepts of health, disease, and disability' (249), but he does not propose any final way in which to resolve these contradictions.

Perhaps the answer can be found in the poem which first appeared in 1856 *Leaves of Grass* as 'Poem of Wonder at the Resurrection of the Wheat', later titled 'This Compost', which proclaims the regenerative and restorative power of nature:

It grows such sweet things out of such corrup-
tions,
It turns harmless and stainless on its axis, with
such endless successions of diseased corpses,
It distils such exquisite winds out of such infused
fetor,
It renews with such unwitting looks, its prodigal,
annual, sumptuous crops,
It gives such divine materials to men, and accepts
such leavings from them at last. (1856 205)

In this poem the effects of humanity are those of pollution, imperfection, and uncleanness, providing 'diseased corpses', 'fetor', 'corruptions', sickness and 'leavings'. In contrast, nature is presented as fertile and pure, 'stainless', 'furnish[ing] health', providing 'growths of spring', and 'divine materials' (1856 204). Whitman idealised 'outdoor people' as healthy and productive labourers, with the view that 'the passion for light and the open air' is evidence of 'the unfailing perception of beauty and of a residence of the poetic' within the individual (1855 v). In a time of

Lamarckian evolutionary theory, and before disease was understood as a 'discrete entity', being characterised as "'the sum of one's transactions with the environment'" (Rosenberg qtd. in Scholnick 252), Whitman's persona of 'Song of Myself' simultaneously occupies positions as advocate for the 'joyful enactment of practices of vigorous health' (Scholnick 249), and as healer and protector of the sick. He achieves this by promoting a practice of engagement with the life-giving and restorative properties of nature, exploring the capacity of poetry to promote what Scholnick calls his 'gospel of healthy living' (250). The persona of 'Song of Myself' in the end enters 'the dirt' as a leaving, to 'grow from the grass', and is merged with the earth. In such a form of embodiment, Farland argues, 'the poet's body "shall be good health" to the reader', where, 'Corporeal fusion with the poet through the medium of the earth's body - the material substance "dirt" - serves to "filter and fibre" the human blood' (818). Through presenting a model of the human body as integrated with its environment, Whitman's poetry aims to use the matter of the text to bring the reader into contact with his or her environment, to improve the reader's own ecology of mind and body, and to realise the filtration of these strengths into democratic citizenship and his ideal new America.

Stein's poetry is similarly directed toward effecting material changes to the reader, with particular focus on alterations to the mind, but also achieving an impact on the rest of the reader's body. As Kaufmann claims, Stein 'attempts to break the habits of print by making its conventions ... visible as habits rather than as natural laws', and restore to words their feeling of movement (*Textual* 53). But by changing readers' habits of association, Stein also achieves material changes. A further exploration of the connection between Stein's writing and James' psychology demonstrates how this can be possible. As Dana Cairns Watson argues, William James' 'idea that the mind consists of arrangements ... coupled with his assertion that linguistic experience can form these arrangements, suggests that Stein's weird series of words might have the capacity to rearrange the arrangements in our minds' (37). Stein's words, in their ability to alter mental habits through textual experimentation, demonstrate the possible efficacy of language to change people and, in turn, societies (38). In a passage also quoted by Watson, James himself claims,

No mental modification ever occurs which is not accompanied or followed by a bodily change. The ideas and feelings, e.g., which these present printed characters excite in the reader's mind not only occasion movements of his eyes and nascent movements of articulation in him, but will someday make him speak, or take sides in a discussion, or give advice, or choose a book to read, differently from what would have been the case had they never impressed his retina. (*Principles* 5)

In the experience of reading *Tender Buttons*, these material effects which James highlights are made immediately present, as the text achieves an instant impact on the body of the reader. One early reviewer noted the book's provocation of an intense physical response, 'After a hundred lines of this I wish to scream, I wish to burn the book, I am in agony. ... the feeling is purely physical. Some one has applied an egg-beater to my brain' (Anonymous 38-39). This reviewer claims to have reacted to Stein's attempt to 'tear' words 'loose from their meanings', suggesting that restoring movement to words is a physical process which involves the body of the reader.

Stein's work is often met with resistance, classed as 'difficult', as there is 'something about her style that is an impediment to reading' (Cecire 282). But her brand of difficulty differs from that of her modernist contemporaries in that she uses 'mainly small, everyday words' (Spahr 118), which do not require 'expertise' in order to be read, such as is the case with Joyce, Pound and Zukovsky, whose 'writing is governed, in theory at least, by assumptions of exact uses of language', with 'many specific meanings explosively packed into the words' (Perelman 131). *Tender Buttons* is a constantly evolving text, always resistant to definition, enclosure and finality. As Julianna Spahr points out, for all attempts to explicate *Tender Buttons*, 'the deciphering does not hold', suggesting 'that each of these readings feels so provisional to the work as a whole, has to be part of the point', being a book 'always in the process of being read over and over' (113). Spahr's comment recalls what Bernstein describes as the performance of Stein's text, whose meaning 'is not something to be extracted or deciphered but rather to be responded to' (259). The text is made not as a message but as an interactive performance, calling for a response. Following a similar view, Mix argues, 'Stein asks her readers to participate actively in her writing, to create their own meanings in her work', thereby 'actively resisting the drive toward authorial mastery and authoritarianism' (5). Stein can then be read as producing an anti-authoritarian, egalitarian form of difficulty, which advocates readerly

intervention over accurate interpretation. The indeterminacy of Stein's language means that her readers necessarily become 'makers of her texts' (Mix 24). Stein's words produce a direct resistance to cultural authority, and do so by engaging with the matter of readers' bodies.

The physical immediacy of Stein's text extends beyond the sensations that accompany frustration. One of the ways in which Stein engages a physical response is through theatrical performativity, which is made materially present through 'the oral-musical properties of her texts' that 'come most alive in spoken or sung performance' (Retallack 12). The sonic qualities of Stein's text add to its embodied presence for the reader, highlighting the sensory impact of words on the organs of speech. The qualities of orality and aurality resonate through the body, as sound vibrates in the chest, through the breath, and on the teeth, lips and tongue. The text is not a static entity but an activity enacted by the body. It is an event that plays out in space-time in the present-tense encounter of each reading. Stein's 'eroticized, material language' enables 'the experience of rhythm and sound through the body' (Frost 11). An attempt to consume Stein's text is, in parts, an effort of bodily production. For instance, in 'EATING', Stein highlights the quality of speech by breaking words apart into sound components, and through repetition:

Eat ting, eating a grand old man said roof and never never re soluble burst, not a near ring
not a bewildered neck, not really any such bay.

Is it so a noise to be is it a least remain to rest, is it a so old say to be, is it a leading are been.
Is it so, is it so, is it so, is it so is it so is it so.

Eel us eel us with no no pea no pea cool, no pea cool cooler, no pea cooler with a land a land
cost in, with a land cost in stretches.

Eating he heat eating he heat it eating, he heat it heat eating. He heat eating.

A little piece of pay of pay owls owls such as pie, bolsters.

Will leap beat, willie well all. The rest rest oxen occasion occasion to be so purred, so purred
how.

While 'eat ting' and 'near ring' indicate a stilted speech, 'he heat it eating' and 'oxen occasion' extend into a sense of stuttering, where the agencies of the vocal muscles intercept the message the conscious mind wants them to produce. The tongue-tied fragmentation and repetition of sound

throughout this passage makes this poem a mouthful, a mastication of words which play sensually on the tongue. As Catherine R. Stimpson notes, Stein's 'body also enlivens her writings ... For her texts read as if her voice were in them, as if she were speaking and dictating as much as writing' (72). Here, it is also the reader's body that enlivens the text, through the orality and aurality of its combinations of words. This is particularly apparent in the final portion of 'ORANGE IN', which descends into rhythmic repetitions:

A no, a no since, a no since when, a no since when since, a no since when since a no since when since, a no since, a no since when since, a no since, a no, a no since a no since, a no since, a no since. (TB 58)

'A no since' could be 'a nonsense', 'a nuisance', or Ruddick reads it convincingly as 'innocence' ('Rosy' 236), however the most pervasive feature of this segment is not its semantics but its rhythm. The words are punctuated in such a way that they seem to have a syncopated beat. Whether they are read aloud with the vocal apparatus of the body, or silently, visually, the words capture sound beyond the ordinary cadences of spoken English, and become instead an instrument of musicality.

Orality and aurality highlight the nature of the poem as both an object, as shapes recur again and again on the page, and an event, which occurs through the interaction of bodies in the present. Johanna Frank observes that Stein's aurality brings to the poem a temporality of live theatre, in which bodies are present as the 'producers and receptors of sound', such as when 'characters make sudden and corporeal appearances onstage rather than taking shape gradually, as in a novel' (502). This temporality is common to both theatre and music, both of which Stein's text could be said to evoke, as 'music is time made sensually present' (Retallack 13). Stein's orality and aurality bring the reader's body into direct corporeal contact with the matter of culture; as her words scramble the reader's brain, he or she is in a position to re-create meaning in an act of resistance to the habits of mind and conventional truths embedded within language.

Stein's poems produce a felt presence of the bodies of poet, reader, and the objects around each of them. As Poetzsch claims of *Tender Buttons*, 'the text is for Stein a commemoration' of the 'occasion' of perception and 'for readers an invitation both to envision it and, by so doing, perhaps

to *re-envision* the objects scattered every day around us' (950). Like Whitman, Stein's object-portraiture brings the reader into present contact with the object she perceives, but also with the objects around the reader, who sees them anew after the strangeness of the encounters with the objects in the poem, and the ability of Stein's language to recalibrate the brain.

Whitman creates this awareness through *resonance*, which passes significance from one material form to another through synchronous vibration, and is the method by which Whitman brings readers into contact with the 'substantial words' of his body and the things of the earth (1856 322). Bennett argues that by including his own postures or stances within his poetry, such as 'sidecurved head' (1855 15), there can occur a '*mimetic production* of the relevant muscular configuration in the reader's or hearer's body... *imagining* a posture incipiently *enacts* that arrangement of arms, legs, neck, hands, tongue in the reader and auditor' ('Sympathies' 248). Bennett further suggests that through his postures Whitman evokes a kind of 'natural resonance' which registers on the bodies of his readers. 'Side-curved head is the pose one might assume while resonating with the insouciance of inanimate things': With side-curved head one lingers to wonder, is simultaneously attentive and slightly detached – nonchalant ... still enough to take in other bodies', but still participating in the scene ('Sympathies' 246, 247). By modelling physical states, Whitman's poems 'will make things happen in human bodies' ('Sympathies' 248). This includes, but is not limited to, stance. The words of the poem are re-materialised in the body of the reader.

Posture is a way of registering, by resonating with, the 'vibrating' and 'buried' 'speech' of nonhuman things (1855 18), as a 'synchronous vibration' or 'sympathetic response' (OED). Whitman presents a model of embodiment which resonates with the things of the earth, and rather than showing or telling the reader what he sees and hears, he teaches the reader a way to listen, with 'side-curved head', reading 'these leaves' outdoors, while leaning and loafing, as Whitman does, 'observing a spear of summer grass' (1855 15, vi, 13). As the speaker in 'Song of Myself' instructs:

Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems,
You shall possess the good of the earth and sun . . . there are millions of suns left,

You shall no longer take things at second or third hand . . . nor look through the
eyes of the dead . . . nor feed on the spectres in books,
You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,
You shall listen to all sides and filter them from yourself. (1855 14)

The use of the imperative, 'stop', brings an immediacy to this passage, and directly addresses the reader in the moment of reading the poem. This immediacy brings into simultaneity the process of reading with the process of writing. Whitman uses the same technique of direct reference to the reader in 'As a Child Went Forth', as the poem ends with, 'These became part of that child who went forth every day, and / who now goes and will always go forth every day, / And these become of him or her that peruses them now' (1855 91). The transformative momentum of 'wonder or pity or love / or dread' which causes the boy to become his urban, natural and social environment is not absorbed by the boy within the poem, but is passed on to the reader through the poem. In both of these examples, Whitman is creating for the reader a direct engagement with his or her own material world, and a new way of recognising bodily identification with it.

Similarly, Stein's 'A LEAVE', also discussed in Chapter 2, explicitly locates the present-temporality of the writing process in the poem:

A LEAVE.

In the middle of a tiny spot and nearly bare there is a nice thing to say that wrist is leading.
Wrist is leading. (TB 27)

Here is an example of Stein's 'continuous present', whereby the composition is 'beginning again and again', and 'the time of the composition and the time in the composition' is always the present (Stein 'Composition' 5). Every reading of the composition is a re-encounter of the poem in composition. The reader is made present at that moment where Stein's wrist touches the page, and she experiences the sensation that 'wrist is leading', as the ink mark, the 'tiny spot', appears on paper. For both poets, the matter of the written poem is an unfolding of a meaningful event, always with a present temporality, and occurring through the meeting of bodies.

In the cases of both Whitman and Stein, the text produces a communion with readers. By actively encouraging the participation of readers, the meaning of the text is dynamically unfolding. Whitman's speaker does not seek to transmit the truths of the earth 'by print' (1856 324), but to invite the reader to 'lean and loafe' with him on the grass, and 'stop'. And in the act of replicating the speaker's bodily positions, the reader too can resonate with the things of the earth, and receive, possess, and be possessed by, 'the origin of all poems', or, inspiration: the sense of enchantment that flows into the body from engaged interactions with the material environment. Stein's performativity is similarly productive, as her word-objects require a productive form of reading that does not privilege the author as the creator of the text. *Tender Buttons* is always being read over and over, but the readings never seem conclusive, as its meaning shifts with each encounter. Stein's composition is always 'beginning again and again', always in the process of being newly made in the present meeting between bodies. In the case of each poet, the poem, just as the material world with which it engages, is perpetually in process, always creating and creative, dynamic, and incomplete. By insisting on the present-temporality of the event of the poem, Whitman and Stein also insist on the presence of human bodies and their environments as its participants.

In the cases of both Whitman and Stein, the result of their poetry is to facilitate a direct bodily engagement of the reader with the text, and the matter of nature and culture. Through Whitman and Stein's use of language, the reader is brought into a physical connection with the things of nature, the objects in the room, the rhythm of the visible world, democracy and cultural authority. In the case of Whitman, the resonance of the physical world and the poet's inspired response are passed on to the reader by modelling a body that is integrated with its environment. In the case of Stein, the text enacts a performance by which the objects of the physical world are rendered sensually present for the reader, as the poem includes the reader in the moment of perception and the text's composition. For both Whitman and Stein, the text facilitates material and productive exchanges with egalitarian communities of readers. While Whitman foresaw this exchange as improving the health of readers' bodies to build a strong and vibrant nation, which he could not

foresee was about to be torn apart by civil war, Stein's project was to investigate the limits of language's possibilities on the cusp of modernism and World War One.

The effect of the poems' call for a physical response from readers is to demonstrate the participation of the text in a material ecology. The text is not isolable from the physical world as immaterial meaning, and does not function as part of a 'culture' existing in opposition to 'nature'. The text is thoroughly implicated in nature, as it achieves real impacts on bodies, and the way in which they engage with their environment. The site of the body is a central locus for tracing the exchanges between the human individual and the air, water, land, and communities of other bodies, human and nonhuman, which surround it, sustain it, and become it. The physical response that is built into the use of language in the texts of Whitman and Stein examined demonstrates the presence of the text in all these material exchanges which produce both human and environment – that is, in the bodily habitat.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the ways in which Whitman and Stein's poetry engages with the physical world in its creation, reception, and in its very substance. Whitman and Stein directly textualise the continuity of the human self with its physical environment, displaying the self as part of a bodily habitat. Through their vastly divergent poetic techniques, Whitman and Stein contribute innovative and radical ways of demonstrating the non-severability of matter and mind. Chapter 1 explored the way in which Whitman and Stein engage with the object-world through literary techniques that avoid representational strategies such as mimetic description. In so doing, they defeat the oppositions that distinguish subjects from objects and words from things. Chapter 2 discussed the ways in which Whitman and Stein textualise the body, and found that they exhibit the integration of mind and matter, and the formation of consciousness through bodily encounters with their material environments. In this manner, Whitman and Stein challenge the distinction between inside and outside, body and mind. Chapter 3 analysed the ways in which examples of Whitman and Stein's poetry directly impact the reader's body, which serves to challenge the distinction between culture and nature, as the text, a cultural artefact, directly engages with the matter of nature at the site of the human body. Whitman and Stein's encouragement of embodied reading challenges the text's segregation from the material world and foregrounds its participation within a material ecology in which matter moves between bodies.

The poetry examined in this thesis demonstrates the movement of matter from environment to poet, from poet to text, from text to reader, and outward again from the reader's body in infinite possible directions. The impacts on the reader are integrated into the 'networks that are simultaneously economic, political, cultural, scientific, and substantial' with which each human individual is inextricably entangled (Alaimo *Bodily* 20). Through their differing methods of textual experimentation, Whitman and Stein explore the potential of poetic language to bring readers into an awareness of their presence as living bodies in, of, and amongst others: To inhabit the body as 'a

thing amongst things' (Merleau-Ponty 163). The three chapters of this thesis summarise Whitman and Stein's contribution of a poetry of bodily habitat. Here, the body is situated within its environment, but is co-extensive with its external world, and is itself inhabited as a location – a temporary piece of matter to which we stake a claim for the duration of our lives, but is a form which emerges from, and will subsumed back into, the larger physical environment.

There is an ethics inherent in this awareness of the self's continuity with its environment. Stacy Alaimo argues that an examination of the place of the body 'within global networks and systems' is a part of a reconsideration of matter, agency and subjectivity, as 'tracing substantial interchanges renders the human permeable, dissolving the outline of the subject' ('Oceanic' 187). The effect of this reconsideration is that the thinking subject can no longer be understood to be 'ontologically other than matter' (Coole and Frost 8), and matter can no longer be conceived as 'passive, immutable, and mute' (Barad 133), a conception which 'feeds human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption' (Bennett *Vibrant* ix). An increased recognition of the 'thingness' of the self as not outside, but embedded within the matter of the earth, can serve to help see the nonhuman world not as a dumb, passive resource for human consumption, but as a collection of co-inhabitants with their own vitalities. As Alaimo puts it, 'this is a world of fleshy beings, with their own needs, claims and actions' (*Bodily* 2). This reconsideration of Whitman and Stein's poetry contributes to the ecocritical project of generating new worldviews in order to transform human behaviour. Literature, and the way in which it is read, has the ability to alter human worldviews and their accordant actions. Whitman and Stein's poetry of bodily habitat is able to transform readers' perception of their own entanglement with the material world.

This thesis provides an example of how two poets, in two different eras, before the advent of contemporary environmentalism, produced poetic innovations which radically reimagine the Cartesian understanding of the relation of the human individual to its environment. In their differing ways of articulating the integration of the human self within the material world, they anticipate the twenty-first century new materialist understanding of the place of the human as entangled within

material agencies. The conclusion that can be drawn here is that since the Romantic reaction to the post-Enlightenment theories which designated mind and matter as irreparably separate and extricated human consciousness and culture from nonhuman nature, there have appeared examples of poetry which challenge these assumptions. While the Cartesian legacy may still today dominate popular Western thinking, challenges to its underpinning duality have been present since its inception. As Coole and Frost point out, new materialism draws on explorations of 'alternative ontologies, such as that of Spinoza, whose work emerged more or less contemporaneously with Cartesianism in early modernity' yet has remained relatively marginalised until now (Coole and Frost 8). New materialist, material ecocritical and posthumanist discussions can be enriched by an exploration of the history of non-dualistic ontologies and poetry which engages with them.

There is still work to be done in exploring the varying ways in which poetry, through all its diverse incarnations since Romanticism, has produced challenges to Cartesian dualism. In particular, there is a further need for ecocritical examinations of modernist poetry, an undertheorised area within ecocriticism. The rapid material changes that occurred in the early twentieth century: expansions in cities, technologies, mass-production and consumer markets, in addition to the occurrence of world wars, do not simply reflect an increasing alienation of the human from nature, by which nature becomes a marginal or historical figure (Raine 'Ecocriticism' 101). Modernity and modernisation are productive sites for ecocritical enquiry as they demonstrate the ways in which humans produce and alter their environments through cultural and discursive practices, and the changing nature of relations between the human and nonhuman world.

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