

‘Thinking (in)Verse’

Poetic Thought as Dialectics
in Rap and Contemporary
American Poetry

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Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.



Jeremy Page
22 December, 2018

Publication List

As evidence of the status of this thesis as a ‘Thesis by Publication,’ this list of published works, and those currently under review, were all produced during the thesis candidature. These works appear as the thesis chapters in exactly the same form and textual content as the published and submitted articles. The sections of discussion between the chapters are written to link the chapters and articles to the thesis argument, as are the Introduction and the Conclusion.

Chapter One – Page, J. ‘When Poetry and Phenomenology Collide,’ *Journal of Aesthetics and Phenomenology* 5:1 (2018), pp. 31-51.

Chapter Two – Page, J. ‘Flowprints: A Revised Method for Visualising Flow in Rap,’ *Journal of New Music Research*. Online. URL = tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09298215.2018.1516784

Chapter Three – Page, J. ‘Why Reading Sharon Olds Makes You a Better Person,’ *Cordite* 87:1 (2018). Online. URL = cordite.org.au/scholarly/olds-makes-you-a-better-person/

Chapter Four – Under review by *Contemporary Literature*.

Chapter Five – Under review by *Journal of Cognition and Culture*.

Abstract

What does it mean to think poetically? Is thinking something we do separate from artistic creation, or through artistic creation? By drawing together disparate threads in continental philosophy, contemporary American poetry, hip-hop music, and the recent field of cognitive poetics, the thesis argues for an understanding of poetic thought that suggests a (re)introduction of dialectics into the field of poetics.

Submitted as a thesis by publication and comprised of a series of integrated articles, three of which have been published during the candidature (with two currently under review), the work is broken into five discrete sections, each examining different forms of dialectics in a broad scope of contemporary poets and artists. Through its consciously interdisciplinary approach, the research presented entails, firstly, a reexamination of Heidegger's phenomenology in *Being and Time* (1927) in reference to the poetry of Frank O'Hara. The second article outlines the creation of a novel system for musical analysis (what the author calls 'flowprints') in rap. The third article moves to a defence of the ability of certain poetries (such as that of Sharon Olds) to have real world benefits to readers through the promotion of empathy. In the fourth section, the author examines the work of Charles Simic, arguing it should be understood as a poetics of atten(s)ion: an attention to objects in-the-world that enacts the tensions in a phenomenological apprehension of world. Finally, through a consideration of the autobiographical poetry of Charles Bukowski alongside contemporary debates on selfhood, it is argued that poetic thought is able not only to construct biography, but identity.

The thesis ultimately argues that poetic thought is best understood as functioning through ontological, rhythmic, emotional, political, and intersubjective tension. Poetic thought is here conceived as the most human(e) way of thinking, not only because it underscores a fundamental aspect of what it means to be human, but because it promotes and encourages a creative embrace of that nature toward creative ends.

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Introduction

Vague questions often elicit vague answers. *What is poetry? What is thinking? What does it mean, if anything, to think poetically? What can poetic thought achieve?* More audaciously: *What does it mean to be human?* If we attempt to provide answers to these questions, how does the process of answering unfold? We consider the question, *think* about it, think about a response, create a response (perhaps a poetic one), write it on the page. We stop thinking, yet the thoughts remain, there, on the page. No matter what we write, the individual who attempts to answer these questions answers them twice over: the answers are on the page, but they are also somewhere, elusively, in the act of answering itself.

I don't know the answers. But it is my hope that in the process of attempting to answer some of the above rather daunting questions, some answers will begin to be reflected through the act of writing itself. The answers that I will attempt to provide will suggest that what it means to be human is to exist in a state of perpetual tension, and that poetic thought is that kind of thought that underscores, explores and exploits our fundamental contradictions. Accordingly, this thesis will argue that poetic thought is necessarily clustered around dialectics; around points where contradictions, inversions — tensions — come to generate (possible) meaning. The arguments presented here will suggest that by examining linguistic, rhythmic, political and emotional relations, and particularly relations characterised by contradiction, we might shed light on how it is that poetry means, and what it is that distinguishes poetic thought. By drawing together disparate threads in continental philosophy, contemporary American poetry, hip-hop music, and the recent field of (what is usually called) cognitive poetics, this thesis argues for an understanding of poetic thought that relies in part on a (re)introduction of dialectics into the field of poetics.

The introduction begins by outlining a number of broader concepts that will be central to the work — specifically tension, thought and poetic thought — and traces several lines from philosophy and literary theory that underpin the arguments to follow. This is followed by a brief summary of the arguments to be presented in each chapter, which comprise five discrete sections, three of which have been published (and two currently under review) with commentaries after each section intended to trace the common threads of what at times may seem quite disparate lines of argument. The goal in this first section is to broadly situate the conception of poetic thought that will be argued for within larger philosophical discourses, before turning to examine in detail instances of how poetic thought manifests as ontological, rhythmic, emotional, political, and intersubjective tension.

Tension

We humans are structurally made of contradictions,
living peacefully, sometimes painfully, with our
oxymoronic selves.

– David Berliner (2018)¹

Various philosophers have endorsed the view that to be human means to exist in a state of perpetual tension, and most notable for my purposes here are Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Heidegger. For Schopenhauer, to be human is to be defined by a will that constantly oscillates between desire and (dis)satisfaction.² The problem for Schopenhauer is that our desires are always making us gravitate toward objects of desire, but as soon as the object is attained it bores us, and inevitably only gives rise to new desires. As he writes of the will in Volume II of *World as Will and Representation* (1819):

its desires are unlimited, its claims inexhaustible,
and every satisfied desire gives birth to a new one.
No possible satisfaction in the world could suffice
to still its craving, set a final goal to its demands,
and fill the bottomless pit of its heart [...] the
enchantment of distance shows us paradises that
vanish like optical illusions.³

In Schopenhauer's decisively pessimistic view, then, life is a tedious process of drifting between desire and (un)fulfillment, or boredom: the will's 'life swings like a pendulum to and fro between pain and boredom, and these two are in fact its ultimate constituents.'⁴ To be human for Schopenhauer is thus to exist in a state of perpetual tension.

Similarly, for Nietzsche, who was greatly influenced by Schopenhauer,⁵ to be human is to be subject to the 'will to power'; a drive for self-mastery against the constraints of one's surroundings. Nietzsche seems often to posit this will to power as the most fundamental driving force of humanity (and indeed occasionally of all reality). As he writes in *The Will to Power* (1901):

¹ Berliner, D. 'How Our Contradictions Make Us Human and Inspire Creativity,' *Aeon*, December 7, 2016. Online. Accessed January 15, 2018. URL = <https://aeon.co/ideas/how-our-contradictions-make-us-human-and-inspire-creativity>.

² See Norman, J. et al. *Schopenhauer: The World as Will and Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 338.

³ Schopenhauer, A. *The World as Will and Representation*. E.F.J. Payne, trans., (New York: Dover Publications, 1966), 363.

⁴ Norman, J. et al. *Schopenhauer: The World as Will and Representation*, 338.

⁵ Williams, L.L. *Nietzsche's Mirror: The World as Will to Power* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 28.

The following are therefore phenomenal: the injection of the concept of number, the concept of the thing (concept of the subject), the concept of activity (separation of cause from effect), the concept of motion (sight and touch): our eye and our psychology are still part of it.

If we eliminate these additions, no things remain but only dynamic quanta, in a relation of tension to all other dynamic quanta: their essence lies in their relation to all other quanta, in their ‘effect’ upon the same. The will to power not a being, not a becoming, but a *pathos* — the most elemental fact from which a becoming and effecting first emerge.⁶

In this way, for Nietzsche, as for Schopenhauer, the most ‘elemental’ force that underscores the human condition is tension, an opposition between weakness and power, submission and dominance. Put another way, and in a way that may resonate closely with Hegel, the characteristic nature of reality is *flux*: what keeps ‘things’ together is a will to power that maintains relations among and against other things (what Heidegger calls a ‘totality’).⁷ Linda L. Williams (2002) argues for this reading when she states that ‘for Nietzsche, the question may not be “Why do things change?” but “Why do things stay together?”’ She continues:

Nietzsche's answer to this question, of course, would be will to power [...] A ‘thing,’ being a ‘power-constellation,’ is constantly struggling to maintain that constellation in the midst of ‘its’ surrounding forces.⁸

Not only human beings then, but indeed all objects are for Nietzsche defined by their relations, and a will to power that drives toward and facilitates cohesion.

Finally, in *The Origins of the Work of Art* (1993)⁹ Heidegger contends that art, and particularly poetry, has a special role in uncovering a fundamental tension that underlies our being-in-the-world. Specifically, for Heidegger art, and particularly great art, allows us to apprehend the ontological tension between ‘earth’ and ‘world’; that is, between the physical world as it presents itself to us and the worlds that open up in contexts of use, meaning and understanding.¹⁰ It is through our purposive use of ‘equipment’ that is *ready-to-hand* (any object we use toward some end) that humans create (or ‘disclose’) new worlds and as such take part in

⁶ Nietzsche, F. *The Will to Power* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2011), 339.

⁷ Heidegger, M. *Being and Time* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), 97.

⁸ Williams, L.L. *Nietzsche's Mirror*, 58.

⁹ Heidegger, M. and Krell, D.F., ed., *Basic Writings*. Second Edition, Revised and Expanded. (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 139.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 194.

the nature of being (as *Dasein*).¹¹ To the extent that great artworks can, through our dynamic engagement, hold a mirror to our own meaning-making capabilities, they are able to enact the tension between earth and world into which we are always-already thrown in our day to day meaning-making activities. I return at length to these terms in the first chapter. For now, it is enough to note that Heidegger also sees tension at the core of human existence.

The philosophies of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Heidegger clearly vary greatly, however at a broad stroke it can be said that each held that a form of tension, if not contradiction, lies at the core of what it means to be human (if not reality itself). I gloss them here as a cursory view into the strain of thought that underpins much of what will be discussed. To begin to make this a little clearer, it is now necessary to turn to dialectics.

Dialectics

Dialectic is a slippery term: one can get a completely different sense of it depending on whether one is reading Plato¹² or Aristotle,¹³ Kant¹⁴ or Hegel,¹⁵ Marx,¹⁶ Adorno¹⁷ or Russell.¹⁸ The manner in which I wish to use it here has two different, complementary but nonetheless distinct senses. At a broad level, the method of argument that I pursue is largely dialectical in a Hegelian sense. This entails that, contrary to causal (one-way) modes of thinking, the focus here is on dynamic relationships between multiple levels of interaction. As Michael Ryan puts it, in a dialectical approach ‘there is a heightened attention to the ways in which effects flow back and forth between the various entities [...] rather than a focus on one-sided causal explanations.’¹⁹

¹¹ Ibid., 175–199.

¹² The dialectic in its Platonic form is conceived largely in terms of the Socratic dialogue. See Rowe, C. *Plato: Theaetetus and Sophist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), xxiii.

¹³ As D.W. Hamlyn argues, Aristotle’s dialectic ‘proceeds from premises which are accepted on a lesser basis “by everyone or by the majority or by the wise, i.e. by all, or by the majority, or by the most notable and reputable of them” [...] and proceeds deductively from them to further conclusions.’ See Hamlyn, D. W. ‘Aristotle on Dialectic,’ *Philosophy* 65: 254 (1990), pp. 465–476, 465.

¹⁴ For Kant, dialectic is a ‘logic of illusion.’ As Jonathan Bennett writes, ‘in expounding the alleged fault-line running through the faculty of reason, Kant speaks of ‘a natural and inevitable illusion,’ a dialectic which is ‘inseparable from human reason, and which, even after its deceptiveness has been exposed, will [...] continually entrap [reason] into momentary aberrations ever and again calling for correction.’ See Bennett, J. *Kant’s Dialectic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 116.

¹⁵ For a brief consideration of Hegel’s dialectic, see next section.

¹⁶ Where for Hegel, the real world is only ‘the external appearance of the idea’, for Marx’s dialectical materialism the reverse is true: ‘the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought.’ See Marx, K. et al. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (London: Penguin Books Limited, 2004), 175.

¹⁷ For a brief consideration of Adorno’s negative dialectic, see section of this introduction, ‘Adorno’s Dialectic.’

¹⁸ Russell was heavily critical of the dialectic from the position of logic. As Nectarios G. Limnatis explains, ‘though Russell was influenced by Hegel, he later discarded Hegel’s position as based on a series of trivial logical mistakes.’ See Limnatis, N.G. *The Dimensions of Hegel’s Dialectic* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011), 3.

¹⁹ See Ryan, M. ‘Dialectic,’ in Ritzer, G. *Encyclopedia of Social Theory* (London: SAGE Publications, 2004), 200.

The second sense in which I will use the term is as referring to specific instances of tension and contradiction both within and as elicited by the poems and songs I examine. Here I use dialectic as a specific textual phenomenon whereby opposing forces — be they rhythmic, emotional, semantic, sonic, philosophical or ideological — generate a friction pivotal to the creation of (possible) meaning. In order to make both of these senses clearer it is worth a brief digression into Hegel and Adorno, before moving to the matters of thinking and poetic thought.

Hegel's (Fichtean) Dialectic

When attempting to capture what Hegel himself proposed it will be possible only to speak in generalisations and approximations, particularly regarding the dialectic. This is so due to both the complex and often contradictory nature of Hegel's thought, as well as the impenetrably dense nature of his writing, which has led at least one scholar to insist that Hegel himself did not know what he meant.²⁰ As one of the most respected commentators on Hegel, J.N. Findlay (2014), puts it:

the meaning and worth of the Hegelian Dialectic is, in fact, teasingly obscure even to those who have studied Hegel longest and most sympathetically [...] If one starts by thinking Dialectic easy to characterise, one often ends by doubting whether it is a method at all, whether any general account of it can be given, whether it is not simply a name covering any and every of the ways in which Hegel argues.²¹

Slippery as the concept may be, Hegel's dialectic has been enormously influential, and his impact on the Frankfurt School of critical theorists, and particularly his influence on Marxism (in the form of dialectical materialism), cannot be overstated. It is surprising, then, that in the last few decades there has been a steady decline in the scholarly interest in the dialectic, despite interest in Hegel flourishing throughout the same period. As Nectarios G. Limnatis (2011) writes in the introduction to one of the few recent anthologies on Hegel's dialectic,

It is a striking fact that despite the immense and steadily growing Hegel discussion, dialectic is not frequently addressed in the English-speaking world [...] to the best of my knowledge there has been no large-scale examination of Hegel's conception of dialectic in English in the past two decades.²²

²⁰ Nash, R. 'Hegel's Two Schools of Thought.' *Modern Philosophy Podcast*, Ronald Nash, ed., Reformed Theological Seminary. June 22, 2016. Accessed September 15, 2017.

²¹ Findlay, J.N. *Hegel: A Re-Examination* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2014), 143.

²² Limnatis, N.G. *The Dimensions of Hegel's Dialectic*, 3. This is indeed true, though it is worth remembering Terry Pinkard's landmark examination of the dialectic in *Hegel's Dialectic: The Explanation of Possibility* was published some twenty two years earlier. See Pinkard, T. *Hegel's Dialectic: The Explanation of Possibility* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988).

Despite having enormous philosophical and sociopolitical implications over the last century, Hegel's notion of the dialectic has made only occasional ripples within the field of literary studies,²³ and even less within discussions of poetics. Yet Hegel's dialectic lies at the centre of a number of important insights for our understanding of art, and the dialectic is, I will argue, becoming even more compelling in light of recent empirical research in the fields of neuroscience and cognitive poetics. But what is the dialectic?

The dialectic supposes that all human thought — actually, all history — is fraught with contradiction, with tension, with struggle. Early conceptions of the Hegelian dialectic conceived of it as a tripartite separation between thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Though these are Fichte's terms which have often been misattributed to Hegel,²⁴ they are nonetheless a useful shorthand for getting at one important aspect of the dialectic — namely opposition.²⁵ In order to conceptualise or conceive of anything, this version of dialectic supposes that one must first conceive of its opposite, and then negotiate a relationship between the two via a concept that bridges them. In other words, a thesis (concept) transforms itself into (or contains within it) its antithesis, and the two are eventually mediated by a third concept, namely their synthesis. This synthesis then goes on to become a new thesis, and the process starts anew. Accordingly, all of human thought, and all of human history is conceived as a process of inherent contradictions working themselves out — human history is a story of conceptual progress (toward the ultimate Idea, as Hegel has it).²⁶ It is because Hegel understands everything as being ontologically connected that dialectic makes sense as an epistemological tool.

It must be stressed that I am considering the Hegelian dialectic in Fichtean terms — importantly terms that Hegel himself did not use.²⁷ However, though the terminology of thesis/antithesis/synthesis has been discredited from originating in Hegel, it nonetheless succinctly captures an element of his thought. Accordingly, as Julie Maybee notes, 'versions of

²³ For interesting examples see Habib, M. *Hegel's Aesthetics and their Influence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Kukla, R. 'Reading Literature after Hegel,' *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 12:4 (1998), pp. 245-254 and Smith, J. 'U-Topian Hegel: Dialectic and Its Other in Poststructuralism,' *The German Quarterly* 60:2 (1987), pp. 237-261.

²⁴ See Mueller, G. 'The Hegel Legend of "Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis."' *Journal of the History of Ideas* 19:3 (1958), pp. 411-414, 411.

²⁵ As William Desmond argues in *The Intimate Strangeness of Being* (2012), 'Hegel offers no static formalisation of thesis, antithesis, synthesis (now recognised by scholars to be attributed to Fichte, more properly speaking). The passing of opposites into opposites is more nuanced. Nor is contradiction to be denied; it rather assumes an enhanced role as a way to truth. All of being will be said to be dialectical: nature, history, God. Hegel will claim to articulate the logical necessity in all this. He will offer dialectic as articulating the logic of the whole, the logos of the whole.' See Desmond, W. *The Intimate Strangeness of Being: Metaphysics After Dialectic* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 17.

²⁶ See Solomon, R.C. *Continental Philosophy Since 1750: The Rise and Fall of the Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 62.

²⁷ A fair consideration of the Hegelian dialectic would require a digression beyond the scope of these introductory remarks.

this interpretation of Hegel's dialectics continue to have currency.²⁸ Since my central concern is a consideration of dialectics in literature rather than on Hegel's thought *per se*, this is the version I will use when referring to the Hegelian dialectic — with the caveat that it is of a Fichtean bent.

To complicate matters slightly, there are at least two ways in which we might defend this version of the dialectic. The first is to defend it on instrumental grounds, which is to say that we can defend the dialectic as useful; a tool for understanding art (or history or whatever else). We might call this the *pragmatic* argument. Another, perhaps more difficult to defend and certainly more contentious view of the dialectic might assert that the dialectic is helpful precisely because it captures something *true* about reality; that is, the nature of reality (or the nature of the human condition) is one of tension and contradiction. We might call this the *ontological* argument for dialectic. I wish to make both arguments in defence of Hegel's dialectic: through an examination of dialectics (as literary phenomena) in contemporary American poetry and rap, I suggest that Hegel's dialectic is helpful in uncovering our fundamental contradictions and, in so doing, helpful in explaining the ubiquity and strength of verse that exploits them. Before I can begin to argue this, however, the concept of dialectic requires some further unpacking. Having seen very briefly how Hegel conceives of dialectic, we can now begin to contrast how Adorno employs the term, before proceeding toward the issue of cognition, of art as thought.

Adorno's Dialectic

Throughout *Negative Dialectics* (1966),²⁹ Adorno reconceives the Hegelian dialectic in negative terms, and begins to use the term in a rather different way than did Hegel. As Simon Jarvis (1998) notes, for Adorno the concept of dialectic concerns the status of truth; the overlap between metaphysics and epistemology.³⁰ Following from Hegel, Adorno delineates two modalities of truth stemming from competing possible truth values latent in the term 'is.' Borrowing Hegel's example in *Encyclopaedia Logic* (1817),³¹ Adorno notes that when we say 'the rose is red,' we highlight a problem of identity classification: by 'the rose is red' we cannot mean that this rose and redness are the same thing, rather, we mean that redness is one of the attributes of the rose (of which it has countless others); the two overlap only at the periphery. As Hegel puts it, 'the subject and predicate in the immediate judgement touch, as it were, only in a

²⁸ Maybee, J. and Zalta, E.N., ed., 'Hegel's Dialectic,' in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition). Online. Accessed July 2, 2017. URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/hegel-dialectics>.

²⁹ Adorno, T.W. *Negative Dialectics* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1973).

³⁰ Jarvis, S. *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 141.

³¹ Hegel, G.W.F. et al. *The Encyclopaedia Logic, Part I of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1991).

single point, but do not cover each other.³² In this sense, while the statement is ‘correct’, it cannot be fully ‘true,’ as Jarvis notes, ‘because its correctness depends upon an interpretation of the copula ‘is’ which arbitrarily excludes one of its senses.’³³

We have, then, two ways of thinking here, depending on how we construe the concept ‘is.’ The first is what Adorno refers to as ‘identity’ (or, occasionally, ‘classificatory’) thinking, being precisely this way of defining objects via their qualities. Identity thinking suggests that if we exhaust the rose’s qualities with correct statements of the form ‘the rose is x’ — if we exhaust all of its qualities, the sum total of these correct statements represent the truth; the essence of the rose. Adorno contrasts this thinking of what an object is *like* with dialectical thinking, which aims to address what an object actually *is*. For Adorno, dialectic at its starting point ‘marks the insufficiency of correspondence models of truth’³⁴ (i.e. identity thinking), since such models always circumscribe concepts via predicates, their (often arbitrary) qualities and characteristics. It is in this way that dialectics is always negative for Adorno, since it points to the incompatibility and also, paradoxically, the inextricability of identity and dialectical thinking.

Unless otherwise stated, when referring to dialectics throughout I should be understood as meaning it in the Hegelian rather than the Adornian, negative sense. The aim here is not to uncover truth in the form of essences, what ontologically *is*, but rather through an examination of dynamic relationships uncover the process by which (possible) meaning comes into being; the emphasis here, in Hegelian/Fichtean terms, is becoming (synthesis), rather than merely being (thesis) or nothingness (antithesis).³⁵

A final aspect of a dialectical approach worth mentioning here is that, unlike many other approaches, particularly in the physical sciences, a dialectical approach embraces and is guided by values. The claims made throughout this thesis are both descriptive and normative — not only arguing for what *is* in the texts but what should be seen in the texts and the effects/affects we not only do but should encourage ourselves to see. As Michael Ryan writes,

Another aspect of dialectical logic, and Marxism more generally, that sets it apart from many other modes of analysis, especially a Weberian approach, is a belief that values should be an integral component of any research endeavour. [...] Marx did not believe that it was

³² Quoted in Jarvis, S. *Adorno: A Critical Introduction*, 165.

³³ *Ibid.*, 165.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 166.

³⁵ Mueller, G. 'The Hegel Legend of "Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis,"' 411.

desirable, or even possible, to separate values or his own personal feelings from his work.³⁶

With this in mind, the analyses that are to come will likewise be guided by my own values, which are guided by the values of a Western education. I will stress the positive practical implications of certain poetries to promote empathy, as well as defending the idea that poetry comprises one aspect of the extended self. Though my discussions analyse (and so in a sense endorse) music that contains offensive lyrics, as well as work by a poet often charged with misogyny, the goal is to trace the redemptive qualities of poetic thought.

Armed now with a rough idea of what we are dealing with in engaging dialectics, I can now consider some of the ways in which *thinking* has been conceived. I continue firstly with Adorno, before examining some alternative views as offered by Simon Jarvis and Heidegger. I then position my own conception of thought as combining some aspects of each, with an emphasis on Hegel's dialectic. After establishing how we might consider thinking, we can then move toward a thorough delineation of how poetic thinking occurs through rap music and contemporary American poetry.

Thought (The Traditional View)

The traditional way of conceiving of thinking is as necessarily a process engaged in by a human subject. Objects cannot think; we can. This view of subjectivity as separate from objectivity derives ultimately from Cartesian dualism, and persisted all the way through to the intentionality of Husserl until it was later challenged (to put it mildly) by Heidegger. As Hubert Dreyfus (1991) neatly summarises:

The traditional view of practice, from Descartes on at least, is representational. Contemporary philosophers such as John Searle and Donald Davidson, who do not agree on much, do agree that action must be explained in terms of beliefs and desires, that is, mental states causing bodily movements. Heidegger's attempt to break out of the tradition is focused in his attempt to get beyond the subject/object distinction in all domains [...]³⁷

As applied to art, this view decisively polarises the audience from the artwork, with thought becoming merely subjective projection over an object. Someone may think 'through' an artwork,

³⁶ See Ryan, M. 'Dialectic,' in Ritzer, G. *Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, 200.

³⁷ Dreyfus, H. *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 49.

which is to say artworks become a mediator for the artist and the audience's thinking processes, but the thinking itself happens by the human subject. On this view, artist and artwork constitute an inextricable whole, so that where thinking is present the artist is also present, and any thinking that occurs outside of this can only be on the part of the audience. As an audience, we can consider artists and their works in isolation, but it is *us* who thinks. Figure 1 roughly represents this traditional view of how thinking as subjectivity may occur in and around art:

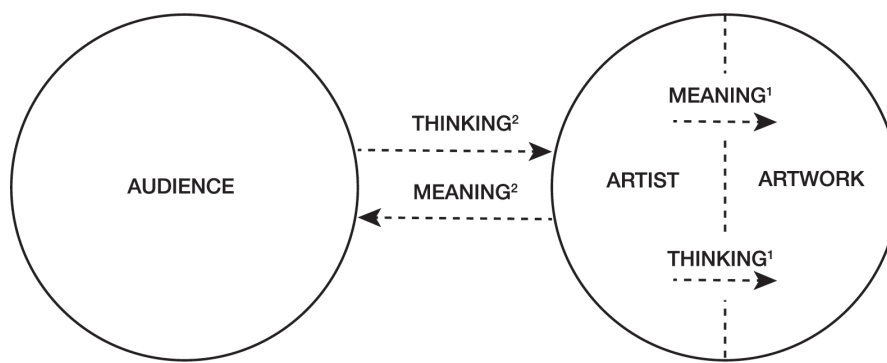


Figure 1: The Traditional View of Thinking as Subjectivity

This view of thought, however, has gradually been recrafted as it fails to account for the complex interplay between not only subjects and objects (the interrelation of *Dasein*, for Heidegger),³⁸ but for the thought content of artworks that at times seems to transcend both artists and audiences.

Poetic Thought

The importance of listening, then, is driven home in Wordsworth's poem, while the relation between rhyme and repetition is also essential to the notion of 'the inward ear' as it is put into practice. But, given the significance of listening, what is it that a poem 'listens' to? The formal feature of rhyme here provides its own answer, for any rhymed poem must perforce listen to itself, and be alert to the 'rebounds' that rhyme creates.

– Peter McDonald (2012)³⁹

Can a poem listen to itself? Or read itself? Can a song listen to itself? Or a sculpture feel itself? Is it possible that Peter McDonald can mean the above in any sense other than metaphorically, or with a very stretched meaning of the word listen? This conception of poetry (and often other art forms) as capable of thought — as *performing* rather than merely eliciting thought—has sprung

³⁸ Ibid., 52.

³⁹ McDonald, P. *Sound Intentions: The Workings of Rhyme in Nineteenth-Century Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 46.

up in a number of disciplines. Simon Jarvis, for instance, has been arguing for some time now that poetry can both think and, when it thinks well, know.⁴⁰ Adorno conceives of art as thinking, specifically through technique,⁴¹ while Mary Louise Serafine (1988) argues persuasively for music as a method of cognition.⁴² Artworks, these theorists propose, do not (only) engender or inspire thought, but think themselves, when our backs are turned.

This quite recent consideration of artworks as thinkers dovetails with long-running debates regarding artworks as knowers, debates regarding the relationship of art with truth that go back to at least Plato, and which have engaged philosophers and literary theorists from Aristotle to Auerbach, Platonists to Poststructuralists. The question in this case is whether artworks have, or should be thought to have, some access to fundamental truths about the nature of human consciousness and experience. Can art, in other words, offer us knowledge we can't attain through the methods of science?

Adorno's Poetic Thought

Throughout *Aesthetic Theory* (1970),⁴³ Adorno argues at length and in various ways for the possibilities of art as a social, philosophical and political tool. As a starting point, how is it that Adorno supposes that art can be considered cognitive? This idea rests on what he refers to as the 'language-character' of art, which refers to its excesses of meaning. This comes in two forms. The first is the excess of meaning over the artist's intention. Since what is meant (or taken to be meant) by any artwork is always in excess of, or at least not identical with, the artist's intention, there is an overflow of meaning in every artwork that necessarily exceeds the artist. The second aspect of language-character is that works of art are always more than the sum total of their parts, since form dictates meaning over and above (or beneath and below) content. Any line in a poem does not mean in itself, but means also by virtue of where in the poem it sits, and so meaning is always greater than the sum of its parts. These two facts together—the excess of art beyond both authorial intention and its constitutive parts—comprise what Adorno calls that language-character of artworks, and this is what gives them their cognitive character. If we are to visualise this in a diagram, the thinking that is taking place is then the conceptual content between two excesses: between the artwork and the artist and between meaning and the artwork itself, thus:

⁴⁰ Jarvis, S. 'Why Rhyme Pleases,' *Thinking Verse 1* (2011), pp. 17-43.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴² Serafine, M.L. *Music as Cognition: The Development of Thought in Sound* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

⁴³ Adorno, T.W. *Aesthetic Theory* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

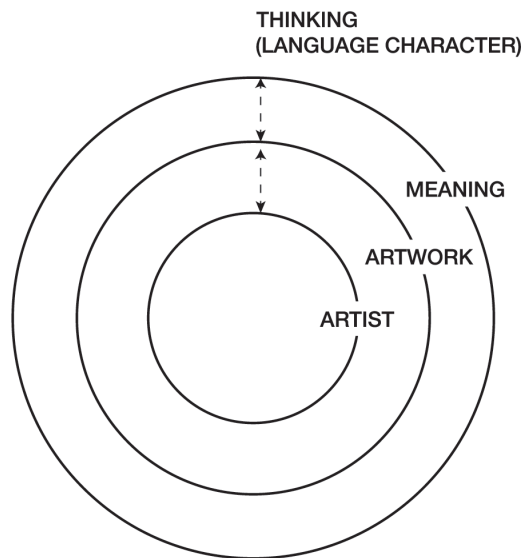


Figure 2: Thinking as Language-Character

Note that thinking here is occurring quite outside the artist—thinking as language-character occurs between the artwork’s constitutive parts and its possible meanings (through its form-driven potentials) and between the artwork’s excesses of meaning over and above the artist’s intention. The artwork, here, lies at the centre of processes of thought, not the artist.

Importantly, Adorno draws on the Platonic tradition of seeing art as mimesis,⁴⁴ but then draws a direct line from its mimetic core to its rationality. He writes:

the continued existence of mimesis, understood as the non-conceptual affinity of a subjective creation with its objective and unposited other, defines art as a form of cognition and to that extent as ‘rational.’⁴⁵

This is what Adorno sees as the core dialectic of art, a contradiction between its mimetic function and its rationality. For Adorno, and as he and Max Horkheimer detail at length in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944),⁴⁶ rationality necessarily implies conceptual progress. This is so because reason is that which is supposed to overcome ignorance and so lead to mastery of ourselves and our environments (*Sapere Aude* — ‘Dare to Know’ — as Kant has it).⁴⁷ Insofar as art is rational it is for Adorno inherently bound with ideals of progress. However, as noted, art is, in the other direction, inherently mimetic, it represents (or strives to represent), reflects and reconceives the world around us. Since aspects of reality must be fixed in order to be represented, mimesis relies

⁴⁴ Kearney, R. *Routledge History of Philosophy Volume VIII: Twentieth Century Continental Philosophy* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2003), 226.

⁴⁵ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 226.

⁴⁶ Horkheimer, M and T. Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

⁴⁷ Kant, I. *An Answer to the Question: 'What Is Enlightenment?'* (London: Penguin Books Limited, 2013).

on stasis, while all acts of representation further fix reality. Accordingly, art simultaneously pulls toward progress and stasis. It is, in other words, inherently dialectical. As Adorno puts it:

The aporia of art, pulled between regression to literal magic or surrender of the mimetic impulse to thinglike rationality, dictates its law of motion; the aporia cannot be eliminated. The depth of the process, which every artwork is, is excavated by the unreconcilability of these elements; it must be imported into the idea of art as an image of reconciliation.⁴⁸

It is precisely in this contradiction that Adorno sees art as the antidote to reification — the process by which the subject is objectified and the object subjectified⁴⁹ — even as it must function through processes of reification in order to grasp at the ungraspable of what lies beneath language and subjective experience. As Thijs Lister explains in *The Spell of Capital* (2017):

[...] the aesthetic experience is exemplary for what a full experience might be in a society that is not dominated by functional relationships. Such a mode of relating to objects has an eye for the meaning inherent in the object itself, beyond the meaning the subject projects on it.⁵⁰

I return to these concepts at length in the fourth chapter in order to examine more closely how this functions through the poetry of Charles Simic. Having broadly considered Adorno's conception of language-character and its grounding of the cognitive character of art, we can now move to a philosopher with whom Adorno spent much of his time arguing against, Heidegger, and specifically Heidegger's essay *What is Called Thinking?* (1954).⁵¹

Heidegger's Poetic Thought

In *What is Called Thinking?* Heidegger argues that in our technological age we are no longer thinking, in the right sense of the word, since our thought is no longer reflexive and self-critical regarding that which such thinking is aimed toward. Heidegger traces the etymology of thinking from the Greek *legein* to the Latin *ratio* and argues that in this historic translation from the former to the latter something fundamental to thought was lost.⁵² As Brent Dean Robbins (2014) notes, Heidegger finds that in the translation from *legein* to *ratio* two crucial significations

⁴⁸ Adorno, T.W. *Aesthetic Theory* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 137.

⁴⁹ Honneth, A. *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 22.

⁵⁰ Gandesha, S. and J.F. Hartle. *The Spell of Capital: Reification and Spectacle* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 63.

⁵¹ Heidegger, M. *What Is Called Thinking?* (New York: Harper Collins, 1976).

⁵² *Ibid.*, 178-180.

for the term are lost: firstly, thinking as speaking and, secondly, thinking as gathering.⁵³ For Heidegger, thinking is importantly an act of engagement, one that occurs as a process and can happen through language, objects and artworks.

In Heidegger the artwork has two dimensions to its function. At once it both has the phenomenological aspect — the for-me-ness of the artwork, the artwork in use — but it also simultaneously gives glimpses of its ‘thingliness.’ The poem phenomenologically unlocks a wealth of potentiality in meaning, but the poem points also to its raw material. The question of how the poem comes to mean as what I term *environment-at-hand* is interrogated in the first chapter. The important point to note here is that for Heidegger thinking is not an abstract process, but rather is the unfolding of thought through engagement in and with the world. As Timothy Clark (2002) writes, Heidegger ‘tries to carry us toward that point at which the poetic words would become no longer just objects of our thinking but that through which we think.’⁵⁴ Rational thought, Heidegger suggests, presupposes a progression from *a* to *b*, and an attempt to ascertain the most reasonable route from which to make that movement. However, what *a* and *b* are; that is, the content rather than the form of thought, is not brought into question. Thus, for Heidegger, thought as rationality is inherently irrational (and even amoral), since it thinks for its own sake and produces systems for producing systems *ad infinitum*.

The importance of this kind of thinking through art is as an antidote to what Heidegger terms enframing or *Gestell*, referring to our modern, technological world-view in which we essentially order for the mere sake of further ordering. As Robbins highlights, Heidegger views our technological age as ‘the epoch of the *Gestell*.’⁵⁵ In this epoch, ‘thinking has become the experience of using rationality as a device to operate on a world of things.’⁵⁶ As he writes in ‘The Question Concerning Technology,’ ‘above all, enframing conceals that revealing which, in the sense of *poiesis*, lets what presences come forth into appearance.’⁵⁷ It is great artworks for Heidegger, as for Adorno (and at points for Hegel), that have the capacity to transcend this instrumental rationality and as such are antithetical to *Gestell*.

How, then, might we move toward rescuing thought? For Heidegger the most important thing to think about is *what it is we are thinking about*, and the answer to that is that we are not thinking about thought. What we require is a fundamental shift from *ratio* back to(ward) *legein*

⁵³ Robbins, B. ‘Joyful Thinking-Thanking: A Reading of Heidegger’s “What Is Called Thinking?”’ *Janus Head*, 13:23 (2014), pp. 13-21, 15.

⁵⁴ Clark, T. *Martin Heidegger* (London: Routledge, 2002).

⁵⁵ Robbins, ‘Joyful Thinking-Thanking,’ 14.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵⁷ Heidegger, M. and D.F. Krell. *Basic Writings*, 332.

— bringing thinking back to engagement. In this vein, Heidegger suggests that ‘we must learn thinking.’⁵⁸ *Prima facie*, this reads as ‘we must learn [what] thinking [is].’ But the two are not the same. Acquiring the knowledge of what it means to think is not the same as learning what thinking is. Consider, for example, learning to swim. When at the edge of a pool watching other children, a child learns what it means to swim before s/he learns what swimming is. In the act of swimming the child *learns* and *swims* and thus learns what swimming is. Heidegger is not suggesting we learn [how to] think, nor is he suggesting we learn [what] thinking [is]. We must rather learn *by* thinking, learn *through* thinking, which may not lead to the (full) understanding of what it means to think or what it means to learn (which is different from how to think, as the swimmer shows) but is a practice, an exercise in and toward both. To this end — the end of exercising our capacity for thought — art for Heidegger becomes indispensable to countering *Gestell*. Where Adorno sees a capacity for art to think as manifestations of excesses of meaning, Heidegger sees it as a tool for thinking through, a process which simultaneously highlights its ontological autonomy, its raw materiality.

Simon Jarvis

Over the last decade or so, Simon Jarvis has written a number of papers that directly address Hegelian dialectics, the nature of consciousness, music, poetry, phenomenology and cognitive poetics. Such articles include, but are not limited to, ‘Prosody as Cognition’ (1998),⁵⁹ ‘Musical Thinking: Hegel and the Phenomenology of Prosody’ (2005),⁶⁰ ‘Thinking in Verse’ (2008, from which I have adapted and revised the title of this thesis),⁶¹ ‘What Does Art Know’ (2009),⁶² ‘Why Rhyme Pleases’ (2011)⁶³ and ‘Superversive Poetics: Browning’s *Fifine at the Fair*’ (2016).⁶⁴ Jarvis argues throughout these works that we should understand poetry as both being able to think and being able to *know*, including knowing things we do not. There are several ways in which he argues these points, with each resting on a rather particular conception of knowledge and thought.

In his article ‘What Does Art Know?’ (2009) Jarvis reintroduces Adorno’s conception of identificatory thinking from *Negative Dialectics* (1966), where Adorno suggests that there can

⁵⁸ Heidegger, M. *What Is Called Thinking?*, 17.

⁵⁹ Jarvis, S. ‘Prosody as Cognition,’ *Critical Quarterly* 40:4 (1998), pp. 3-15.

⁶⁰ Jarvis, S. ‘Musical Thinking: Hegel and the Phenomenology of Prosody,’ *Paragraph* 28:2 (2005), pp. 57-71.

⁶¹ Jarvis, S. ‘Thinking in Verse’, in Hawes, D. ‘The Cambridge Companion to British Romantic Poetry.’ *Reference Reviews* 23:4 (2009), pp. 22-23.

⁶² Jarvis, S. ‘What Does Art Know?’ in De Bolla, P. and S.H. Uhlig. *Aesthetics and the Work of Art: Adorno, Kafka, Richter* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

⁶³ Simon J. ‘Why Rhyme Pleases.’

⁶⁴ Jarvis, S. ‘Superversive Poetics: Browning’s *Fifine at the Fair*,’ *Modern Language Quarterly* 77:1 (2016), pp. 121-141.

never be a perfect correspondence between a proposition and a state of affairs and that, accordingly, truth is better understood as an ‘affinity’ between concepts and reality (or signifiers and signs).⁶⁵ Here Adorno distinguishes, as we have seen, between two types of thinking, identificatory thinking and dialectical thinking, and implies that only the latter can lead to knowledge.⁶⁶ ‘Identificatory thinking,’ according to Jarvis, ‘says what an object comes under, of what it is an instance or an example, whereas dialectical thinking tries to say what it is, by saying what it is like.’⁶⁷ Accordingly, to know something is to know what it is like. Herein lies the germination of the idea that art can itself know, by enacting a mimetic instantiation of likeness through its materiality. For Jarvis, materiality is essential to the way that art can think and know. Here Jarvis uses the metaphor of a gift, stating that ‘the truth-content of works of art is not propositional truth [...] waiting to be unpacked when the (merely technical) wrapping is taken off.’⁶⁸ Rather, for Adorno, and for Jarvis, the wrapping *is* the message — as Jarvis summarises it, for Adorno ‘technique is how art thinks.’⁶⁹

A major implication of this view is that aspects of the artwork that are outside the artist, outside their knowledge, their concern, their time (such as past influences), and so forth — everything exterior to the knowledge of the artist in their creation of the work — can be seen as nonetheless *interior* to the work and so to the process of thought. As Jarvis puts it, ‘the artist’s thinking is not all his own work.’⁷⁰ This simultaneously decentralises authorial intention as a key to meaning while also destabilising the artwork as a fixed entity. Paradoxically, then, autonomy for the artwork is afforded through pluralising its constitutive materiality, through recognising that it is both a text and a multiplicity of texts. For Jarvis, the offshoot of all this is that poetry *itself* thinks, and that it does so in excess of the poet, as he puts it, at ‘the very threshold of intentionality.’⁷¹ Jarvis writes that

while it is quite certainly the case that a ‘text’, should there be any such, could think nothing at all, it still makes sense to say that the poem thinks. The thinking is not all the poet’s own work, because since the thinking that happens in a poem is by no means a matter of the sum total of meanings intended in a text, but is rather a matter of everything which the poet ‘cares’ about [...] ⁷²

⁶⁵ Jarvis, ‘What Does Art Know?’ 63.

⁶⁶ I write ‘implies’ because Jarvis does not state this specifically, but it seems to be the necessary implication of his argument.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*, 69.

Here the distinction between care and intention becomes pivotal for Jarvis, with care denoting those aspects of a poem that the poet is concerned about but are not necessarily sites of deliberate meaning. Sites of care but not intention may thus include everything from the banal, such as the typeface or ink or paper used, to the incidental sites of textual meaning. Jarvis' point here is to shift the conception of art from static objects to dynamic processes, as they are in Heidegger. Accordingly, he suggests that works of art, 'instead of being [...] containers for propositional intentions, or 'marks', sheer stuff, are cognitive artefacts.'⁷³ Since artworks are thus manifestations of thought in excess of their artists, Jarvis can make the bold claim that 'works of art know something we do not.'⁷⁴

On this point Michael Kelly (2017) has been particularly critical, suggesting that moving agency from the poet to the poem is indefensible via the notion of care. He writes:

[...] even if we should not interpret a poem in terms of the poet's intentions, at least not if they are understood in purely subjective terms, that does not imply that poetry does the thinking instead of a poet. To account for what determines any thinking that is taking place in poetry beyond such intentions, do we really need to say that the poem is the agent? After all, isn't the point of Jarvis' own materialism to account for poetic thinking by looking outside the poem to, say, what the poet 'cares' about?⁷⁵

For Kelly, Jarvis goes too far in distancing agency from the poet. On the one hand Jarvis argues, with Adorno, that the poem itself thinks by virtue of the fact it necessarily exceeds whatever the poet can bring to it, while on the other hand he argues that the thinking that happens 'is a matter of everything which the poet cares about,' seemingly retracting the autonomy of the artwork he has been arguing for all along. The problem might be that Jarvis does not go far enough in distancing the poem from the poet, because he puts too much stock in the notion of care. This seems to conflate the distinct excesses of meaning that Adorno takes care to delineate, and I believe needs to be replaced by a framework that puts more stock in the autonomy of the artwork, and more emphasis on dialectics as a site of meaning. As will be demonstrated in the chapters that follow, poetry and (rap) music are distillations of our inherent tensions and contradictions, and as such are potentialities of cognition, of *thinking through* art (as Jarvis suspects, albeit in a different way).

⁷³ Ibid., 60.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 60.

⁷⁵ Kelly, M. 'Aesthetics and the Work of Art: Adorno, Kafka, Richter (Review),' *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* (2009), University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Online. Accessed June 3, 2017. URL = <https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/aesthetics-and-the-work-of-art-adorno-kafka-richter/>,

Structure

The discussion to this point has focused on the broad question of how thought relates to, or functions through, art. At the broadest level, this is the core question this thesis seeks to address, specifically in the case of poetry. Given the multifariousness of this question, examining it will require approaching it from a number of angles, breaking pieces of the question off to examine in isolation. Having some of the larger aspects of this question on the table, the discussion can now move from an outline of a hypothesis to a consideration of the evidence we have to believe it. If Hegel is right when he suggests that contradiction underpins the human condition, which I believe he is, distillations of contradiction that appear in art may show us something about what it is like to be human. I will argue that thinking is what makes us human, as the unpopular Cartesian view suggests,⁷⁶ but not thinking as instrumental rationality but as experience underpinned by dialectics. Poetic thought, I suggest, may then be understood as the most characteristically human(e) way of thinking; poetry attains its philosophical, emotional and political weight because it connects us most viscerally to an experience of our inherent tension in and with the world; our situatedness on the cusp of perpetual transition.

Justifying these claims will entail approaching dialectics from a number of angles, and through the lens of a number of different disciplines, including cognitive poetics, phenomenology, theories of emotion, sociology and more. As a way of investigating the manifestations of art as thought — as lived dialectic — I take two in some ways rather different and in some ways rather similar art forms — rap music and contemporary American poetry, and analyse the manifestations of dialectic within. The work is broken into five discrete sections that each deals with a different manifestation of poetic thought as ontological, rhythmic, emotional, intersubjective and political tension. Throughout each chapter I employ ostensibly outdated philosophies to generate new avenues for research, as well as using new poetics to reexamine prematurely jettisoned philosophical ideas.

In the first chapter the poetry of Frank O'Hara is examined for what it can contribute to Heidegger's phenomenology and dismantling of aesthetics. Specifically, I argue that O'Hara's poetry presents a problem for Heidegger's tripartite ontology of substances, equipment and Dasein, and that a further piece must be added to the puzzle; a piece I call the *environment-at-hand*. Here the dialectical relationship between earth and world is seen as (perhaps uniquely) accessible by poetry, and poetic thought accordingly as being that which illuminates the tension that underlies our being-in-the-world.

⁷⁶ Descartes, R. *Discourse on the Method: Of Rightly Conducting One's Reason and of Seeking Truth in the Sciences* (Portland: Floating Press, 2009), 56.

In the second chapter I move to a completely different genre and medium to consider flow in rap music, and manifestations of tension in rhythm, rhyme and sound. In this section, and as a matter of necessity for my aims, I develop a novel system for empirically studying and diagrammatically representing flow in rap, which I call *flowprints*. Following a detailed outline of the need, the functionality and the potential benefits of the system, I then employ the technique to analyse flow in a selection of works by rap artist Kendrick Lamar.

Throughout the flowprint analysis, I illustrate that flow in rap is centred around rhyme patterns being ‘bent’ around central pivot points demarcated by the drumbeat of backing instrumentation. As such, flow should be understood as a dialectic of rhythm; a tension that has to be navigated to create stylistic consistencies across a rapper’s work in order to create their own flow. I argue that an examination of rap and specifically of rhythm brings to light one possibility of poetic thought as aural cognition. The recorded sound is not expressive of poetic thought; it *is* poetic thought (as the navigation of rhythmic tension). Just as the first chapter works against the subject/object divide of traditional aesthetics, here the argument seeks to work against the almost solipsistic internal contemplation/external expression divide that keeps us conceiving of ‘thought’ as something internal and private (and so largely inaccessible).

The third chapter moves to consider Sharon Olds’ Pulitzer Prize-winning collection *Stag’s Leap* (2012).⁷⁷ Here I argue that in the past fifty years, universality as applied to the lyric ‘I’ has been almost universally condemned. Critics of confessional poetry often dismiss the lyric subject as being self-absorbed, while (post)postmodern critics dismiss universal subjects as (at best) impossible and (at worst) deeply unethical. Against such claims, I argue that there is a sense in which we might revive one notion of universals, and it comes in the form of Sharon Olds’ poetry. This is a poetry that exploits and inverts systems of appraisal and valence that are hardwired into our biological makeup. Using *Stag’s Leap* as a case study, I argue that emotion in Olds’ poetry functions as dialectical meta-emotion, which creates a short-circuiting of aesthetic appraisal and cognitive affect. In so doing, the poetry promotes an ability for readers to experience dialectical meta-emotion in the real world, making us more empathetic, and in a small way, better people.

In the fourth chapter I examine the work of the Frankfurt School philosophers, particularly Axel Honneth and his theories on reification; the theory that modernity commodifies subjectivity while subjectifying commodities. Various philosophers, such as Debord, Marcuse, Honneth, Habermas and others have argued at various points (and in various ways), that hypermodernity has a specifically dehumanising effect. The increased saturation of society in virtual technologies,

⁷⁷ Olds, S. *Stag’s Leap* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013).

social media, automated and technologised consumer service, increasingly virtual workplaces and ongoing globalisation in the economic, social and academic fields has led (and continues to lead) to the disembodiment, the deindividualisation and the replaceability (in short, the reification) of the modern citizen. I argue here that poetry, as exemplified by Charles Simic, works to reverse this process; that poetry is a specifically (and necessarily) unreifying art form, by which humanity (as inherent, internal contradiction) is foregrounded and legitimised.

In the fifth chapter I discuss theories of selfhood, and argue for truth in the cliché that artists are able, in a real sense, to ‘live on’ in their work. I discuss Daniel Dennett (1991), who has argued that the self is a ‘theorist’s fiction’, a narrative self that is spun from the brain and functions like a ‘centre of gravity’; an abstraction that is ‘supremely useful’, even if an ontological fiction.⁷⁸ Various theorists, including Priscilla Brandon (2016),⁷⁹ Richard Menary (2008)⁸⁰ and Lynne Rudder Baker (2016)⁸¹ have retorted that both embodiment and a first-person ownership — a ‘mineness’ in Brandon’s terms⁸² — are both necessary for and prior to such a narrative self. I argue here that the poetic self that is constructed in autobiographical poetry problematises both of these accounts, illuminating what I see as the possibility for (and indeed ultimate necessity of) self-detachment; the point at which the self loses its centre of gravity, its embodiment and its ‘mineness,’ without itself evaporating. Through a consideration of the autobiographical poetry of Charles Bukowski, I argue that poetic thought is able not only to construct biography, but identity.

This initial discussion has served to introduce a number of the key thinkers and broad philosophies that will be engaged with throughout what follows. I have suggested that through each chapter textual analysis will suggest that poetic thought operates through the navigation of dialectics, and that poetic thought is that kind of thought that underscores, explores and exploits our fundamental contradictions. Given the breadth of this claim, defending it will require approaching poetic thought from a number of angles, as ontological, rhythmic, emotional, political, and intersubjective tension. Since the arguments presented in each chapter from this point will proceed down various discrete paths, after each chapter I will return to the larger discourses that have been introduced here, and attempt to draw together the implications of the textual analyses provided, as well as how they might hang together. With a rough sense of the

⁷⁸ Dennett, D.C. *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991), 416.

⁷⁹ Brandon, P. ‘Body and Self: An Entangled Narrative,’ *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 15:1 (2016), pp. 67-83.

⁸⁰ Menary, R. ‘Embodied Narratives,’ *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 15:6 (2008), pp.63-84.

⁸¹ Baker, L. ‘Making Sense of Ourselves: Self-Narratives and Personal Identity,’ *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 15:1 (2016), pp. 7-15.

⁸² Brandon, P. ‘Body and Self: An Entangled Narrative,’ 72.

terrain to be covered now established, the discussion can begin down its first path, to consider more fully the phenomenology of Heidegger, alongside the poetry of Frank O'Hara.

Chapter 1. When Poetry and Phenomenology Collide

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No matter how lofty and abstract our thoughts are or
how complex our systems might be, all of it is rooted,
finally, to the human body's mutual relationship with
the physical environment.

– Andrew Hinton (2014)²

In the literature on poetics of the last decade, a wonderful phrase has popped up, in various forms and in the work of various theorists. The phrase is ‘poetic thinking’ (or any number of slight variations on this theme),³ and Simon Jarvis, J.H. Prynne, Helen Vendler and John Wilkinson, among many others, have each wrestled with it, pinning the concept down variously on prosodic, cognitive and linguistic grounds.⁴ As Vendler writes, ‘the relation of poetry to thought is an uneasy one,’⁵ and I will not presume the ability to make it easy here. But for my part, I wish to suggest that a (re)emphasis on early Heideggerian phenomenology may offer the most fruitful avenue for understanding poetic thought.⁶ Not only can Heidegger assist our understanding of poetry, but poetry can and should assist in correcting core insights from phenomenology on the nature of being itself.

Poetries (and artworks more generally) that examine and represent the physical world present a problem for Heidegger when he suggests in his early work in *Being and Time* (1927) that equipment in the world must necessarily ‘withdraw’ [*zurückzuziehen*]⁷ in order for us to engage with it authentically. To address this, I introduce and employ the term *environment-at-hand* to describe the relationship between artists and the surrounding environments they use as fuel for their art. Creativity, and particularly literary creativity, should be understood as a

¹ Page, J. ‘When Poetry and Phenomenology Collide,’ *Journal of Aesthetics and Phenomenology* 5:1 (2018), pp. 31-51.

² Hinton, A. *Understanding Context: Environment, Language, and Information Architecture* (Beijing: O'Reilly Media, 2014), 162.

³ For variations see Jarvis, S. ‘Musical Thinking: Hegel and the Phenomenology of Prosody,’ *Paragraph* 28:2 (2005), pp. 57-71.

⁴ See Prynne, J. H. ‘Poetic Thought,’ *Textual Practice* 24:4 (2010), pp. 595-606; Wilkinson, J. ‘Repeatable Evanescence,’ *Thinking Verse* 4:1 (2014), pp. 23-49; Jarvis, S. ‘Prosody as Cognition,’ *Critical Quarterly* 40:4 (1998), pp. 3-15; Jarvis, S. ‘Musical Thinking.’

⁵ Vendler, H. *Poets Thinking: Pope, Whitman, Dickinson, Yeats* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 2.

⁶ This is a slight redirection of Jarvis in De Bolla, P. and S.H. Uhlig. *Aesthetics and the Work of Art: Adorno, Kafka, Richter* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), Nuzzo in Nuzzo, A. ‘What Are Poets For?: Renewing the Question with Hegel and Heidegger,’ *Philosophy Today* 59:1 (2015), pp. 37-60, and particularly Gosetti-Ferencei in Gosetti-Ferencei, J. *Heidegger, Hölderlin, and the Subject of Poetic Language: Toward a New Poetics of Dasein* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004).

⁷ Heidegger, M. *Being and Time* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), 99.

propensity to ascertain and exploit artistic affordances in the world. Resulting poetic works should then be understood as linguistic crystallisations that simultaneously articulate and afford a certain kind of thought — that thought which underscores the self-definitive nature of our embedded, embodied creative nature.

Poetry plays a crucial role in Heidegger's later thinking and writings on art, particularly in *The Origin of the Work of Art* (1950)⁸ and *Existence and Being* (1949)⁹, where he considers the work of Friedrich Hölderlin. Though these texts play a supplementary role in this paper, I choose to examine Frank O'Hara's work for much the same reason Heidegger examines Hölderlin, whom he considers 'the poet of the poets,' namely because his work reflexively examines the nature of its own creation; poetry which is 'borne on by the poetic vocation to write expressly of the essence of poetry.'¹⁰ Though Heidegger expands and elaborates (and indeed revises) his early phenomenological work in later texts, aspects of his divisions of being as presented in *Being and Time* offer the most promising insights for examining poetry philosophically (and philosophy poetically). A consideration of these divisions alongside contemporary poetic works may help us get to the heart of what distinguishes poetic thought, and may steer recent discussions in fruitful new directions.

1.1 Being and Time

Throughout *Being and Time* Heidegger attempts a dramatic reconceptualisation of metaphysics since at least Descartes, putting the nature of being itself at the core of metaphysics. Briefly, Heidegger contends that in asking questions of the form 'what is *x*?', traditional metaphysics has presupposed and failed to question the nature of Being (*Sein*) itself (i.e. what *is* is), and that in order to redress this (and following Husserl), we need to examine the phenomenon of being (*Seiendes*).¹¹ Phenomenology cannot observe Being itself, for the simple reason that Being is only made manifest through *beings* — the *isness* of the table is only apprehendable through Dasein's apprehension of the table itself. Consequently, in order to ascertain the nature of Being we must examine the character and interaction of beings, and question what constitutes how it is that they are what they are.¹²

⁸ Heidegger, M. and Krell, D.F., ed., *Basic Writings*. Second Edition, Revised and Expanded. (New York: Harper Collins, 1993).

⁹ Heidegger, M. and Brock, W., ed., *Existence and Being* (Chicago: H. Regnery Co., 1968).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 295.

¹¹ Heidegger, M. *Being and Time*, 25.

¹² Here I maintain the capitalisation of 'Being' and 'beings' in line with Macquarrie and Robinson's translation, as I believe it a helpful shortcut to outlining Heidegger's distinctions. In subsequent references I return to the common, lowercase rendering.

In Heidegger's phenomenology as presented in *Being and Time*, he distinguishes between three modes of being, which roughly correspond to self-sufficient entities; entities as they are in use; and the users of those entities, namely us.¹³ In the first instance, and partially in keeping with the philosophical tradition of Aristotle through to Descartes and Kant, Heidegger considers one mode of being as that of *substances*.¹⁴ This category includes anything that is real and self-sufficient, and exists in the world as either a physical object or conceptual whole (such as words and numbers). Secondly, Heidegger points to the ways in which we interact with our environments, suggesting that the being of certain objects only reveals itself through our *use* of that thing. The pen only reveals what it is to be a pen, for instance, when we pick it up and begin to write with it. This mode of being Heidegger calls *equipment*. The final mode of being is the distinctly human mode of being-in-the-world, which Heidegger terms *Dasein*. We are, for Heidegger, uniquely beings *whose Being is at issue for us*, and it is through our purposive use of equipment, he suggests, that we partake in the distinctively creative, human mode of existence.¹⁵

Dividing the category of equipment further, Heidegger notes that equipment can either be inert, as when we are not using it —the hammer as it is in the toolbox — or it can be *as it is in use* — as when we are hammering. The distinction here is, respectively, between equipment *present-at-hand* (inert) and *ready-to-hand* (in use). The important characteristic of equipment as ready-to-hand is that, according to Heidegger (and as highlighted by Dreyfus), it 'withdraws' [*zurückzuziehen*].¹⁶ When one is skillfully using equipment, as a tennis player uses a racket, the physical properties of the object become increasingly unnoticeable. The more authentically one engages with equipment, according to Heidegger, the more such properties recede into the background as the object becomes like an extension of the user's body. As Heidegger writes, 'the peculiarity of what is proximally *ready-to-hand* is that, in its *readiness-to-hand*, it must, as it were, withdraw [*zurückzuziehen*] in order to be *ready-to-hand* quite authentically.'¹⁷ This will be crucial to the arguments that follow.

As a final piece of necessary terminology, Heidegger suggests that all equipment, when it is in use, has a 'towards-which,' meaning that purpose which its use is directed toward achieving. The hammer has a 'towards-which' of hanging an artwork, or building a house; the racket of hitting a ball, of playing tennis, of winning a match.

¹³ Heidegger, M. *Being and Time*, 25.

¹⁴ Heidegger variously refers to these as 'substances', 'objects' and 'Things.'

¹⁵ Heidegger, M. *Being and Time*, 96.

¹⁶ Dreyfus, H. *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 64.

¹⁷ Heidegger, M. *Being and Time*, 70.

Taking stock, the three modes of being Heidegger distinguishes can be (somewhat crudely) summarised as follows:

substances	objects, both real and abstract, which are within the world and are self- sufficient;
equipment	objects in the world as they are in use. These can either be present-at-hand (not in use) or ready-to-hand (in use), and;
<i>Dasein</i>	the distinct human mode of existence, by which we define ourselves through our purposive use of equipment within the world.

Frank O'Hara's poetry expresses and enacts a mode of being-in-the-world that this early ontological picture cannot adequately account for, namely by engaging with equipment in a way that brings its properties to the *foreground* — precisely the opposite of making it withdraw. The three poems that I consider have been chosen with the intent of, respectively, 1) introducing what I term the environment-at-hand; 2) elucidating the potentiality of the environment-at-hand for creating (possible) meaning and; 3) exploring the environment-at-hand in reference to some of Heidegger's later thought.

1.2 Interior (with Jane)

Written in 1951, 'Interior (With Jane)' is one of several poems written about or inspired by O'Hara's close friend Jane Freilicher, a popular representational painter who befriended several of The New York School poets, including Ashbery, Schuyler and Kenneth Koch (with whom she shared a kitchen in the same apartment building in the Lower East Side of Manhattan).¹⁸ Freilicher had painted O'Hara's portrait before his arrival in New York in 1951, the year this poem was written, and welcomed O'Hara (along with Ashbery and others) with a tour of his new home city.¹⁹ O'Hara had in turn written a number of poems inspired by and dedicated to Freilicher, including a concrete poem shaped to resemble her face.²⁰ Freilicher remained O'Hara's muse for several years during O'Hara's time in New York,²¹ and the resulting poems

¹⁸ Quilter, J. 'Explicit as a Star: Jane Freilicher, Painter Among Poets,' *Poetry Magazine* 203:4 (2014). Online. Accessed September 8, 2016. URL = <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/articles/70081/explicit-as-a-star>.

¹⁹ Chiasson, D. 'Fast Company: The World of Frank O'Hara,' *The New Yorker*, April 2008. Online. Accessed September 3, 2016. URL = <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/04/07/fast-company>.

²⁰ Quilter, J. 'Explicit as a Star,' 361.

²¹ Gray, T. *Urban Pastoral: Natural Currents in the New York School* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2010), 111.

speak to a shared preoccupation with the physical environment as inspiration for their art. The example of concern here, in its entirety, is as follows:²²

Interior (With Jane)²³

The eagerness of objects to
be what we are afraid to do

cannot help but move us Is
this willingness to be a motive

in us what we reject? The
really stupid things, I mean

a can of coffee, a 35¢ ear
ring, a handful of hair, what

do these things do to us? We
come into the room, the windows

are empty, the sun is weak
and slippery on the ice And a

sob comes, simply because it is
coldest of the things we know

We find in ‘Interior’ a blurring of the distinction between subject and object that takes place through an inversion of the poetic subject and the physical environment, such that objects in their ‘eagerness’ are willing to *be* motives for action — something the subjects afraid to *do*. The tautological structure of the third to the fifth line has a doubling, reiterative effect on the objects in the room as driving forces, since ‘the eagerness of objects to / be what we are afraid to do / cannot help but move us’ amounts to saying, ‘the eagerness of objects to [move us] / cannot help but move us.’ Here the ‘us’ is universalised beyond Freilicher and O’Hara to represent the human subject *per se*, suggesting that *objects* (and not subjects) are the affective (if not agential) half of the subject/object relation that the poem initially supposes and subsequently begins to dismantle.

The reification of subject/object continues, and is compounded in the rhetorical question ‘Is / this willingness to be a motive / in us what we reject?’ There is in these lines considerable ambiguity in the attribution of ‘this willingness’, leaving it open to at least two (and conflicting) referents. The willingness could refer to, on the one hand, the *object’s* willingness to be a motive in us (which is to say *for* us). Or, alternatively, it may refer to our willingness (*in us*) to be a

²² All poems discussed in this thesis are reproduced in full in the appendix.

²³ O’Hara, F. and Ford, M., ed., *Selected Poems* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 21.

motive (as reflected by the object). Here we have an instance of rhetorical polysemy, wherein agency becomes ambiguous and subject and object become reified; the process of artistic creation is brought under its own scrutiny.

‘Interior (with Jane)’ is at its most compelling in its final, slightly elusive lines:

do these things do to us? We
come into the room, the windows

are empty, the sun is weak
and slippery on the ice And a

sob comes, simply because it is
coldest of the things we know

To what does the last line of the poem refer? What is it that is the coldest of the things we know — the ice, presumably, or could it be the sob? Or both? Here again the lines are deliberately vague. Marjorie Perloff describes lines such as these as employing ‘syntactic ambiguity,’ points in O’Hara’s poems that deliberately obfuscate (possible) meaning.²⁴ For Perloff these points ‘destabilise the meaning,’ while for Hazel Smith they create multiple possibilities; ‘an overlaying of different meanings.’²⁵ Here coldness serves as a metaphor that overlays colour and touch with associations of insensitivity and melancholy. In cognitive linguistic terminology it serves, importantly, as a conceptual metaphor.

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have written extensively on conceptual metaphors, suggesting that physical embodiment underpins all cognitive mapping of the world. In *Philosophy in the Flesh* (1999) Lakoff and Johnson produce a table of primary metaphors — those metaphors that ‘pair subjective experience and judgement with sensorimotor experience’, and which form the basis of complex metaphors via conceptual blending. In this table, Lakoff and Johnson’s first listed primary metaphor is ‘affection and warmth’, combining the subjective judgement of affection with the sensorimotor experience of temperature.²⁶ Conversely, of course, *low* temperature corresponds with a *lack* of affection (as when we say someone is being ‘cold’ or gives an ‘icy’ glance). One of the key progenitors of cognitive poetics, Reuven Tsur (2010), has also drawn strong connections between metaphors of temperature relating to emotion and corresponding physiological changes. Citing research by various psychologists, Tsur notes that one of four core features of emotions is ‘deviation from normal energy level: increase of energy

²⁴ Smith, H. *Hyperscapes in the Poetry of Frank O’Hara: Difference, Homosexuality, Topography* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 11.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁶ Lakoff, G. and Johnson, M. *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 130.

(gladness, anger), or decrease of energy (sadness, depression, calm).'²⁷ In analysing Shelley's lyric 'A Song', Tsur notes that 'the verb 'freeze' denotes exceptionally low thermal energy,' and straddles both the literal and the metaphoric.²⁸ There is ultimately, these theorists argue, physiological grounding for all primary metaphors, and certainly those involving temperature.

Returning to the poem at hand, the *coldness* of the *weak* sun on icy windows, then, brings together the perceptual experience of coldness, the conceptual metaphor of a *lack* of emotion (insensitivity), the *presence* of emotion as melancholy (in both the sob and the conceptual metaphor of sadness as a lack of energy; as weakness) and the visual associations of coldness as shades of 'cool' blues and greys. The poem thus blends, via conceptual metaphors, the somatic, the visual and the auditory with the physical environment as the source (and site) of emotional experience and artistic creativity. In so doing, O'Hara blurs the boundaries between subject and object, interior and exterior.

This is an instance of what Hazel Smith (2000) has described as a prevalence of 'hyperscapes' in O'Hara's work. Smith describes the hyperscape as follows:

a postmodern site characterised by difference [...] distinguished by the co-presence of opposites [...] low and high culture, sexual and racial difference, the local and global, modernist innovation and postmodernist appropriation.'²⁹

'Interior (With Jane)' constitutes what can be understood as a hyperscape of subjectivity, in which divisions between the physical and the mental, subject and object and interior and exterior are inverted, subverted and undermined. It is even unclear, for instance, from whom the sob of the penultimate line comes:

are empty, the sun is weak
and slippery on the ice And a

sob comes, simply because it is
coldest of the things we know

The division between O'Hara and Jane is blurred in the ambiguous attribution of sob in 'a sob comes.' Where does the sob come from? Jane? The speaker? Through the windows? If we read the sob as coming through the windows they are hardly 'really stupid,' but have an explicit role as the source of agentive emotional response, inverting the subject/object dichotomy and so

²⁷ Tsur, R. 'The Poetic Function and Aesthetic Qualities: Cognitive Poetics and the Jakobsonian Model,' *Acta Linguistica Hafniensia* 42:1 (2010), pp. 2-19, 5.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁹ Smith, H. *Hyperscapes in the Poetry of Frank O'Hara*, 1.

fracturing the poetic ‘I’ between self and object. Yet, several lines later we get ‘it is the coldest of the things *we* know,’ which may suggest the sob comes from both Jane *and* the speaker. The result in this reading is simultaneously a fracturing of the self (again) — as the poetic ‘I’ collapses under the weight of syntactic ambiguity — and a synthesis of selves, as both Jane and the speaker merge as potentially co-agentive in the penultimate line.

Moreover, the lack of attribution on the noun (rather than the verb) of ‘sob’ not only detaches it from specific human agency, but abstracts the action altogether; it places the sob in the ether of subjective objects and objective subjects that the poem establishes, where a sob just *is*. All this works against a division of the internal and external worlds, placing intangible emotion on the same ontological plane as physical reality, as the objects in the room. Accordingly, any psychoanalytic interpretation that takes the exterior to be revealing O’Hara’s (or the reader’s) ‘interior’ misses the point entirely. When Peter Schwenger (2006), for instance, applies a Freudian interpretation on the poem and takes it to be presenting objects as ‘an outward projection of what is repressed in our own “interior,”’ he takes the poem to articulate what it deliberately obscures.³⁰

To bring this all back to Heideggerian terminology, in the above ways O’Hara’s poem works to underscore the interrelation of Dasein and the physical world of objects. This amounts to far more than simply saying that the subject/object dichotomy is an oversimplification. Rather, echoing Heidegger, the poem suggests the *interrelation* of subject and object, to the point that our very mode of being not only depends upon but is *constituted by* those beings which we use for our purposive actions within the world. As Heidegger puts it in *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (1927):

World is a determination of the Dasein’s being. This is expressed from the outset when we say that Dasein exists as being-in-the-world. The world belongs to the Dasein’s existential constitution.³¹

When O’Hara thus uses the surrounding environment for the sake of writing a poem (with an ultimate purpose — what Heidegger calls a *for-the-sake-of-which* — of being a poet), the environment is constitutive of his very mode of being. The answer to the question ‘what do these things do to us?’, then, is that ‘these things’ make up part of the very fabric of what it means to be ‘us.’ The objects in the poem are not merely external objects for O’Hara’s subjective use, nor do they merely make up a part of his subjective experience. Insofar as ‘being a poet’ (as a mode of

³⁰ Schwenger, P. *The Tears of Things: Melancholy and Physical Objects* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 8.

³¹ Heidegger, M. *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 296-297.

Dasein) relies on their existence and skilled use, and insofar as ‘the world belongs to the Dasein’s existential constitution’, the objects must be understood as a part of that Dasein that engages with them creatively — which is to say as part of O’Hara himself.

Heidegger’s profound rejection of Cartesian dualism (and all theories of mental representation that followed, including Husserl’s intentionality)³² is based on his insistence that our way of being (Dasein) is as engaged users of equipment, wherein we experience the equipmentality of equipment in a dynamic process of disclosing spaces for action and creativity within the world. We are not separate (subjects or minds) for whom the world is a static set of things that we use to create or observe meaning. Rather, we are always-already thrown into a world of dynamic webs of meaning through the readiness-to-hand of equipment. As Heidegger writes in *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*,

Intentionality belongs to the existence of Dasein...
To exist then means, among other things, to be as relating to oneself by comporting with beings. It belongs to the nature of Dasein to exist in such a way that it is always already with other beings.³³

And, in *Being and Time*:

Being-in-the-world [...] amounts to a non-thematic circumspective absorption in references or assignments constitutive for the readiness-to-hand of a totality of equipment.³⁴

Note that it is ‘the nature of Dasein’ to exist in such relations, in which we are always ‘absorbed’ in a world in which things matter to us and *matter to us through their use*. This rejection of the subject/object relation and emphasis on engaged action (later to become *embodied* engaged action in Merleau-Ponty) constitutes one of Heidegger’s fundamental concerns throughout much of his early work, including in *Being and Time*. As Dreyfus notes:

Heidegger’s attempt to break out of the tradition [of Descartes through to Husserl] is focused in his attempt to get beyond the subject/object distinction in all domains, including action.’³⁵

³² Dreyfus, H. *Being-in-the-World*, 49.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Heidegger, M. *Being and Time*, 107.

³⁵ Dreyfus, H. *Being-in-the-World*, 48.

O'Hara's poetry likewise enacts a mode of being-in-the-world that demonstrates the insufficiency of the subject/object distinction (even as it engages with it), but also, as will be shown, the insufficiency of Heidegger's early revisionist ontology.

1.3 Affordance

O'Hara is questioning the place of physical objects as catalysts, both for artistic creation as well as cues for emotional response. In the field of ecological psychology this has been a central question, and one to which its founder James Gibson (1979) has offered the concept of *affordances*. An affordance is a property of an object or aspect of the world that opens itself to specific action, in a given context and to a particular organism or individual. As Gibson puts it, 'it implies the complementarity of the animal and the environment.'³⁶ When we look at chairs we do not see, or do not only see, a set of physical properties — a curved piece of wood or plastic attached to four legs. Rather, we see *something to sit on*. We do not see the vase, we see *something to put flowers in*. An affordance is the organism-specific potentiality of an aspect of the environment. This model stresses the inextricability of the subject and object in acts of perception, since perception is the confluence of an actor with their environment. As Joanna McGrenere and Wayne Ho (2000) write:

by cutting across the subjective/objective barrier, Gibson's affordances introduce the idea of actor-environment mutuality; the actor and the environment make an inseparable pair.'³⁷

1.4 The *environment-at-hand*

The concept of affordances, combined with Heidegger's distinction between equipment and substances, begins to offer a lens through which we can understand the relationship between the poet and their external physical environment. Consider O'Hara entering the room, seeing weak light on the window, having an emotional response and experiencing the inspiration for a poem. In this instance the window instantiates an affordance for emotion and artistic creation, while language functions as equipment for Dasein's self-expression. The window is not withdrawing, but rather its artistic affordances as emotional resonance for the poet come to the fore, and so act as equipment ready-to-hand without withdrawal. The interesting thing about this poem in particular is that it is doing all this *while reflecting on the very process of poetic creativity itself*. This requires a little further unpacking.

³⁶ Gibson, J. *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979), 191.

³⁷ McGrenere, J and Ho, W. 'Affordances: Clarifying and Evolving a Concept,' *Proceedings of Graphics Interface 2000, Montreal* (May 2000), pp.179-186, 180.

I take it to be the case that in most instances an emotional response entails, at least in part, some appraisal about its source. Those things that make us happy we judge as in some way beneficial or useful; those things we judge as frightening we also judge as things to avoid. As Magda Arnold and John Gasson (2010) put it, ‘emotion is a tendency towards an object based suitable, or away from an object judged unsuitable.’³⁸ The fact that emotions often involve appraisal, however, does not make such emotional responses affordances. This is because an affordance is not just an appraisal, but an appraisal of something as useful for specific action. In Heidegger’s terms, affordances have a ‘towards—which,’ being that action they disclose as a context-specific possibility. When O’Hara has an emotional response to the interior and/or the physical items within it, the response is in part an appraisal, but it only becomes an affordance when the object is experienced as artistic inspiration — when it is seen as *something to write about*. The poem then becomes a linguistic crystallisation of an artistic affordance within equipment in the world.

As Dreyfus notes, ‘sometimes words are, indeed, used as equipment in the local situation and language functions transparently in a nonpropositional way.’³⁹ Accordingly, and returning to Heidegger’s distinctions, here language and the external environment are both functioning as equipment that is ready-to-hand and has a ‘towards—which’ of generating a poem. The surrounding physical environment as it is present-at-hand (inert; present but not in use) shifts to being ready-to-hand when it presents affordances that enable it to be used for the sake of art. Here, however, we run into a problem with Heidegger’s caveat regarding ‘withdrawal’.

Heidegger suggests that in order for us to authentically engage with equipment, that equipment’s properties and characteristics must fall from view. What, then, are we to make of a process by which language operates as equipment while simultaneously bringing its own qualities and the latent emotional resonance of the external environment to the foreground, multiplying the potential properties of each (through polysemy and syntactic ambiguity)? If we are to follow a Heideggerian conception of being as presented in *Being and Time*, it would seem we must do one of two things: either we must reject that the objects in O’Hara’s poetry (the window, the hair and so forth) — objects for the sake of art — are equipment (since they and the language that describes them do not withdraw), or we must change our conception of equipment as it functions for the sake of art.

³⁸ Quoted in Tsur, R. ‘The Poetic Function and Aesthetic Qualities,’ 5.

³⁹ Dreyfus, H, Malpas, J.E and Wrathall, M.A., eds., *Essays in Honor of Hubert L. Dreyfus* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 317.

Rejecting the status of objects as equipment in poetry is undesirable, since they resemble equipment in all other respects (having a towards-which, being part of a system (or totality, as we will see), and being ready-to-hand or present-at-hand). Accordingly, postulating an entirely separate mode of being would create a mode of being that is not entirely separate (and therefore both implausible and unhelpful). Consequently, I wish to suggest that what we might call the environment-at-hand (by which I mean the physical environment as artistic inspiration) represents a unique possibility of being-in-the-world that reverses the usual way in which we encounter equipment as ready-to-hand. It will help to work through another of O'Hara's works in order to clarify what I have in mind.

1.5 Walking to Work

Walking to Work⁴⁰

It's going to be the sunny side
 from now
 on. Get out, all of you.

This is my traffic over the night
 and how
 should I range my pride

each oceanic morning like a cutter
 if I
 confuse the dark world is round
 round who
 in my eyes at morning saves

nothing from nobody? I'm becoming
 the street.
 Who are you in love with?
 me?
 Straight against the light I cross.

'Walking to Work' creates a tension between happiness and fear, immobility and motion. The poem begins with an ostensibly optimistic tone, using the image of sunshine and allusion to fried eggs ('sunny side') to symbolise life's improvement. The reference here is likely to the popular song 'On the Sunny Side of the Street' recorded by various jazz musicians throughout the 1940s and 50s,⁴¹ and the title to the 1951 film *The Sunny Side of the Street*, released less than a year before O'Hara wrote the poem.⁴² The lyrics of the song, which O'Hara likely

⁴⁰ O'Hara, F. and M. Ford. *Selected Poems*, 34.

⁴¹ Winer, D.G. *On the Sunny Side of the Street: The Life and Lyrics of Dorothy Fields* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997).

⁴² Quine, R. (Writer) *The Sunny Side of the Street*. J. Taps (Producer). Los Angeles: Columbia Pictures, 1951.

would have known well, enact the metaphor of crossing a street — ‘grab your coat / get your hat / leave your worry on the doorstep / just direct your feet / on the sunny side of the street.’ O’Hara borrows this imagery to serve as the literal and metaphorical grounding for the work’s sociopolitical undercurrent.

Since ‘Walking to Work’ was written less than a year after O’Hara had arrived in New York and shortly after he had taken a job at the Museum of Modern Art (where, at this point, it is likely he was selling postcards),⁴³ it is not surprising that the walk might elicit the mood of things ‘looking up’. However, the remaining questions in the poem — particularly that spanning from lines 5 through to 13 — betray a curious ambivalence, and a use of the environment-at-hand that invokes sociopolitical themes of inclusion and exclusion:

and how
 should I range my pride

each oceanic morning like a cutter
if I
 confuse the dark world is round
round who
 in my eyes at morning saves
nothing from nobody? I’m becoming
the street.

The street is personified as the lens through which O’Hara can highlight his relative insignificance in a large new city: ‘a dark world.’ O’Hara sees the streets as cold and ‘dark,’ and yet defiantly asserts that although the morning street ‘saves / nothing from nobody’, nevertheless it’s going to be ‘the sunny side / from now on.’ As in ‘Interior (with Jane),’ there is here a blurring of subject/object, of environment and emotion, interior and exterior. But here the antagonism runs a sociopolitical course, and the environment-at-hand becomes the ground for enacting and subverting the status quo.

As Hazel Smith notes in *Hyperscapes in the Poetry of Frank O’Hara: Difference, Homosexuality, Topography* (2000), ‘the period in which O’Hara was writing was highly repressive, but it marked a turning point in the social position of homosexuals.’⁴⁴ Though not as explicitly political as some of Ginsberg’s works, many of O’Hara’s poems engage directly with his relationships, and are situated at this ‘turning point’ in the marginalization of homosexuals. Smith suggests that O’Hara’s poetics is often radical in this sense of openly exploring and describing sexuality in a time when homosexuality was still categorised by the medical profession

⁴³ Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). *Museum of Modern Art Official Website*. Accessed January 7, 2017. URL = <http://moma.org/explore/multimedia/audios/13/118>.

⁴⁴ Smith, H. *Hyperscapes in the Poetry of Frank O’Hara*, 109.

as an illness, while homosexuality was considered a felony in all but two American states.⁴⁵ Accordingly, she writes that O'Hara's work 'was too radical for its time [...] The message, that homosexuality was a matter of pride rather than shame, needed to be spelt out loud and clear.'⁴⁶

Returning to the poem at hand, the question 'and how / should I range my pride' may then be read as exploring O'Hara's conflict between his pride as a homosexual and the oppressive social environment in which he lived. Since 'range' can mean 'to run or extend in a line in a particular direction,' 'to place oneself in opposition to' or 'to travel or wander over a wide area,'⁴⁷ pride becomes not (or not only) an (internal) emotion but also, and more significantly, an (external) way of navigating the world — what Judith Butler (2003) calls a *performative act*.⁴⁸ The further 'each oceanic morning like a cutter' evokes an image of a boat traversing an ocean, making 'the dark world' seem particularly perilous (though 'cutter' may also reference a tailor, a further sense of having to 'navigate' appropriate social spaces). In each of these deliberately slippery, polysemous lines, O'Hara sees the external environment as affording a choice between particular ways of navigating the 'dark world' (physically and socially), a decision that is enacted in the final line. The environment-at-hand thus becomes the core means by which O'Hara establishes a sociopolitical undercurrent within the work.

Who or what is it that saves 'nothing from nobody' in the lines 'in my eyes at morning saves / nothing from nobody'? I suggest that 'saves' here should be read as remembering (or forgetting) rather than as rescuing or sparing. This is because the syntax is ordered as saving 'nothing from nobody,' rather than saving 'nobody from nothing.' The difference here is between the world (or the speaker) saving something from people, as one saves a gift from a friend, rather than saving that friend from pain or hardship. Once again, this is slightly ambiguous, since the double negative can reverse the meaning (to save *nothing* from *nobody* can mean to save *something* from *everybody*). Colloquially, however, and particularly in New York vernacular, 'nothing from nobody' would usually suggest to save no trace from any individual — making each day a fresh start. Though the lines can plausibly be read as either 'the dark world' or the speaker being that which saves 'nothing from nobody', in either case the emphasis is on relationships situated in a world that is difficult (for us and for the speaker) to navigate. The lines that follow — 'I'm becoming / the street / Who are you in love with? / me?' — blur even further the lines between the physical world, the poetic self and the reader (is it us who are being addressed as 'you'?). At this point in the poem the obfuscation of logical paths parallels O'Hara's

⁴⁵ Ibid., 112

⁴⁶ Smith, H. *Hyperscapes in the Poetry of Frank O'Hara*, 112.

⁴⁷ Stevenson, A. *Oxford Dictionary of English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁴⁸ Butler, J. 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay on Phenomenology and Feminist Theory.' (London: Routledge, 2003).

struggle to ‘range [his] pride’, the conflict between this pride (and his insistence that ‘it’s going to be the sunny side / from now / on’) with the ‘dark [social] world’ that interrogates not only who he is in love with, but the nature of those relationships (is anything saved?).

‘Walking to Work’ creates a deliberate chaos of sorts that mimics both O’Hara’s mind and the street itself, and this occurs not only syntactically and grammatically (as has been shown), but through uneven stanza breaks and indentation. No two indented lines are perfectly aligned, making the poem uneven and staggered in its visual form. All this serves to create a tension in the poem between a ‘showing up’ and a retreat of the poetic self, which is brought home in the final lines:

Who are you in love with?
me?
Straight against the light I cross.

The walking ‘*straight* against the light’ in the last line of the poem represents the final decisive moment in which O’Hara ‘ranges his pride,’ and all ambiguities fall under the weight of a performative act. The crossing represents a flouting of convention, not only of road rules (against the direction of a street light) but also the refusal to accept the sociopolitical reality, as a departure to ‘the sunny side of the street’ from the ‘straight,’ heteronormative and monogamous. It is thus simultaneously an arrival and a departure; an arrival at the metaphorical light of the ‘sunny side’ and the literal light of work (at MoMA), while a departure from the metaphorical ‘dark world,’ the literal dark of the street and the interrogations of a society that questions who one loves (and what one saves). Just as in ‘Interior (with Jane),’ the environment-at-hand in ‘Walking to Work’ breaks down the subject/object divide and foregrounds the interrelationship of Dasein and world. In utilising affordances embedded in the external environment, the environment-at-hand becomes the means not only for O’Hara’s (re)establishment as poet, but for (re)establishing personal and sexual identities.

In what way, we can now ask, are the street, the [traffic] light, the traffic and the ‘dark world’ being employed by O’Hara in a philosophically significant way? The traditional subject/object view fails to capture how the speaker is fundamentally engaged in a world of use, a world which presents affordances for action. Accordingly, we can use Heidegger’s phenomenology to correct our view and see O’Hara not as a subject experiencing a world of objects, but as a Dasein enmeshed in a world of equipment and equipmental affordances. Using Heidegger’s distinctions, however, again becomes problematic, given his caveat regarding withdrawal. Since the traffic light of the final line presents two alternative affordances — wait or walk — there is a sense in which the traffic light necessarily cannot ‘withdraw,’ since to use it as

equipment ready-to-hand one must bring its properties — its *lightness* — to the fore. Moreover, in using it further as a metaphor, with a *for-the-sake-of-which* of writing a poem, O'Hara uses the light as equipment, while bringing its properties (the fact it was 'against the light') to the *foreground*, rather than letting them recede into the background.

There are thus two levels — the level of reality, where O'Hara is actually crossing a street, and, later, the level of the poem — in which O'Hara demonstrates that, contrary to Heidegger's claim, properties needn't withdraw in order for things in the world to function as equipment, particularly when it comes to the creation of art. We should not say, as Heidegger does in *Being and Time*, that in order to use equipment authentically it necessarily withdraws into the background. Rather, there is a way of using the external environment, which I am calling the environment-at-hand, which crystallises in poetry the affordances that the environment provides. In this way we can, and should, use O'Hara (and other poets that utilise such strategies) to correct our ontologies.

1.6 Some Possible Objections

One possible objection that Heidegger may raise is a stipulation that he makes that equipment, in order to be equipment, has to be in a totality of supporting objects that serve as a scaffolding. One can use a hammer to open a paint tin, to borrow Dreyfus' example,⁴⁹ but since it is not *for* that purpose (and does not have supporting conceptual structures), it is not functioning *as* equipment when being used for that purpose. In the same way, one can use a window *for-the-sake-of* writing a poem, but that does not, Heidegger may suggest, make it equipment. In order for it to function as equipment it must 'belong to a totality,'⁵⁰ just as in order for the hammer to function as a hammer it must exist within a framework of other objects: nails, wood, buildings and so forth. If this is so, the window, the street, the objects discussed so far are not even equipment, so the issue of withdrawal is not an issue in the first place.

It could be argued, however, that such a totality does exist — that poets do have a totality of equipment, broadly defined, that constitute the objects that they write 'with.' For the sake of argument, however, let us suppose that such a totality does not exist, and that Heidegger's 'totality' caveat is a reasonable rejection of our placing the environment-at-hand in the ontological realm of equipment. Doing so, it should be clear, would merely take us back to square one, left wondering the status of objects-for-art in Heidegger's ontology. If we accept the ontological divisions outlined at the outset of this paper (substances; equipment; Dasein), we

⁴⁹ Dreyfus, H. *Podcast in Philosophy 185, Fall 2007: Heidegger. Introduction - Part 3*. (Berkeley: U.C. Berkeley, 2007).

⁵⁰ Heidegger, M. *Being and Time*, 97.

need to seriously consider where objects used *for the sake of art* fit within this ontology. I suggest that, firstly, they must be considered equipment and that, secondly (and accordingly), we must reject that equipment necessarily withdraws when we use it authentically.

Heidegger argues that the peculiar role of the artist is to draw attention to the fact we are always-already engaged in a meaningful world. However, he does not then *re-import* the artist's creative use of the environment into the ontological schema constructed in *Being and Time*, so it is left sitting half-outside his ontological framework.⁵¹ If one uses the environment-at-hand as artistic affordances in the world for-the-sake-of art, it seems to me that our best option is to concede that one is using equipment. Since that equipment is both ready-to-hand and also not withdrawing (but rather having its emotional resonances brought to the fore), it seems we must revise Heidegger's early schema to include a category that allows such appropriation of the environment. In keeping with Heidegger's terminology, and in lieu of a more pertinent term, environment-at-hand seems to me as good as any.

It is important to note that in later works, particularly *Existence and Being* (1949), *The Origin of the Work of Art* (1950), *The Question Concerning Technology* (1954) and *Discourse on Thinking* (1959), Heidegger will expand and revise his earlier phenomenological thought, in ways that supersede much of what I have outlined here. Language will come to have a central position, and poetry in particular as that which safeguards the nature of Being (more of this will be considered shortly). Moreover, Heidegger comes to think of the environment as used for poetic appropriation in terms of technology, and objects in the world in this sense as *Bestand* — 'standing-reserve'⁵² — warning that imposing our use on the environment (enframing; *Gestell*)⁵³ is antithetical to authentic artistic creation (that kind of art, as *poiesis*, that he sees as enacting the strife between earth and world).⁵⁴ Accordingly, he jettisons much of his early terminology, no longer writing in terms of 'equipment' in favour of a richer, more nuanced and more complex approach.⁵⁵ The objection could be made, then, that it is unfair to critique early Heidegger without reference to later works in which he himself offered such corrections, though in different terms. But there are reasons to avoid merely 'shifting' from the framework of *Being and Time* to later texts.

⁵¹ We should remember here that *Being and Time* was supposed to comprise three divisions, and Heidegger may have intended to address this in the third, unwritten division.

⁵² Heidegger, M. and D.F. Krell. *Basic Writings*, 322.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 325.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 326.

⁵⁵ An adequate consideration of such later works lies beyond the scope of the current paper.

Heidegger laments in *On the Way to Language* (1959) that ‘the fundamental flaw of *Being and Time* is perhaps that I ventured forth too far too early.’⁵⁶ Indeed, there are important holes in *Being and Time* that require patching. Yet there is profound ontological insight and lucid terminology worth saving, particular for our discourses on poetic thought. The term environment-at-hand (and its grounding in affordance) is a step toward correcting early Heidegger with insights from his later texts but, more importantly, with insights that are performed poetically in O’Hara’s great work.

Having seen how O’Hara can revise our understanding of (early) Heidegger, I can now progress to the final poem for consideration here, and a consideration of how (particularly later) Heidegger can aid our understanding of the nature of poetry.

1.7 Heroic Sculpture

Heroic Sculpture⁵⁷

We join the animals
not when we fuck
 or shit
not when tear falls

but when
 staring into light
 we think

Written in 1958, ‘Heroic Sculpture’ in scarcely more than twenty words manages to evoke themes of art, death, morality and epistemology. The ‘heroic sculpture’ of the title and the final line is, I will argue, *The Thinker* (1901) by Auguste Rodin, whose work O’Hara greatly admired (Heikki Kujansivu calls Rodin and Cézanne the two ‘major thinkers influencing his thing poems,’⁵⁸ while the Museum of Modern Art archives feature a photo of O’Hara posing alongside — and playfully imitating — Rodin’s *St. John the Baptist Preaching* (1880) in the museum’s garden).⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Heidegger, M. *On the Way to Language* (Bloomington: Harper Collins, 1982), 7.

⁵⁷ O’Hara, F. and M. Ford. *Selected Poems*, 151.

⁵⁸ Kujansivu, H. ‘Returning Thirds: On Reading Literature,’ Published Dissertation (State University of New York, 2008), 125.

⁵⁹ McDarragh, F. W. (Producer). ‘Frank O’Hara AT MOMA.’ Photograph, Online. Accessed January 7, 2017. URL = <https://www.gettyimages.com.au/license/838858255>.

At face value, the premise of the poem is that we find our strongest connection with animals not in our mutual capacity for basic, mechanistic actions, but our mutual capacity for inward, introspective contemplation. In this respect the poem can, quite plausibly, be read as a statement on animal rights. Alternatively, it is quite possible to read the last line of the poem as something of an addendum, so that we join the animals when staring into the light [...or so] we think. On this reading ‘staring into the light’ could symbolise death, and the poem could be foregrounding mortality as unifying universal (this is certainly the reading that Bob Perelman and Micah Mattix (2011) have taken, Perelman even imagining that ‘O’Hara inserted a thin pause ‘...we think.’)⁶⁰ Or, even further, we could take the poem’s title to refer to heroic nudity, that tradition of sculpture that depicts the mortal man as a divine being, and the poem then as undermining the elevation of man beyond corporeal bounds. These are plausible readings, yet I believe the poem is, or at least should be read as, far deeper than this. This can be seen through a brief detour to consider more closely a possible reference to Rodin’s artwork.

Rodin’s *The Thinker* was originally conceived as a representation of Dante, the archetypal poet, staring into and contemplating his work *The Divine Comedy* (1472).⁶¹ The official website of Rodin Museum explains:

‘The Thinker’ was originally entitled ‘The Poet.’ He represented Dante, author of *The Divine Comedy* which had inspired The Gates, leaning forward to observe the Circles of Hell, while meditating on his work.⁶²

For O’Hara, this may be what makes the sculpture ‘heroic’: that it shows us that we are at our most primal not in our base bodily actions, and not *just* (as Descartes might have it) when we think. Rather, our most fundamental nature is revealed when, like Dante, we create and contemplate art: ‘when staring into the light / we think.’ The emphasis here is thus on ‘when staring into the light’ rather than ‘we think.’ But what does it mean to ‘join the animals’? It cannot mean to find a connection with animals, since all shared ways in which humans and non-human animals behave (including even displaying emotion) are rejected. Rather, ‘joining the animals’ means to find connection with our most defining acts, with that which expresses the nature of our being. An animal defines itself *as animal* when it ‘fucks,’ ‘shits’ and displays emotion. But our mode of being, and O’Hara’s identity as poet, are defined via the act of artistic

⁶⁰ Mattix, M. *Frank O’Hara and the Poetics of Saying ‘I’* (Chicago: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011), 138.

⁶¹ Dante, A. *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*. Edited and translated by Robert M. Durling; introduction and notes, Ronald L. Martinez and Robert M. Durling; illustrations by Robert Turner (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁶² Rodin, M. *Musée Rodin Official Website*. Online. Accessed January 7 2017. URL = <http://www.musee-rodin.fr/en/collections/sculptures/thinker>.

creation. In the act of creating and contemplating art [staring into the light] the thinker/poet ‘joins the animals’, in the sense of doing *that which (re)defines their essence*.

Accordingly, ‘Heroic Sculpture’ enacts its own meaning, since O’Hara, in staring into ‘the light’ of the poem (which stares into Rodin, which stares into Dante) metaphorically joins the primal level of artistic expression. The sculpture is ‘heroic’ because it reveals that the very act of creative contemplation — of thinking through art — is precisely that which defines us *as us*; it serves as a mirror through which we can apprehend the transcendent nature of our experiences of art. Yet, while the sculpture itself reflects the nature of our being, it is only by appropriating the artwork, as object, *through the poem* that O’Hara is able to define his nature as poet. Though the sculpture itself can instantiate the tension between what Heidegger calls ‘earth’ and ‘world,’ it must be employed as environment-at-hand in order to not only reflect but enact the nature of Dasein. Only then (and only through language) can poetry ‘establish’ being. As Heidegger writes in ‘Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry’ (1949),

Being is never an existent. But, because being and essence of things can never be calculated and derived from what is present, they must be freely created, laid down and given. Such a free act of giving is establishment.⁶³

Since being and essence cannot be derived from what is present, the act of writing ‘Heroic Sculpture’ becomes the means for O’Hara’s establishment of being. Far from having the salient properties of the sculpture withdraw, then, O’Hara utilises the sculpture (as environment-at-hand) to bring to the foreground the tension between earth and world that the sculpture instantiates. To clarify this further, it is necessary to return to Heidegger.

1.8 The Experience of Art

Heidegger, in ‘The Origins of the Work of Art’ and elsewhere contends that art, and particularly poetry, does have a special place in human experience. For Heidegger art, and particularly great art, allows us to apprehend the ontological tension between ‘earth’ and ‘world’; that is, between the physical world as it presents itself to us and the worlds that open up in contexts of use, meaning and understanding.⁶⁴ Heidegger discusses at some length the philosophical import of Van Gogh’s painting *A Pair of Shoes* (1886), and its capacity to elicit a phenomenological apprehension of our engaged ways of being.

⁶³ Heidegger, M. and Brock, W., ed., *Existence and Being*, 305.

⁶⁴ Heidegger, M. and Krell, D.F., ed., *Basic Writings*, 141.

The painting depicts a peasant worker's shoes, tattered and worn from years of work in the field. Their owner is not depicted explicitly, but retains an implicit place in the painting, since the shoes suggest the worker's ethic, their poverty, their *being elsewhere*, and hence their background absence is paradoxically foregrounded as a kind of presence.⁶⁵ As Heidegger writes:

[...] from out of the dark opening of the worn insides of
the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stares forth...
The shoes vibrate with the silent call of the earth [...].⁶⁶

In *A Pair of Shoes* there is accordingly an inherent and irreconcilable tension between the foreground and the background. The foreground (the shoes) draw out the background of meaning and engaged use — and as we engage with the work and bring this background to the fore, we apprehend our own meaning-making engagement through the work, sending the foreground effectively into the background. The painting thus encapsulates the tension between earth and world into which we are always-already thrown in our day to day meaning-making activities within the world.

This is one of the key reasons why, for Heidegger, the subject/object dichotomy of aesthetics fails to capture what is most crucial about our ways of experiencing the world, and in particular of experiencing art. The power and ontological import of art is that it allows us to move beyond a conception of objects in the world as inert matter that we subject to our experience, domination and control, and of artworks as treasure chests of meaning that we unpack, or containers that we fill with our ideas.

The phenomenological study of art reveals the tension between earth and world that underlies all creativity, not just of art but of meaning within the world. Iain D. Thomson (2011) puts this point most eloquently:

Our phenomenological encounter with Van Gogh's
painting shows us that its meaning is neither located
entirely in the object standing over against us nor

simply projected by our subjectivity onto an
inherently meaningless work; instead, the work's
meaning must be inconspicuously accomplished in
our own implicitly dynamic engagement with the
work. Through our engagement with Van Gogh's
painting, Heidegger thus suggests, we can lucidly

⁶⁵ I am thinking here of Merleau-Ponty's insistence that there is an indeterminate being (ambiguity): 'the being of the background, which is there in its absence.' See Marshall, G. *A Guide to Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2008), 57.

⁶⁶ Heidegger, M. and Krell, D.F., ed., *Basic Writings*, 159.

encounter the very process by which we are always-
already making sense of our worlds.⁶⁷

Similarly, when O'Hara collapses the subject/object distinction in 'Interior (with Jane),' when he crystallises environmental affordances in 'Walking to Work', and when he shows us that art is what defines us at our most basic and primitive levels in 'Heroic Sculpture,' he should be understood as achieving poetically what, for Heidegger, Van Gogh achieved in paint. O'Hara's is a poetics that at the very least lends itself to a Heideggerian, phenomenological interpretation. It is a poetics through which we might revise our understanding of Heidegger's work in *Being and Time* (via the concept of the environment-at-hand), and it poignantly gets at a fundamental truth about reality — about what it means to live in a world of engaged use. What, then, of poetic thought?

1.9 Poetic Thought

John Wilkinson (2014) acknowledges the limitations of the aesthetic approach that I have criticised in this paper, writing 'to admire a poem as an object reduces its energy, situating reader and poem in a space already symbolic, rather than engaging them in creating meaning.'⁶⁸ Similarly, Simon Jarvis has in several illuminating papers urged against seeing poems as "texts", containers for propositional intentions, or 'marks', sheer stuff.'⁶⁹ One alternative is to see the poem as a dynamic process of creation — what Jarvis calls a 'cognitive artefact.' On this view, the poem is an experience, and everything the poet 'cares' about, according to Jarvis, can be brought to bear on the intricacies of that experience.⁷⁰

One problem with regarding the poem as a process, an experience rather than an entity, however, is that it begins to look precisely like the aesthetics we are trying to avoid, particularly if we construe that experience as a process of merely subjectivising an 'objective' text. What we need is a way of accounting for both the experiential nature of the poem *and* the link between the experience of the poem and the subjectivity that (re)establishes itself through and reflects itself in that experience.

This is exactly what Heideggerian phenomenology affords — it explains not only the processes by which the poem comes into being, but how being is realised and reflected in and through that creative process, and the subsequent experience of the poem by a reader. In the writing of the poem, via the environment-at-hand, O'Hara becomes the poet, while in the creative

⁶⁷ Thomson, I. *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 98.

⁶⁸ Wilkinson, J. 'Repeatable Evanescence,' *Thinking Verse* 4:1 (2014), pp. 23-49, 25.

⁶⁹ Quoted in De Bolla, P. and Uhlig, S.H. *Aesthetics and the Work of Art*, 60.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

process of reading the poem we engage self-reflexively with our mode of being as engaged meaning-makers within the world. The poem must accordingly be understood as an event of thought — a thinking-into-being of Dasein's self-reflexivity.

There is, however, a problem with pushing the point too far. If we wish to maintain that you and I have been examining the same poems in this paper, we cannot insist that the poem is *all* process or event, for the simple fact that every experience of a poem is necessarily unique. If we say 'what all manifestations of O'Hara's 'Walking to Work' have in common is the words on the page', we return to an aesthetics that misses the point of what the poem most importantly is and does. Yet if we say 'it is all an experience' we lose the cohesion required to begin our discussion in the first place. And if we say 'it is what all events of its reception hold in common' we attempt to reduce the irreducible — demarcating 'the poem' arbitrarily around popular readings that are necessarily culturally and temporally contingent.

Accordingly, I think we have to settle for a dialectical definition of the poem that pulls in two directions at once. A poem has to be understood as a chimera that will always exist over and above any attempt to pin it down. As Adorno suggests, and as Jarvis reminds us, poetry has a 'language-character', an infinite possibility of meanings and referents that change, develop and dissolve over time and across cultures.⁷¹ The poem is *both* the text and the cognitive event of its being read, as well as the infinite possibilities of its reception. It cannot be the sum total of these manifestations, as these are inexhaustible, so the poem itself necessarily expands and multiplies over time. Accordingly, the poem always resists its own walls, saying louder and louder, to rephrase Hegel,⁷² more than what it means.

As a summary of what I have in mind, I like to visualise the poem roughly as follows:

⁷¹ Jarvis, S. *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 103.

⁷² Hegel writes of how we can learn by experience that we 'meant something other than we meant to mean.' See Hegel, G.W.F. and Baillie, J.B., ed., *The Phenomenology of Spirit (the Phenomenology of Mind)*. Digireads.com, 2009, 39.

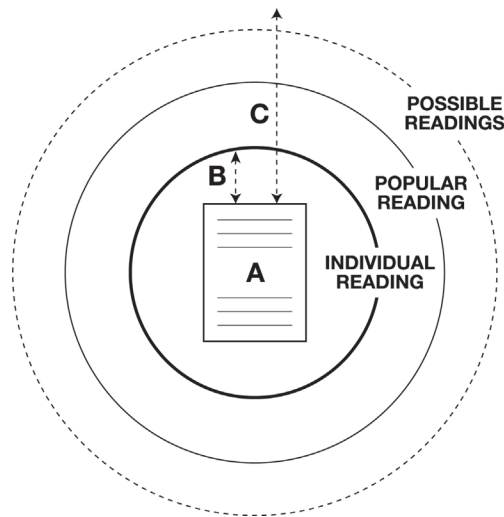


Figure 1. The poem as entity, experience or dialectic possibility.

At (A) we have the text itself.⁷³ The ‘text as experience’ model conceives of the poem as existing at (B). Yet the poem itself must be seen as existing in the tension between the text and all of its possible (and expanding) readings, which is to say at (C). *Poetic thought* (not the poem) is that which occurs between (A) and (B), as a combination of text and experience.

Through ‘What Does Art Know?’, Simon Jarvis has pushed so far as to claim that art, through thinking through technique, can *know*.⁷⁴ He writes of poets forming

a new way altogether of thinking in verse: a new verse sentence, above all, in whose syntax, lexicon, punctuation, rhythms, tunes, pauses, echoes and clicks thoughts previously unimaginable may be called up.’⁷⁵

Here Jarvis is speaking of original poetic thoughts, where I am arguing (following Heidegger) that poetic thinking — at least one aspect of it — gets to something deeper. What we are getting at here is something more fundamental: something that poetry knows and reveals about reality — about Truth *per se*. In this respect I agree with Jarvis that ‘works of art know something we do not’⁷⁶ (but can). Poetry knows, reflects and reveals the fact that we are inherently engaged meaning-makers, a fact (as Heidegger and other phenomenologists point out) that we neglected or forgot throughout much of our philosophical history. In this way poetry does not only show us new ways of looking at the world, which it surely does, but it can help us understand the nature of being itself.

⁷³ Whether we want to include the ink, the typeface, the medium and so forth is a separate issue here.

⁷⁴ Jarvis, ‘What Does Art Know?’

⁷⁵ Jarvis, ‘Verse, Perversity, University,’ 102.

⁷⁶ Jarvis, ‘What Does Art Know?’

When Poetry and Phenomenology Collide (Discussion)

I have argued that one aspect of poetic thinking can be understood as an ontological tension between earth and world which is negotiated through artworks via the *environment-at-hand*. In beginning with a consideration of poetry and phenomenology, what I have offered, then, is in one sense a rather vague and another sense a rather specific conception of poetic thought. It is vague because the notion of poetic thought (as highlighting our inherent meaning-making potentials) can at this point seemingly apply equally to narrative, to painting, to music. On the other hand, it is rather specific, since I have narrowed the consideration to specific free verse works of a very narrow time period, by a particular poet, with a particular social, political and ideological backdrop. Accordingly, the goal now becomes to begin to broaden the scope of texts, and in so doing offer a more comprehensive view of the possibilities for poetic thought as tension. To this end, the discussion in the next chapter entails an extended digression into poetic thought as it occurs through a rather different medium — music, specifically through the phenomenon of flow in rap. Before advancing, however, I should first elaborate on several concepts that I consider key to poetic thought and which were only glossed in the preceding chapter, namely temporality, embodied cognition, dualism(s) and the poetry/music divide.

Temporality

As I have argued, it is through the writing of poetry (via the *environment-at-hand*) that an individual becomes a poet as a mode of being (*Dasein*), while in the creative process of reading poetry readers engage self-reflexively with our mode of being as engaged meaning-makers within the world. In this vein, the poem must be understood as an *event* of thought — a thinking-into-being of *Dasein*'s self-reflexivity. This raises the significant point that poetic thought is necessarily a temporal event; it is not a static or fixed point but rather a dynamic and contingent *action*. This draws in part on what Peter Lamarque calls the Experiential thesis: the notion that 'the core value of a poem lies in the experience(s) the poem affords when read as a poem.'¹ As Lamarque suggests, the experience

[...] is a temporal process, not a state. It is a process of thought, constrained by the linguistic medium that gives it both its character and its identity.²

¹ Lamarque, P. 'Semantic Finegrainedness and Poetic Value' in Gibson, J., ed., *The Philosophy of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 20.

² Ibid., 23.

While I am not arguing here that the *value* of poems is restricted to the event of their reading (I will argue against — or rather beyond — this in the third chapter), I nonetheless wish to stress that poetic thought as I am conceiving it is always a process that unfolds through time. This is important because, as will be examined in the chapter that follows, poets and musicians (in this case rappers) deliberately control rhythm and flow in ways that create (possible) meanings.

The centrality of time to musical meaning may be a given, however it extends beyond the mere creation of musical meaning, extending to the subjectivity of the listener herself. Jarvis, for instance, quotes Hegel on this point in ‘Musical Thinking: Hegel and the Phenomenology of Prosody’ (2005):

Now since time, and not space as such, provides the essential element in which sound gains existence in respect of its musical value, and since the time of the sound is that of the subject too, sound on this principle penetrates the self, grips it in its simplest being, and by means of the temporal movement and its rhythm sets the self in motion.³

This is what allows Jarvis to make the argument for musical thinking as a kind of embodied subjectivity. Against the dualist conception of thought as a linguistic mode of signifying — of ‘making-explicit’⁴ — Jarvis argues for a reconceptualisation of thought that stems from meaning and is grounded in embodiment. He writes:

But what counts as ‘mind’, what counts as thinking is, as soon as one begins to enquire closely into it, strikingly bodily [...] What grounds my being is not reflection, knowing that I know, thinking that I think, and it is thus not at all anything emptied of affectivity; it is rather the primordial fact of affectivity itself in so far as I am affect. The feeling of thinking, as the feeling which *I - am*, and not thinking about thinking. Insofar as I am my body, rather than having it, this body is part of thinking.⁵

For Jarvis, this kind of thinking is self-reflexive subjectivity *per se*; it is that which brings subjectivity back to itself. Embodiment as *feeling* is central here because it is the most fundamental site of meaning. As Jarvis writes, ‘in the meaning borne by the experiences of pain, fear, desire or hunger [...] is grounded the possibility of any meaning whatever.’⁶ In this respect

³ Jarvis, S. ‘Musical Thinking: Hegel and the Phenomenology of Prosody,’ *Paragraph* 28:2 (2005), pp. 57-71, 66.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 69.

music — as an embodied experience of temporally-unfolding meaning — can be understood as a cognitive act, since it grounds subjectivity, the *I am*.

Embodied Cognition and the Music / Poetry Divide

In a parallel argument, and in part following from Jarvis, Isobel Armstrong sees *rhythm* and *rhyme* as inherently cognitive, since their movement — the recurrent ‘excursion and return’ of sound parallels the ‘recursive outgoing and coming back of mind.’⁷ Armstrong thus argues that rhythm ‘brings subjectivity to life,’⁸ insofar as it ‘necessitates a response of the total being, at once somatic and intellectual.’⁹ For Armstrong, however, it follows from this that poetry and music are necessarily discrete domains, since the former relies on more fluid and dynamic systems of time. Accordingly, she argues:

It is this that creates poetry’s paramount difference from music. Verse works with ‘time measure’ and not with the inexorable ‘time beat’ of music. Music can only obey the ‘external sphere of sounding and fading.’ The note is a ‘fading sound without support’ which can only sustain itself by subjection to time and to repetition, the continual re-arousal of repeated sonic patterns. The foot is not the equivalent of the bar. Poetry sustains an ever-changing duration, introducing varying measures (anapests, dactyls) in which there are different forms of time and temporal equivalents. Because poetry is made of language, not notes, it does possess immanent ideas as music does not.¹⁰

Clearly Armstrong is here speaking of music as instrumentation, as music without lyrics. But suppose we consider music with singing or, for my purposes, rapping ‘over’ the music. If we are able to analyse such music that in essence combines the ‘time measure’ of verse with the ‘time beat’ of its backing instrumentation, we have a clear instance that contradicts such a clear-cut dichotomy between poetry and music. Armstrong may retort that such music instantiates a duality — verse and music as separate phenomena in one song — but, as I hope to show, the stresses, rhymes and repetitions central to flow are intimately bound up with the backing instrumentation that guides them. Time measure, in other words, is intertwined with time beat. Moreover, it is worth stressing that semantic content (lyrics) need not be present in order to consider music

⁷ Armstrong, I. ‘Hegel: The Time of Rhythm, the Time of Rhyme’, *Thinking Verse I* (2011), pp. 124-136, 125.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 128.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 130.

appreciation itself a cognitive act, since reference is not a necessary condition for the generation of concepts and emotions; of (possible) meaning. This is a point argued most convincingly by Peter Kivy (2007). As he writes in 'Music, Language, and Cognition: Which Doesn't Belong?':

The enjoyment and appreciation of classical music is concept-laden and content-less, then, in that the entertaining of concepts, both consciously and self-consciously, on the part of the qualified, attentive listener, is essential to its full enjoyment and appreciation, but the concepts entertained are purely musical concepts, even though they may be described in ordinary, non-musical language. In other words, the concepts are not expressive of semantic or representational content. The enjoyment and appreciation of classical music, then, is both a conscious and a self-conscious cognitive process without being one in which the cognition is of either semantic or representational properties.¹¹

This is a point to which I return after the chapter that follows. For now, it is enough to note that what I am advancing here, with Jarvis (and indeed with Armstrong) is a view of music as a form of cognition, and so as another manifestation of poetic thought. Accordingly, though the music I will come to analyse in the next chapter contains both semantic and sonic content, the music itself is sufficient for cognition to be taking place. Indeed, as even Armstrong concedes,

[...] though music differs from poetic rhythm [...] both music and metre 'set the self in motion'. From this setting of the self in motion we can extrapolate something about rhythm. It brings subjectivity to life. It is a somatic pressure brought into being by the poem's play with the sound system and stress pattern of its language [...] as it is experienced in real time.¹²

The somatic pressure that Armstrong refers to here operates within rap music as *flow*; as the interplay between a rapper's vocals and the song's backing instrumentation. Just as through the poetry of Frank O'Hara readers engage self-reflexively with our mode of being as engaged meaning-makers within the world, so too in music, and particularly rap music, do we come to generate meanings that are not only semantic but sonic in nature; not only cognitive (as referential) but cognitively embodied. In so doing we come to experience once again the nature of

¹¹ Kivy, P. *Music, Language, and Cognition: And Other Essays in the Aesthetics of Music* (Gloucestershire: Clarendon Press, 2007), 225.

¹² Armstrong, I. 'Hegel: The Time of Rhythm, the Time of Rhyme,' 128.

Dasein (though I will not labour on this point further); the fact that we are fundamentally embodied, engaged meaning-makers within the world.

Dualisms

The reason, in large part, the preceding chapter and those that follow are aimed at problematising some of the more pervasive strands of dualism, such as the subject/object divide; the separation of internal (experience) and external (world), is that such dualistic accounts fail to do justice to the richness of not only poetry and art in general, but the human experience. To that end, the underlying premise of what I have been suggesting is that dualistic accounts are both overly reductive to our philosophical accounts, as well as limiting to our literary criticism. As William Desmond writes:

As we all know, modern philosophy has unfolded in terms of a set of dualisms, frequently identified with Cartesianism, though actually pervasive in the entire worldview of modernity. Modern philosophy not only unfolds these dualisms, even to the point of their final nihilistic implications; it also fights against them, seeking either to overcome or mitigate their consequences. Postmodern thinking seeks to arrive at a mode of thinking on the other side of such dualisms, though it has to pass through them, deconstructing them on the way.¹³

The project here can be well described as fitting within this lane of overcoming dualisms by passing through them, ‘deconstructing them on the way.’ There is, however, a conspicuous irony in the arguments I am presenting. While criticising dualist accounts of subjectivity, I am simultaneously arguing (and will continue to argue) that poetic thought should be understood in terms of tension, of the navigation of opposing forces. In this respect, the argument supposes the existence of dualities just as it seeks to dismantle them. Some of the oppositions (such as the subject and object divide) that I criticise are ideological constructions, and need to be first postulated and interrogated in order to be taken apart. Others, such as those concerning affect and emotion in the third chapter are, I will argue, underpinned by our biological evolution. In any event, whether real or unreal, innate or artificial, poetic thought should be understood as that thought which generates (possible) meaning via the negotiation of oppositions, which is to say,

¹³ Desmond, W. *The Intimate Strangeness of Being: Metaphysics after Dialectic* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 47.

via dialectics. If this is true, we can disagree with Ronald De Sousa when he argues in ‘The Dense and the Transparent: Reconciling Opposites’ (2015):

One might describe a piece of music, landscape, or plastic art as ‘poetic,’ but these uses are metaphorical, or poetic, and are therefore best eschewed while trying to elucidate what that term might mean. Poetry in the literal sense can hardly do without language [...]¹⁴

While it is too early to say convincingly that poetic thought, if not poetry, transcends (or can transcend) language, the discussion on Frank O’Hara and the phenomenology of Heidegger has at least made it convincing, I hope, that one manifestation of poetic thought is as an *ontological* tension between what Heidegger terms earth and world. With a slightly clearer idea of some key concepts, as well as a better idea of what might be at stake, the argument can now proceed to consider poetic thought as it occurs through sound, as *rhythmic* tension.

¹⁴ De Sousa, R. ‘The Dense and the Transparent: Reconciling Opposites,’ in Gibson, J., ed., *The Philosophy of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 40.

Chapter 2. Flowprints: A Revised Method for Visualising Flow in Rap

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For such a widely studied art form, it is surprising that rap music has received relatively scarce attention to its musical and poetic dimensions, despite a great deal of scholarship exploring its historical, cultural, and political roots.² Only a handful of books have been published on rap's unique musicality, and of these only a portion of each is dedicated to the study of flow; the rhythmic interplay between rap vocals and backing instrumentation (the beat). The core reason for this neglect, I believe, is that scholars have thus far lacked the critical tools with which to study, evaluate, transcribe and discuss rap music effectively. Hip-hop music is a unique art form that exists at the nexus of music, poetry and speech. Accordingly, while rap scholarship can borrow the tools used to study these other domains, its peculiar multimodality makes these tools at best insufficient, at worst counterproductive.³

Traditional music notation foregrounds melody and harmony (elements that rap deliberately jettisons), while standard text transcriptions obscure rap's performative and musical elements, misrepresenting it as static text rather than recorded performance.⁴ Moreover, as Kyle Adams (2015) has rightly pointed out,⁵ rap music is cyclical in nature, making linear musical notation and Schenkerian analyses inappropriate for its transcription. Such notation was designed to transcribe Western music of the 18th and 19th Centuries, music that achieved large scale stylistic and structural *progressions* from start to finish, through syntax, chord and phrase progressions (among others). It was such linear, structural features that musical notation was

¹ Page, J. 'Flowprints: A Revised Method for Visualising Flow in Rap,' *Journal of New Music Research* (2018). Online. URL = <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09298215.2018.1516784>

² The best of these include Tricia Rose's *Black Noise* (1994), Nelson George's *Hip Hop America* (1998) and Jeff Chang's *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (2005). See Rose, T. *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1994); George, N. *Hip Hop America* (New York: Penguin, 2005); Chang, J. *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005).

³ One of the many driving motivations for myself and others to explore the analysis of rap is an effort to redress scholarly neglect that has, at least in part, been due to the systematic exclusion of black art forms and black voices from literary canons. Consequently, the application of any tools that were developed entirely in isolation from such voices may lead to a white-washing of the art; the precise opposite of what any considered approach to rap should strive to achieve.

⁴ In some instances, this is rather deliberate, as in Alexs Pate's *In the Heart of the Beat: The Poetry of Rap* (2009), in which Pate 'want[s] to liberate the poetry of rap...from the stereotyped expectations of their function as "songs"' [original emphasis]. See Pate, A. *In the Heart of the Beat: The Poetry of Rap* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2009).

⁵ Adams, K. 'The Musical Analysis of Hip-Hop', in *The Cambridge Companion to Hip-Hop*. Justin A. Williams, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp.118-134.

designed to effectively and efficiently transcribe. However, such progressions are rarely accomplished in rap,⁶ which is based around the looped repetition of four bar phrases. Accordingly, the application of traditional music notation to the *beat* of rap is misleading, while its application to rapped *vocals* is inefficient.

Given the inadequacy of other forms of transcription and analysis, if we are to pay rap the critical attention it deserves, it seems we need to develop customised methods for identifying, transcribing and analysing the phenomenon of flow.

Fortunately, several scholars have recently begun to work toward such methods, most notably Caldwell (2010, 2011),⁷ Condit-Schultz (2016)⁸ and Ohriner (2016).⁹ Each of these scholars has offered novel ways of analysing and visually representing flow, as well as beginning to construct workable corpora for analysis.¹⁰ Condit-Schultz has helpfully distinguished between two types of approach used to study flow in rap music thus far: corpus-based studies, which sample large amounts of data in order to perceive trends, and humanistic approaches, which focus on exemplars in order to conduct a close textual analysis.¹¹ The system I outline here is an attempt to somewhat bridge these two approaches, specifically to devise a way of integrating all the rich data that corpus-based approaches offer such that we can perform a larger amount of single, humanistic analyses. Until now, those wishing to conduct a humanistic analysis often have to start from scratch, but the hard corpus-based work of Condit-Schultz and others means those of us concerned with humanistic approaches now have a larger pool of data that can and should be imported into our own analyses.

⁶ Of course, lyrically rap contains progressions in narrative, rhyme structure and so forth, but these occur over cyclical music production, so there is an asymmetry between the nature of the vocals and the nature of the beat.

⁷ See Caldwell, D. 'Making Many Meanings in Popular Rap Music,' in Mahboob, Ahmar and Naomi Knight., eds., *Applicable Linguistics* (London and New York: Continuum, 2010) pp. 234-250; 'Making Meter Mean: Identity and Affiliation in the Rap Music of Kanye West,' in Martin, J. R. and Monika Bednarek, eds., *New Discourse on Language: Functional Perspectives on Multimodality, Identity, and Affiliation* (London and New York: Continuum, 2010) pp. 59-79.; Caldwell, D. and M. Zappavigna 'Visualizing Multimodal Patterning,' in *Semiotic Margins: Meaning in Multimodalities*, Dreyfus, S. et al., eds., (London and New York: Continuum, 2011), pp. 229-242.

⁸ Condit-Schultz, N. 'MCFlow: A Digital Corpus of Rap Transcriptions,' *Empirical Musicology Review* 11:2 (2016), pp. 124-147.

⁹ Ohriner, M. 'Metric Ambiguity and Flow in Rap Music: A Corpus-Assisted Study of Outkast's 'Mainstream' (1996),' *Empirical Musicology Review* 11:2 (2016), pp. 153-179.

¹⁰ To my knowledge, the most ambitious transcription and analysis of flow to date has been taken up by Condit-Schultz in his dissertation *MCFlow: A Digital Corpus of Rap Flow* (2016), the major findings of which have been published in *Empirical Musicology Review*. Condit-Schultz has manually transcribed a corpus of 124 popular rap songs, sampled from different eras in the history of rap, based on total sales. See Condit-Schultz, N. 'MCFlow: A Digital Corpus of Rap Transcriptions.'

¹¹ Condit-Schultz, N. 'Commentary on Ohriner (2016),' *Empirical Musicology Review* 11:2 (2016), pp. 180-184, 180.

What I intend to offer, then, is something of a synthesis of visualisations that have already been offered by other scholars. A perfect system for analysing flow may be unachievable, but by utilising the most useful aspects of other systems it is my hope to develop a tool that visualises flow in a way that is accessible, less labour intensive than other methods, integrative (able to be integrated with existing corpuses), and engaging for a lay audience. In what follows I provide a brief, consolidated summary of the approaches offered thus far, as well as an appraisal of what I see as the benefits (and some of the shortfalls) of each. I then introduce the novel Flowprint system, which circumvents some of the difficulties that flow analysis has met in the past, is fully customisable, and which is able to be integrated into existing corpus studies. It is my hope that, with revision and further automation, this system will prove useful for scholars and students who wish to engage with rap and the phenomenon of flow in an empirical and engaging way.

2.1 Methodology

For the sake of highlighting and assessing the methodologies that have been offered so far, it will suffice to select one song and apply each methodology to its analysis. I will use a relatively recent song titled ‘DNA’ by the artist Kendrick Lamar, whose fourth studio album *DAMN.* (2017) was released in April 2017 to widespread critical acclaim, debuting at number 1 on the U.S billboard charts, and in less than one month achieving Platinum certification, denoting sales of over one million copies.¹²

I select this song for several reasons. Firstly, because it represents a cross-section of what is currently popular and also what is critically acclaimed in hip-hop. Secondly, this song presents some difficult phenomena which any successful method of transcription and analysis will need to be able to account for, including a change in tempo during the song. Finally, Lamar’s flow exhibits many characteristics that methods devised thus far tend to overlook, and so is a particularly telling example of why such methods require revision. With that noted, however, the flowprint system can be applied to almost any rap verse, and so the song I have chosen to analyse is only relevant insofar as it illuminates the effectiveness of the tools used to analyse it.¹³

¹² Lamar, K. *DAMN.* (Los Angeles: Top Dawg Entertainment, 2017). Digital.

¹³ I write *almost* any rap verse because there would be rare instances in which an alternative time signature combined with unusual instrumentation may make this method ineffective, though I would be interested to find such instances in order to tweak the methodology further.

2.2 Past Approaches

2.2.1 The Written Method

Some of the earlier transcriptions and analyses of rap music, such as those in Adam Bradley's *Book of Rhymes* (2009),¹⁴ operate solely through a transcription of rap's lyrics, with grammar employed to convey rhyme and metrical stress. Treating the text more or less as page poetry,¹⁵ such text analyses foreground semantic information. In the simplest instances, bold text indicates stressed syllables, underlines represent rhyme, and timing is indicated (very broadly) by the placement of beat markers above corresponding syllables. In recent versions of this approach, bold and italics have been used to mark certain phonetic features, such as in Kyle Adams' 'The Musical Analysis of Hip-Hop' (2015).¹⁶ The guiding principle, however, is the same.

If we apply this transcription method to the first four bars of Kendrick Lamar's song 'DNA,' we produce something like Figure 1.

ONE	TWO
Loyalty, got <u>royalty</u> inside my DNA	
THREE	FOUR
Cocaine <u>quarter piece</u> , got <u>war and peace</u> inside my DNA	

Figure 1. Transcription of the first four bars of 'DNA' utilising the written method.

This is the most simple and clear method if we only want to consider rhyme and syllabic stress. However, it gives little sense of rhythm, and it loses much of the intricacy of the data that we have available. For the sake of consistency with transcription methods I examine shortly, here I have labeled each bar separately, where transcriptions using this method often have bar accents listed in a single, static line above lyrics. Since listed bar accents are static, the correlation with vocals is only roughly indicative, and unfortunately inaccurate for most transcriptions (including the above). For Bradley's purposes of analysis regarding *lyrics*, the written method works rather

¹⁴ Bradley, A. *Book of Rhymes: The Poetics of Hip Hop* (New York: Basic Books, 2009).

¹⁵ I should note that Alexis Pate does this quite deliberately, with the intention of 'liberating' the poetry from the musical aspect of rap. See Pate, A. *In the Heart of the Beat*, 3.

¹⁶ See Adams, K. 'The Musical Analysis of Hip-Hop,' 130.

well. However, as I am interested in studying the phenomenon of flow, a more nuanced and a more precise method is required.

2.2.2 The Tabular Method

One of the most common ways of transcribing flow, likely in no small part due to the influence of Adam Krims' groundbreaking work *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity* (2000),¹⁷ what I will call the tabular method, involves dividing data into a table of bars and beat stresses, with each row representing one bar of a verse, and each row broken into sixteen columns (representing four stressed beats and the intervals between). When applied to the first four bars of Lamar's 'DNA,' we produce Figure 2.

	1	x	y	z	2	x	y	z	3	x	y	z	4	x	y	z
1	Loy-		al-		ty		got		roy-		al-		ty		in-	
2	side		my		D		N		A				co-		caine	
3	quar-		ter		piece		got		war		and		peace		in-	
4	side		my		D		N		A				I		got	

Figure 2. Transcription of the first four bars of 'DNA' utilising the tabular method.

The tabular method allows the reader to quickly see perfect rhyme groups (highlighted in corresponding cell colours), syllabic stress (marked in bold type), and the accurate (or near to accurate) placement of syllables in relation to bars and beat stress. It should be noted, however, that the colours are arbitrary and non-relational; the two sets of 'blue' rhymes above are no more similar to each other than they are to 'green' rhymes (in print these appear in similar tones of grey). Although instinctively the cells seem to have a reason for being coloured in particular ways, this is not the case for the tabular method, at least as it has been used thus far (though of course there is no reason that this could not be changed). In the flowprint system I borrow this idea of applying colour to denote similar sounds, so that even imperfect rhymes can be easily identified.

2.2.3 The Timeline Method

Caldwell (2011) has offered a novel way of transcribing flow, which entails the marking of drums along a timeline with ellipses of varying sizes, corresponding to the nature and duration of the drum beat, combined with stars that indicate the attack of rapped syllables (with coloured

¹⁷ Krims, A. *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

stars indicating stressed syllables). Applied to the first two bars of Lamar's 'DNA',¹⁸ the method produces something like Figure 3.

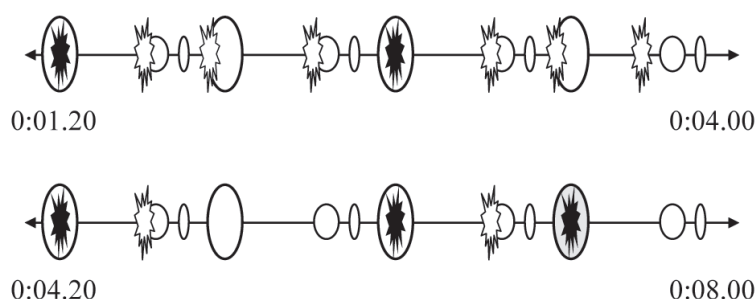


Figure 3. Transcription of the first two bars of 'DNA' utilising the timeline method.

Here Caldwell has devised a system that is, to the best of my knowledge, the first flow analysis system that attempts to track the placement of secondary drum beats — not just kicks, but hi-hats and snares. This brings a new level of detail to the analysis, which may reveal very specific details about a rapper's flow in some instances, such as those Ohriner (2017) dissects in his insightful study, which I will come to shortly.¹⁹ However, the specific nature and timing of drum patterns is often difficult to discern, as well as being inconsistent in much rap production. Accordingly, and while for fine-grained analyses the above may be helpful, for large-scale corpora it is untenable. In addition, all of Caldwell's transcriptions are done manually (as was Figure 3), which makes the method susceptible to error, as it relies solely on the skills of the transcriber, as well as being tedious to produce. What we require is a more automated system, and ideally one that can handle large amounts of data.

2.2.4 The Molecular Method

The most impressive analysis of flow I have encountered to date is that of Ohriner (2017), who eloquently transcribes the flow, rhymes and stress of Outkast's song 'Mainstream'.²⁰ In a method I will (for want of a better name) call the molecular method (due to its visual similarity with common representations of molecules), Ohriner has formulated a system that clearly and simply represents timing, stress, rhyme patterns and lyrics, in a way that brings patterns and placements immediately to the fore. If, once again, we apply this technique to Lamar's 'DNA', we produce Figure 4.

¹⁸ For reasons of space here I limit the transcription to two bars.

¹⁹ Ohriner, M. 'Metric Ambiguity and Flow in Rap Music.'

²⁰ Ibid.

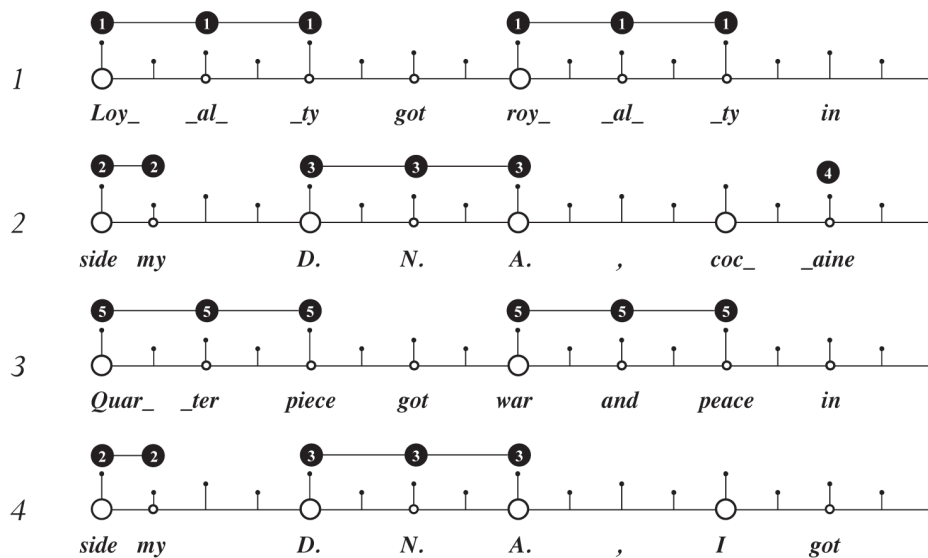


Figure 4. Transcription of the first four bars of ‘DNA’ utilising the molecular method.

In Ohriner’s transcription method, the attack of stressed syllables is indicated by large circles, and unstressed by small circles. Rhymes are indicated via the placement of coloured circles above corresponding syllables, numbered to indicate rhyme chains over the course of a verse. The method is clear and concise, and accurately captures the way that flow operates. From this approach I borrow the idea of using only the most simple and consistent graphic forms to represent flow.

2.3 Two Problems

The first shortfall of every approach offered thus far is that none of them is automated, and my own is only partially automated. This means that analysis requires considerable effort on the part of the transcriber, not only to collect the data (which inevitably requires at least some effort in correcting data acquired digitally), but in the manual production of the flow visualisations themselves. Any future methods should aim to visualise data with as much automation as possible, which should increase efficiency while reducing the margin for human error.

The second hurdle to be overcome, which intertwines with those above, is that each of the methods developed thus far is, in a sense, cut off from the data in existing corpuses. None can ‘import’ or easily update information from other data sources to produce new or corrected diagrams with ease, making their production something of a one-way street. What the field lacks is a system that dynamically integrates data and visualisation, such that we can correct our systems in both a bottom-up manner (correcting our data such that our visualisations update) and

a top-down manner (correcting our methods of visualiation in a way that doesn't affect our integrated data set). What we need, in other words, is a more *nuanced, integrated and automated* system for collecting and visualising our data on flow. With this in mind, along with all of the merits of the systems produced thus far, I now turn to my own working system; the system of visualisation I will call flowprints.

2.4 Flowprints

2.4.1 How They Work

The structure of a flowprint is based on a timeline arranged in a circle, functioning like a clock. A verse (or a whole song, if one prefers) begins at midnight, and then runs clockwise, ending where it joins midnight once again. Every concentric layer provides specific information regarding rhyme and stress, and placement indicates timing.

To assist in explaining the form and function of the flowprint model, in Figure 5 I have recreated a flowprint for the entire first verse of Kendrick Lamar's 'DNA', which I then explain layer by layer.²¹

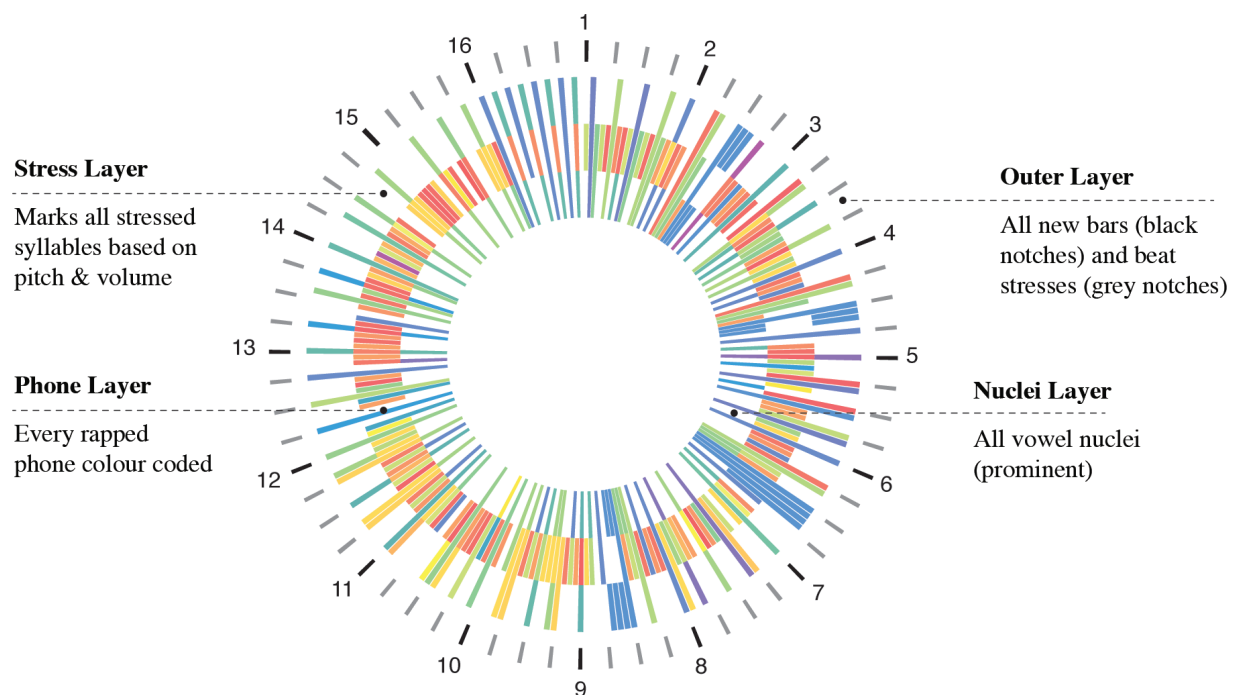




Figure 5. Complete flowprint for the first verse of 'DNA.' Kendrick Lamar, 'DNA' [Verse One]. DAMN, Top Dawg Entertainment, 2017. The Outer Layer of a flowprint indicates time and beat stress. The next layer inward, the Stress Layer, transcribes syllabic stress. The next layer in (the most dense layer) is the Phone Layer, which transcribes all rapped phones. The innermost layer, the Nuclei Layer, transcribes all syllable nuclei.

²¹ Lamar, K. *DAMN*.

At the outer of the flowprint is a layer that indicates all bars and beat stresses. For a standard flowprint analysis of a rap verse consisting of sixteen bars, the outer layer contains 64 grey and black notches, with grey notches indicating a stressed beat within a bar, and the black notches indicating the beginning of a new bar.

Depending on the application, numbering of the bars is optional, as these exist in a separate layer within the Adobe Illustrator file (the program used to create a flowprint) that can be shown/hidden depending on the preferences of the transcriber (for flowprints discussed later I often omit this layer, unless the specific number of the bars is relevant). All technical information extends in coloured bars inward from the outer layer, corresponding to the bars and beat stresses indicated here. If we wish to analyse the flow in the fifth bar, for instance, we would concern ourselves with those coloured bars extending between the 5 and the 6. If the verse for analysis is longer or shorter than sixteen bars, the process and resulting flowprint is identical in structure, but the outer layer will alter to reflect duration. If the verse is 12 bars in length, for instance, the 12th bar ends where the first begins, meaning that regardless of verse length, the resulting flowprint will be identical in structure (and thus helpful when looking at multiple flowprints to draw comparisons). This is the reason a circular shape is used for flowprints, rather than a linear shape — in order to show verses as single units while keeping them visually and structurally similar (where a linear representation would differ in size for different verse lengths, as do the transcription methods examined earlier).

For every method examined in Section One, the smallest unit of analysis has been the syllable. In order to examine the complexity of sound patterning in flow effectively, however, I suggest that we need to go a level deeper and analyse individual *phones*. By doing so we are able to draw out the complexity of not only techniques such as alliteration (which other methods simply overlook), but also to examine slant rhymes and phonetic patterning in a quantitative way. This is the first significant benefit of flowprints: where previous methods rely on the transcriber's discretion to highlight (usually only perfect) rhymes, flowprints offer a colour-coded representation of the data such that similar colours denote similar sounds, making rhyme patterns easily traceable, and less open to subjective interpretation.

The phone layer sits at the centre, and is by necessity the densest layer of a flowprint, containing a transcription of every phone rapped in the verse.²² The colouration of individual phones is based on research by Tasha Nagamine [et al.] (2015),²³ which utilises deep neural networks to organise phonemes, and plots the range of English phonemes on a colour spectrum. Broadly speaking, more ‘harsh’ sounding phones such as sibilants, fricatives and plosives are represented in warmer colours, while vowels are represented in cooler tones of blue and green (please see the online version of this article to access full colour flowprints, though similarities of grey convey the same information, albeit less clearly). This allows for an intuitive reading of a flowprint: in areas marked by long strings of red or orange phones, the rapper will be employing sharp consonants that can sound more abrasive than vowels. Moreover, this mitigates a large difficulty with other forms of analysis, namely the influence of the transcriber in subjectively identifying rhymes. Condit-Shultz (2016) highlights the problem in his discussion of his own work alongside Ohriner. ‘Unfortunately’, he writes, ‘the way around this problem would be to identify rhymes automatically but, as Ohriner points out, this is extremely difficult.’²⁴ The use of a colour-coded system for sounds is an imperfect and incomplete step, but a step nonetheless, toward such an automatic system. By mapping the complete set of phonemes in the English language (as captured by the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)) onto a colour gradient, we can begin to eliminate the problem of subjectivity, because we no longer need to make the call on whether a rhyme occurs, but simply look at the colours and trace similarities. This also reduces the impact of the transcriber’s subjective determination of sound on the results. As Condit-Shultz notes,²⁵ when met with a somewhat ambiguous sound — such as deciding whether a rapper is to be transcribed as rapping ‘ya’ or ‘you’ — a transcriber is often met with the choice between highlighting (in a sense ‘creating’) a rhyme or not, and their choice (compounded over a large number of such decisions in a verse) may muddy the data. In the case of Flowprints the choice between ‘ya’ and ‘you’ entails a selection between colours that are similar (specifically  and ). The result is that transcribers have less ability to influence the

²² At present, in instances where more than one phone occurs in a particular segment (here the segments are less than one-tenth of a second), the first phone is transcribed, along with the syllable nucleus. See Appendix for an outline of this difficulty and potential solutions.

²³ Nagamine, T. et al. *Exploring How Deep Neural Networks Form Phonemic Categories*. Conference Paper: Interspeech 2015, Dresden, Germany, pp. 1912-1916. Note that Nagamine (et al.) only employ ten discrete colours in their colour mapping, where I have utilised 44 different colours on a complete spectrum. Accordingly, my colour mapping is inspired by, but not precisely in line with this research. A closer correlation and further revisions of the colour mapping will be necessary for flowprints to capture sound in a way that is both intuitive and accurate to the empirical relationships between sounds.

²⁴ Condit-Schultz, N. ‘Commentary on Ohriner,’ 182.

²⁵ Condit-Schultz, N. ‘MCFlow: A Digital Corpus of Rap Flow. Dissertation (Columbus: The Ohio State University), 107.

data — regardless of choice the result will appear as either an exact rhyme or sufficiently similar to denote a slant rhyme, staying more true to the actual listener experience.

One layer in from the phone layer is a layer that indicates all syllable nuclei. Since flow is not only a matter of timing and rhyme, but also prominence and stress, it is important that the flowprint does not give the impression that all rapped phones are of equal prominence (which would be the impression from the phone layer alone). Accordingly, syllable nuclei are transcribed as per the below, since these constitute the most prominent aspects of each syllable and, as such, are (usually) the most reliable way of tracking rhyme.

As Adams and Ohriner have suggested, syllabic stress in rap can be difficult to pin down (as it can in page and performance poetry), as it is a perceptual phenomenon that operates by subtle degrees of variation. It would be desirable to have a reliably accurate way of measuring and annotating stress in rap. However, given that it is both perceptual and multifaceted (influenced not only by volume, but pitch and timbre), this may not be possible. The way stress has been recorded by previous scholars then is both subjective and binary: the transcriber transcribes a syllable as stressed if it is perceived as stressed to them, and unstressed if unstressed to them, rather than stressed or unstressed to a certain degree. Following this (admittedly imperfect) approach, the outermost layer of a flowprint is the stress layer, which transcribes those phones that the transcriber perceives as stressed. The nature and rigidity of the parameters used to assess stress, however, are up to the transcriber. For the below I have based the transcription on my own perception, influenced also by pitch contours viewable in Praat software during the transcription process.

It is important to emphasise that the flowprint system is entirely customisable and open to revision by the transcriber. Following roughly from Kyle Adams, I consider flow to be entirely a matter of timing, rhyme and stress, and as such will suggest that the layers outlined above are perfectly adequate to analyse with relative accuracy every aspect of flow. But one need not agree that these aspects of flow are exhaustive (or even applicable) in order to find the flowprint model useful. Any layer can be altered to transcribe any aspect of flow that one wishes to find, and any number of colour systems could be applied, depending on what one wishes to transcribe.

2.4.2 Why They Are Helpful

Nuance

Flowprints allow us to easily identify the most significant aspects of flow. In fact, if it is true that flow is merely a matter of timing and sound, which I take to be the case, then a flowprint should allow us to examine every aspect and possibility of flow. For my purposes here, however, I will only outline what I take to be the most fundamental aspects, and describe how a flowprint can be used to assess them. The aspects I will focus on are: flow density, rhythmic synchronicity; drag and rhyme density.

a) Flow density

What I call flow density is perhaps the easiest aspect of flow to study. By this I merely mean the relative number of phones that are being rapped in a given bar (or set of bars). If we examine the second verse of ‘DNA’ (see Figure 6), for instance, we can clearly see a shift in flow density after the sixth bar, as Lamar speeds up his flow delivery (which also corresponds to shifts in the lyrical tone, vocal inflection and pitch). All we must do is look for gaps, and the point/s where phones become denser.

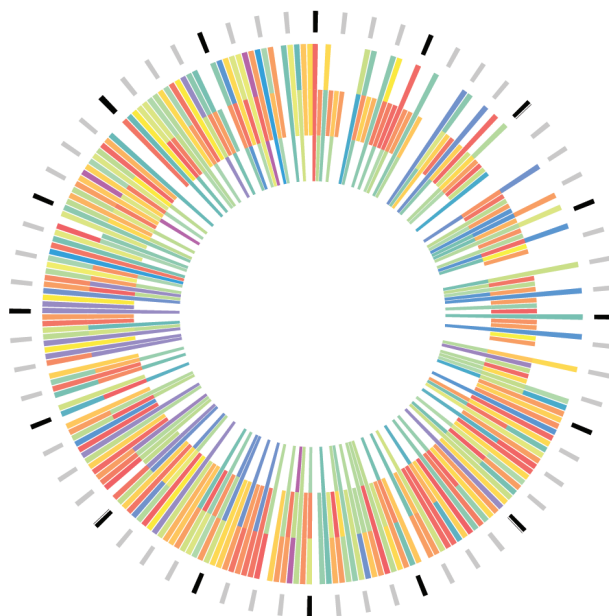


Figure 6. Complete flowprint for the second verse of ‘DNA.’ Kendrick Lamar, ‘DNA’ [Verse Two]. *DAMN*, Top Dawg Entertainment, 2017.

This may seem a banal point — of course rappers, like singers, or speakers, will shift tempo on occasion to create interest and avoid monotony. But rarely will rap artists like Lamar alter their flow density without reason, usually speeding up or slowing down in reference to lyrical content, and always as guided by backing instrumentation. Moreover, flow density is not merely a matter of speed. Flow is, I have suggested, a matter of patterns, and some of these patterns can be created via flow density. Just as meter functions in page poetry, combinations of stress and speed in rap can be used to create distinctive and meaningful flow patterns. Consider, for instance, the broken patterning evident in the first four bars of Figure 6, in which Lamar raps: ‘tell me something [pause] / you motherfuckers can’t tell me nothing [pause] / I’d rather die than to listen to you [pause] / my DNA not for imitation [pause].’ If we direct our attention to the outer (stress) and inner (vowel nuclei) layers, we can see breaks in the rhythmic patterning, followed by an increase in flow density after the sixth bar. Why is there such an evident, staggered flow in the first bars and then a shift in flow density after the sixth?

In this instance flow density is carefully and masterfully controlled to reiterate a tonal balance of both mockery and aggression. ‘Tell me something’ is immediately followed by a pause in flow, as if awaiting a response; ‘you motherfuckers can’t tell me nothing’ is immediately followed by a pause in flow, as if the silence is indicative of the addressee’s lack of ability to say anything; and ‘I’d rather die than to listen to you’ is likewise followed by a pause, a void sardonically indicative of absence or ‘death’. In a song that is concerned with both interrogating and defending identity along personal, racial and musical lines, it is imperative to the song’s creation of meaning that Lamar is able to construct a tension between self and other. While such tension is created lyrically, it is largely reinforced via Lamar’s elaborate flow. It is no accident, for instance, that in the seventh bar, flow density is put into overdrive with the line ‘this how it is when you’re in the Matrix, dodging bullets [...]’. The chaos and violence referenced in the song’s lyrics are enacted in flow, as single syllables are suddenly ‘fired’ like a stream of bullets, and the words ‘this how it is’ comes to reference not only the semantic content, but the sonic aspects of the song’s construction, as if to say to the listener ‘this musical chaos is what my environment feels like.’ The manipulation of flow density (which here I have merely glossed over) is crucial for such nuances and key to the song’s construction of (possible) meaning. Where previous systems either overlook or tend to obscure flow density, the flowprint system allows us to easily track such patterns, to see immediately where shifts in flow density occur, and then to question why.

If we compare the flowprint for the first and second verses — Figure 5 and Figure 6 — without even hearing the song and even in the absence of lyric transcription, we can get an immediate sense of the shift between verses: an increased intensity in flow density, a far greater use of plosives and fricatives (denoted by warmer colours), and a decrease in rhyme clustering; here rhyme chains are not as segmented throughout the verse but rather flooded randomly throughout (and the reasons for this have been seen above). At a glance the flowprint allows a fast and intuitive way of seeing such features, while on closer analysis we can observe finer details, such as rhythmic synchronicity and drag.

b) Rhythmic Synchronicity

Rhythmic synchronicity refers to the degree to which rapped syllables coincide with stressed beats of backing instrumentation. In most instances, to be flowing ‘on beat’ means to rap stressed syllables (stressed by either volume, pitch, tone, rhyme, syntactic closure, or some combination of these) on accented beats. For example, in the opening bars of ‘DNA’, Lamar raps ‘I got loyalty, got royalty, inside my DNA,’ with stresses separated by syllable triplets. On the flowprint this line appears as in Figure 7.

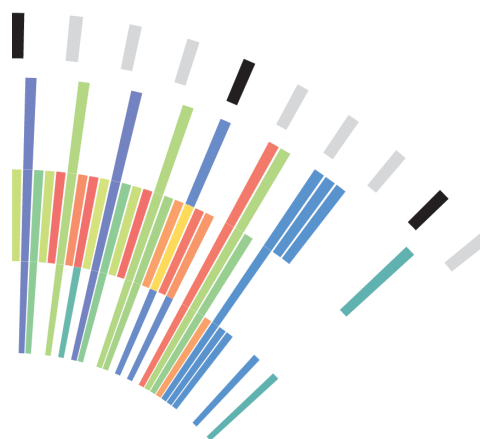


Figure 7. Tracking rhythmic synchronicity using a flowprint.

Here there is a high degree of rhythmic synchronicity, since stressed syllables occur either directly in line with black notches or immediately after. It is important to note that beat stress is a pulse that ‘hits’ at each black notch, but has a period of build and decay that can extend slightly beyond that (depending on the nature of the drums and the production style). The beat accent thus begins at the black notch but needn’t end there. When we are looking for rhythmic synchronicity, then, we are looking for stress and rhyme that clusters toward the black notches of the outer layer,

but may not align precisely. In Figure 7 we can see a clear clustering of blue (and teal) that occurs in equal spaces both on and in the middle of beat stresses (highlighted further in Figure 8).

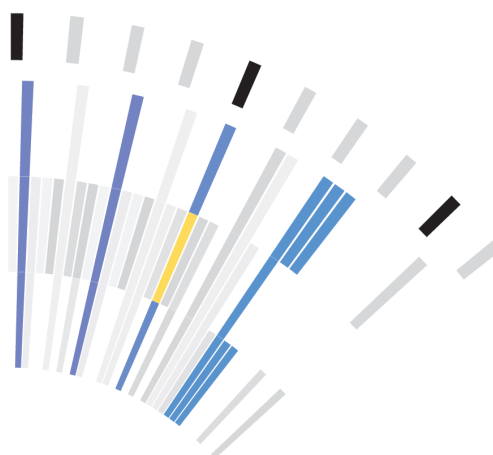


Figure 8. Note similar colours clustering around black notches (denoting beat stress).

In its simplest instances, this is a basic technique for highlighting rhyme and semantically important information. In Figure 8, the stressed syllables are ‘loyalty, got royalty, inside my DNA.’ These are the naturally stressed syllables in each word in ordinary speech, and they are also the rhyming (and slant-rhyming) syllables in the lexical set. By rapping them in such a rhythmically synchronous way, Lamar aligns rhyme and stress with beat accent in a way that doesn’t interfere with the beat. This technique is more or less the goal of what it means to flow effectively. As rap artist Jay-Z explains,

Flow is just becoming one with the music. You find someplace inside the music that you can tuck in, and you don’t get in the way of the groove. You insert yourself in the song as an instrument. You’re just part of the track. You are no different than the horn or the snare or the bass or the hi-hat. You found the place in that track to tuck in and you just don’t disturb the groove.²⁶

This is the simplest way of (effectively) flowing on beat. In other instances, however, stressed syllables are hedged either side of beat stress, either hitting earlier or just after the beat pulse (usually marked by a drum kick, except in syncopated beats). Such instances are where the artist deliberately pushes the potentials of flow to create their own distinct rhythmic patterns. These patterns are a core aspect of flow that other annotation systems have largely overlooked, and constitute an aspect of flow that I call drag.

²⁶ Quoted on O Network (Producer). Oprah Presents Masterclass: Jay-Z, Pt.1-4, 2011. *Oprah Presents Master Class*. Accessed July 2, 2017.

c) *Drag*

I have claimed that rapping stressed syllables and rhymes (particularly monosyllabic rhymes) on stressed beats is the simplest method of flowing effectively (or indeed flowing at all). As various scholars have pointed out, this is the reason why many early rap songs sound basic and (comparatively) uninspired when we listen to them today, familiar as we are with the complex possibilities of flow. Early songs by artists like Sugar Hill Gang, Kurtis Blow, and Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five are largely built around a simple pattern of rapping monosyllabic rhymes on accented beats, such that the flow is constant and predictable. Indeed, Wonder Mike even opens ‘Rapper’s Delight’ explaining that ‘what you hear is not a test, I’m rapping to the beat,’²⁷ distinguishing the monotonous rap from the monotony of a spoken microphone check.

As even a cursory glance at the flowprints thus far (or just a few seconds of listening to Lamar’s raps) reveals, the mastery of rap requires the creation of a dynamic and elaborate flow that can not only respond to beat and lyric changes, but can reinforce the semantic information of the verse. There are, however, limits to how far one can ‘push’ rhyme, stress and semantic closure away from beat accents (usually quantized to quarter notes, in a standard 4/4 rap beat). Just as being a bad dancer entails an inability to physically move in time with rhythm, so being a bad rapper entails the inability to rap in time with the rhythm of the beat. What this means is that in order to be flowing one has to navigate the beat in such a way that salient syllables are rapped within what I will call an ‘acceptable flow range’ either side of the beat pulse. One can rap a syllable slightly earlier, or slightly after the pulse and the rap will still sound ‘on beat’ (particularly if the next syllable compensates by pushing in the other direction, as we will see), but if a prominent syllable, rhyme or semantic closure (or some combination of these) falls too far from a beat pulse it sounds completely ‘off beat.’ Once again, Jay-Z explains this phenomenon well:

‘...the beat is only one half of a rap song’s rhythm. The other is the flow. When a rapper jumps on a beat, he adds his own rhythm. Sometimes you stay in the pocket of the beat and just let the rhymes land on the square so that the beat and flow become one. But sometimes the flow chops up the beat, breaks the beat into smaller units, forces in multiple syllables and repeated sounds and

²⁷ Quoted in Bradley, A. and A. DuBois, eds., *The Anthology of Rap* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 97.

internal rhymes, or hangs a drunken leg over the last bap and keeps going, sneaks out of that bitch.’²⁸

What Jay-Z calls flowing in ‘the pocket’ is how we have seen Lamar rapping at the beginning of ‘DNA’, with rhymes and syllabic stress coinciding with beat stresses. What I will call the ‘acceptable flow range’ is where syllables are rapped earlier or later than the beat pulse, but in a way that they are still flowed with some cohesion to the beat (as Jay-Z poetically calls it, hanging just outside, like ‘a drunken leg’). If a salient syllable falls too far outside the acceptable flow range, however, it will be heard as ‘off beat’, and sound jarring, like an instrument out of place. Of course, this is not an exact science; as flow is an experiential phenomenon, people will perceive subtleties in flow differently. Nonetheless, what I am referring to can be visualised roughly as in Figure 9 (where the extremities fall marks the half way point to the next beat accent).

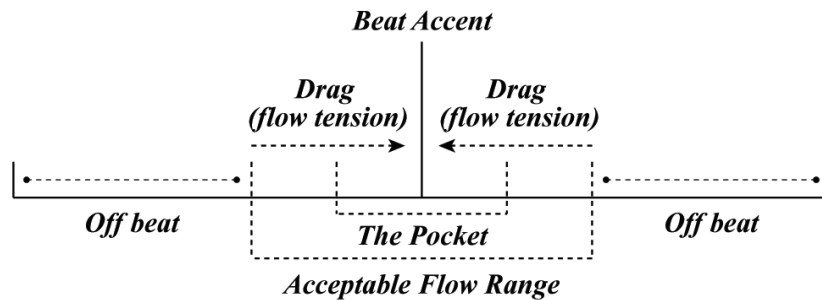


Figure 9. The phenomenon of drag in rap flow.

The important point to note is that there is always a tendency toward rapping on the beat accent. Where a syllable is rapped early, it is usually compensated for by the next bar tending toward the pocket, or swaying the other way and arriving shortly after the beat accent (but still within the acceptable flow range). Conversely, if a syllable is rapped toward the end of the acceptable flow range, there is a tendency toward the next syllable/s returning to the pocket, or compensating by swaying back to arriving slightly before the beat accent. This is common in music by the multi-platinum artist Drake, as can be heard in verse 4 [4:30–5:35] in the song ‘Pound Cake/Paris Morton Music 2’²⁹; verse 1 [1:12–1:53] of ‘Over My Dead Body’³⁰; and verse 1 [1:30–2:20] of ‘Wu-Tang Forever’³¹). Like a pendulum, an effective, dynamic flow tends to swing toward and away from the beat accent, creating not only a correlation between sonic and semantic content, but creating a sense of tension and resolution for the listener.

²⁸ Jay-Z, *Decoded* (London: Virgin, 2011), 44.

²⁹ Drake, *Nothing Was the Same* (Los Angeles: Cash Money Records, 2013). Digital

³⁰ Drake, *Take Care* (Los Angeles: Cash Money Records, 2011). Digital

³¹ Drake, *Nothing Was the Same* (Los Angeles: Cash Money Records, 2013). Digital

Borrowed from fishing terminology, ‘drag’ usually refers to the relative tautness of one’s reel, such that it lets out enough fishing line to prevent the line from breaking, but not so much that one cannot bring the fish back in with relative ease. Similarly, drag in flow is about ‘letting out’ the rapped syllables and allowing them to stray from the beat accent such that the flow isn’t ‘snapping’ (anachronistically) along the ‘breaks’, but not so much that one can’t bring the flow back toward beat accents. Many artists, such as Drake, Curren\$y and Andre 3000 (from rap duo Outkast) use a relatively ‘loose’ drag, while others (such as those early pioneers of rap mentioned earlier) maintain a tight drag. The degree of drag in a rapper’s flow is, to my ear, one of the most distinctive aspects of a rapper’s flow; what distinguishes their unique style.

d) Rhyme Density

The last aspect of flow that I wish to highlight within the flowprint system is rhyme density, which simply refers to the frequency and complexity of rhyme structures at a point in a verse. Every previous system (that I am aware of) leaves the detection of rhyme to the transcriber’s discretion. The result is that subtle verbal parallelisms such as assonance and alliteration, which are ubiquitous in rap music, are universally ignored. Slant rhymes are usually overlooked, and perfect rhymes are often annotated only where they occur in chains of consecutive rhymes (where rappers will often return to previous rhyme structures from earlier in a verse). Here flowprints are exceptionally helpful, because we needn’t know the lyrics (or indeed even hear the song) in order to ascertain where rhyme patterns are occurring.

For the most basic analysis we can consult the vowel nuclei layer, where similar colours will denote slant rhymes, and the same colours perfect rhymes. For a more sophisticated analysis we can look for patterns between all three layers, and the more ‘combinations’ we can see recurring, the more sophisticated the rhyme structure. Moreover, flowprints are particularly helpful if we wish to pay attention to the prevalence of a particular sound or pattern of sounds. Using any photo editing software, we can isolate particular colours in order to trace patterns and prevalence of that sound. In Figure 10, for instance, I have isolated stressed vowels by simply removing reds from the image. This immediately brings to the fore points in the flow that are the most forceful, as vowels (and particularly diphthongs, characterised by purple colouring) by their nature can be stressed longer than consonants. Even without hearing the song or knowing the lyrics, a glance at Figure 10 reveals an increase in stress, an increase in diphthongs and a clustering of rhymes from the 12th bar.

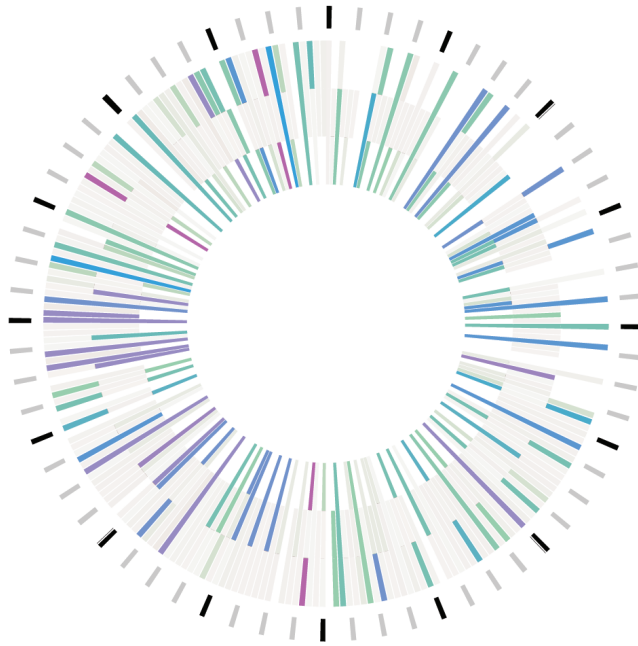


Figure 10. Using Adobe Photoshop to segment aspects of flow.

Such rhythmic stress and rhyme creates a certain intensity in the listening experience, a sensory ‘overflowing’ of similar sound and stress. Accordingly, it would make sense for such an increase in rhyme density to correlate with an increase in intensity in the lyrics. And this is exactly what we find. Just as in the sixth bar a chaotic increase in flow density correlates with lyrics describing chaos, here an increase in rhyme density correlates with lyrics that describe an increase in energy and lyrical skill: ‘only Lord knows, I’ve been goin’ hammer’ (the claim here has a double meaning — ‘going hammer’ both implying ‘going hard’, as well as ‘going hammer’, where ‘going ham’ is a slang acronym for going ‘hard as a motherfucker’).

The point here is that whenever we see a pattern or a change in the flowprint, we can look to the corresponding lyrics and will often find justification for the shift. Far from being a stylistic addendum to lyrical content, flow underpins and foregrounds semantic meaning within rap. Flowprints offer a way of visualising flow that is simultaneously simple and sophisticated: simple to use (and increasingly simple to produce), while allowing for sophisticated analysis of rhythmic and lyrical nuances.

Integration

For the sake of further illustrating the potential uses and integrative aspects of flowprints, I now briefly consider an additional two verses by rappers Eminem and 2Pac, two of the highest-

selling and most well-known rap artists of all time. In each case I have ‘imported’ the data already transcribed by Condit-Shultz in his MCFlow corpus (available online at RapScience.net),³² and edited the data for flowprint transcriptions (as some of the data is formatted in a way that requires adjustment for flowprint use).

In a sense, the more highly intricate a flowprint appears (colour clustering, even distribution of bars, even colour distribution and so forth) the more sophisticated and complex the rapper’s flow is likely to be. This is immediately evident in Figure 11, a flowprint for Eminem’s ‘The Way I Am.’³³

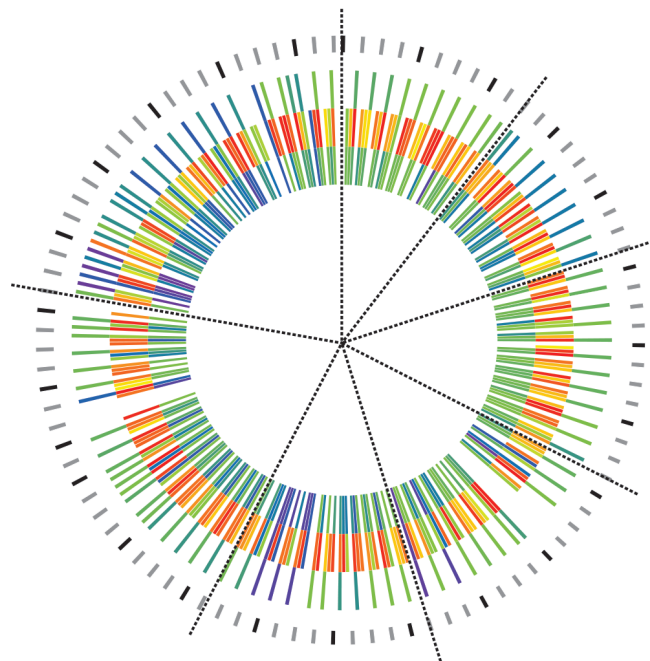


Figure 11. Complete flowprint for the first verse of ‘The Way I Am.’ Eminem, ‘The Way I Am’ [Verse One]. *The Marshall Mathers LP*, Interscope Records, 2000.

Note that this verse is almost twice the length of a standard rap verse of 16 bars, consisting of just over 31 bars of lyrics. Yet where other methods of analysis would in essence double the length of visual output, flowprints merely become ‘denser’ the longer the verse they represent (in particularly long verses it is necessary to zoom into the flowprint to trace patterns, but as the files are in a vector format this can be done without obscuring the visualisation). In Figure 11 we see a remarkable consistency in placement of phones in the stress layer: a constant ‘drumming’ of stress on the sixteenth notes immediately prior to accented beats, which metrically reinforces the

³² Condit-Schultz, N. ‘MCFlow: A Digital Corpus of Rap Flow.’

³³ Eminem, *The Marshall Mathers LP* (Los Angeles: Interscope Records, 2000). Digital.

tone of the lyrics, in which Eminem laments the pressures of consistent fan interrogation, as we will see. Moreover, a survey of the colour patterns in the vowel nuclei and stress layers reveals a segmentation of rhymes into clusters, indicated by the dashed lines (such clusters are what Condit-Shultz and others refer to as rhyme chains).

Each of the dashed lines above highlights the beginning of a new rhyme chain (again, here we need only notice colour clustering to see this), which usually coincide with shifts at the semantic level. For instance, the beginning of the second rhyme chain entails a temporal shift within the lyrics ('the most meanest emcee on this earth / and since birth I've been cursed...'); the third a shift from negative to positive appraisal ('and it sells, and it helps in itself to relieve...'); and the fourth the introduction of the song's addressee ('but at least have the decency in you to leave me alone...'). Of course, to explore the full significance of these shifts one must turn to the lyrics, but flowprints offer a helpful shortcut when disentangling complex verses, highlighting rhyme chains and transitions between them, which often coincide with the most salient shifts at the semantic level.

2.5 A Possible Objection

It may be objected that a flowprint, in jettisoning the transcription of lyrics, makes it difficult to analyse a rapper's flow alongside the lyrics simultaneously (where many of the systems outlined thus far are useful for such analysis). There are two replies I will offer to this very reasonable objection. The first is that flowprints are devised to primarily study flow as a distinct phenomenon, in essence as sound devoid of semantic meaning. When we say that a rapper's flow in a song is remarkable, we are saying nothing about its lyrical content, and a flowprint allows us to look at our data on flow without obscuring it with semantic content.

The second reply I will make is that in devising the flowprint system I have deliberately made it such that in order to construct a flowprint, part of the process involves the creation of a linear visualisation with lyrics included, along with all the colour and bar information that a final flowprint represents. Accordingly, if a user wishes to analyse lyrics alongside flow, and in a linear fashion similar to previous methods, one can simply stop short of the final step in the creation process (before lyrics are omitted and the diagram is made circular — see Appendix: Making a Flowprint for the point at which this occurs). For illustrative purposes, I have done so during the creation of the flowprint for Eminem's 'The Way I Am,' the first bar of which is reproduced in Figure 12 (with adjustments in the software for the sake of legibility).

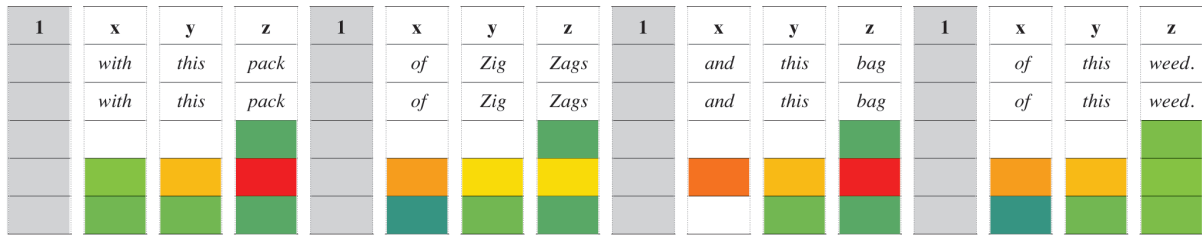


Figure 12. A linear version of the flowprint model, applied to the first bar ‘The Way I Am’ by Eminem.

As we should expect, this method is helpful for fine-grained analysis of lyric placement and rhymes. It is clear to see, for instance, that Eminem avoids rhythmic synchronicity, instead pocketing all lyrics *between* rather than *on* stressed syllables. Moreover, his rhyme chains are multi-syllabic (note the chains of yellow/yellow/green) and are mirrored in vocal stress (the highest colours denote a stressed syllable). At this level we can see a patterning that, in metrical terms, entails a repetition of anapaests, two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable. Combined with the immediate hit of stressed beats that follow stressed syllables, the result is a rhythm that builds and fades four times within each bar. Given the lyric content of the song, in which Eminem vents about the constantly building pressure of stardom (‘the stress has been eatin’ me recently’), a flow that constantly builds within each bar enacts the semantic content of the work, creating a flow that says in rhythm what it says in words. This is crucial to the emotional impact of the song: we hear Eminem’s frustration not only in the lyrics and their inflection, but the way they flow. Once again, all aspects of the way they flow can be seen in the flowprint, but if we wish to see *why* (in reference to the lyrics), the linear flowprint allows closer analysis.

As a final illustration, and with the hope that flowprints are becoming clearer to read, consider the bar pauses evident in Figure 13, the flowprint for 2Pac’s ‘So Many Tears’³⁴ (again, the focus here is on the information extending inward from the black notches on the outer layer, which mark beat accents):

³⁴ 2Pac, *Me Against the World* (San Francisco: Interscope Records, 1994). Digital.

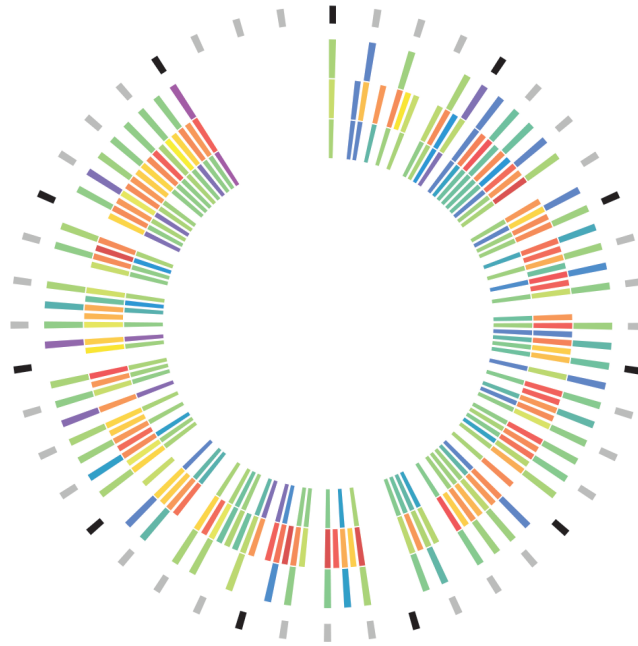


Figure 13. Complete flowprint for the first verse of ‘So Many Tears.’ 2Pac, ‘So Many Tears’ [Verse One]. *Me Against the World*, Interscope Records, 1994.

Where Eminem’s flow is pocketed between beat accents, and Kendrick Lamar largely pulses his rhymes on and around beat accents, 2Pac here does the inverse: on every beat accent in the eleven-bar verse (excluding the ninth bar) there is a pause immediately following the rhyme that falls on the accented beat (and in some cases the phone is drawn out over this time, or echoed). Common in 2Pac’s flow throughout this song (and others from the same album, *Me Against the World* (1995)), this feature of flow is a near-reversal of what Condit-Shultz describes as ‘behind-the-beat’ flow.³⁵ Where behind-the-beat syllables are rapped just outside the accented beat (with loose drag, in my earlier terminology), here beat accents effect a momentary pause (or echo) that emphasises syntactic units that close on beat accents. Similar to a line break in page poetry, such micro-pauses are integral to the impact of 2Pac’s flow, effectively segmenting moments of silence around passages that mourn the death of close friends and the consideration of 2Pac’s own death (such pauses come after ‘no longer with us he’s *deceased*’; ‘seen him murdered in the *streets*’; remember *Kato*?’; ‘Is there a heaven for a *G*?’ and ‘Remember *me*’, among others). Far from being random or merely for emphasis, the gaps evident in the flowprint above constitute reverence manifested in flow, which culminate in a break after the last line before the hook, which runs ‘I suffered through the years, and shed so many tears / Lord, I lost so

³⁵ Condit-Schultz, N. ‘MCFlow: A Digital Corpus of Rap Flow.’

many peers, and shed so many tears’). Here a staggered flow with pauses around beat accents becomes the means for expressing sorrow and reverence, and are thus critical to the text’s creation of meaning. The flowprint allows us to see this effect immediately, and so draws our attention to where flow is reinforcing semantic content.

Flowprints allow us to easily assess all key aspects of flow, in a manner that is engaging to a lay audience, nuanced, integrated, less open to transcriber error than some systems, and (increasingly) automated. They require further revision, yet at the very least — and I hope there is more they will reveal in use — flowprints help us easily identify and analyse the following:

- Flow density
- Rhythmic synchronicity
- Drag
- Rhyme density
- Rhyme chains / transitions between rhyme chains
- Alliteration and slant rhymes
- Pauses/emphases around beat accents

2.6 Conclusion

Flow is to rap as structure and lineation are to poetry; it is not a stylistic device or a tool that a rapper can use over and above the lyrics, but is the very fabric of the song itself. It is no surprise, then, that rappers so frequently discuss, critique and boast about the distinctive nature of their flow, and diss those rappers that seemingly ‘bite’ the flows of other artists.

It is, of course, not a unique phenomenon; one can discuss flow in spoken-word poetry, in dance, and in other music genres. But the way flow operates both technically and culturally within the confines of hip-hop is akin to a fingerprint — a unique individual marking that speaks to personal identity and claims to authenticity. If the musicality of rap is to receive the scholarly engagement that it deserves, we require new tools to quantify, transcribe and discuss the phenomenon of flow, which lies at the core of what it means to be an emcee. The flowprint system outlined here is a further step toward developing such tools, presented for what it is worth and with the hope of working toward new ways of approaching rap that do justice to its uniqueness and complexity. By bringing new systems of visualisation to the analysis of flow and by emphasising nuance, integration and automation, we may create richer and more collaborative methodologies to bear on this remarkable art form.

2.7 Appendix: Making a Flowprint

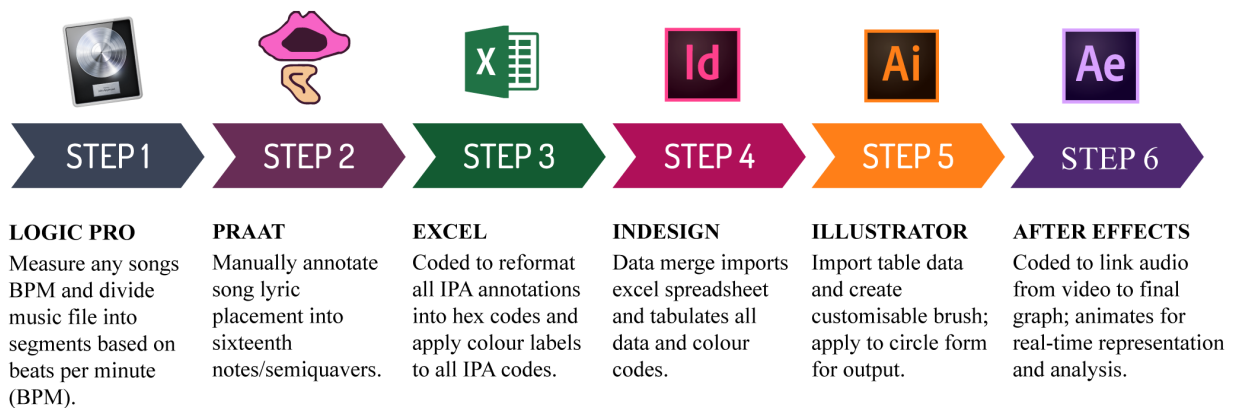


Figure 14. The six steps currently required to produce a complete and animated flowprint.

2.7.1 Step 1 – The Key of BPM

In order to accurately divide song files into bars for transcription, we need to know the tempo (measured in BPM — beats per minute) of the song. This can be learned by using Logic Pro’s ‘BPM Counter’ tool, or can (usually accurately) be found with an online search. In an important sense, the BPM of a song offers an incredible shortcut for analysing flow that all scholars mentioned thus far seem to have overlooked.

Since flow is predominantly a matter of timing and beat stress (precisely what BPM measures), the tools we generate in creating a flowprint become instantly transferable to any rap song of the same BPM. In the analyses presented thus far, for instance, I have transcribed in various ways Lamar’s ‘DNA’ which has an (initial) BPM of 140bpm. In so doing I have set up Logic Pro, Praat, Adobe InDesign and Adobe Illustrator files with 256 sixteenth note time markers (16 notes x 16 bars) on the exact beat stresses and off beats dictated by a BPM of 140. This means that I can now place any song of the same tempo into the same files and, since time markers will necessarily coincide, an accurate transcription of the new song is possible without the labour of setting up new files from scratch. This means that once the necessary files have been created for all possible BPMs (and rap songs generally fall within a manageable BPM range), the process will simply be a matter of selecting the files corresponding to the target song’s BPM, transcribing the data and outputting flowprints. In Logic Pro, after determining the song’s BPM it is possible to then slice the audio track into bar segments for analysis and transcription in the software program Praat.

2.7.2 Step 2 – Praat Transcription

Once the master file for 140bpm transcriptions is produced, the process involves opening the bar files and transcribing lyrics, stress and syllable nuclei into the relative sixteenth notes. Phonetic transcriptions can be ignored during this stage as Excel will convert lyric transcriptions to IPA during Stage 3 (though these will need to be manually checked and corrected where necessary). Unfortunately, there is currently no reliable way of automatically detecting lyric placement that I am aware of, though if an acapella version of the song (vocals only) can be found, the Gentle audio aligner (available at <https://lowerquality.com/gentle/>) can in some instances produce a reasonable transcription (though, once again, these will require manual assessment and correction). A bar as opened in Praat is represented in Figure 15, with the top section displaying the audio waveform, the centre section displaying a spectrogram (and blue lines denoting pitch shifts), and the bottom section the area in which lyrics, syllable nuclei and stress are transcribed.

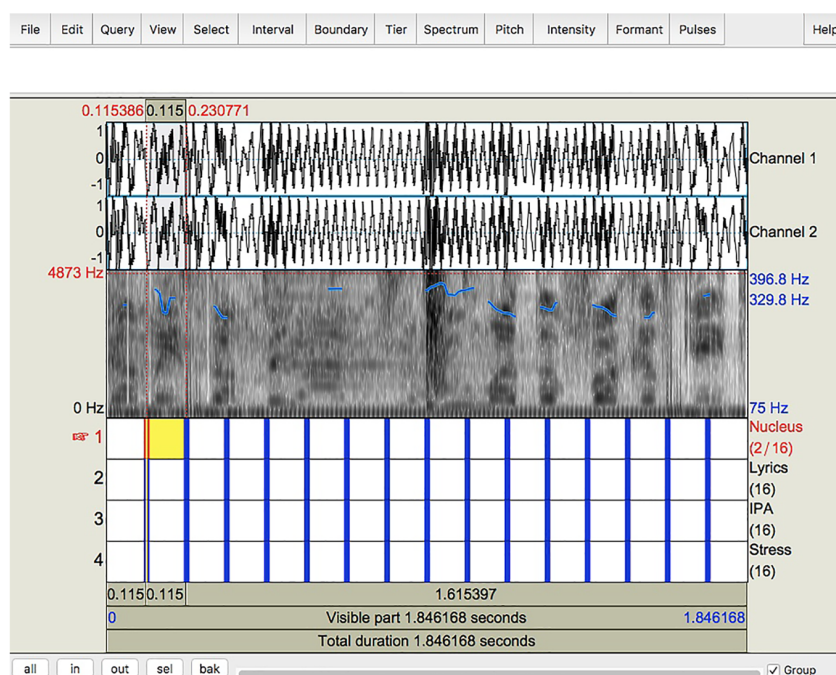


Figure 15. Using Praat software to transcribe lyric placement.

Once all bars have been transcribed using Praat, a complete list should be concatenated and output as a .txt file for use in Adobe Excel.

2.7.3 Step 3 – Microsoft Excel

Using simple VLOOKUP code within Excel, the software can automatically read the lyric transcriptions in the lyrics column and convert them to IPA transcription in the IPA column, which is then read and converted into a colour value system, in which every phone has its own colour, arranged along a spectrum from consonants to vowels and diphthongs, and roughly from bilabials to glottals, as ordered by the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).

There are, unfortunately, two hurdles at this stage of the process. Firstly, the code is imperfect. Since there is no direct correlation between lettering and phonetics — there is, for instance, no way (that I am aware of) to automatically detect whether a phone is voiced or voiceless — there are inevitably some mistakes that are produced by the automatic conversion. When met with the phone *th*, the code has no reliable way of discerning whether this is the voiced dental fricative (as in *mother*) or the voiceless dental fricative (as in *thought*), and will default to the more common of the two (being voiceless). Accordingly, the IPA column must be scanned after conversion in order to manually correct any errors. This is, however, still faster in my experience than completing an IPA conversion manually in full.

The second hurdle is a little higher. In instances where a rapper is rapping at a fast pace (such as going ‘double time’, which involves rapping at a pace of squeezing two bars worth of raps into every one bar of music), there may be more than one phone (indeed, sometimes three or four) in just one sixteenth note. In such instances, we are met with three options: 1) we can divide the Flowchart’s cell up further and transcribe all phones; 2) we can select one phone as the most salient or relevant for transcription based on a pre-determined rule; or 3) we can transcribe the vowel nucleus in the vowel nuclei layer (as normal), and transcribe another phone (the first, as a general rule, for instance) in the phone layer. To my mind, the first option is undesirable as it compromises the visual integrity of the flowprint (and thus obscures the data, as well as requiring much further work). The second option involves jettisoning some of our data, effectively omitting a (usually small, but sometimes significant) handful of phones from the phone layer. The third option — selecting the first phone for transcription — seems to me the most defensible, as it both retains the integrity of the flowprint while minimising the number of phones that have to be omitted (though, it is worth stressing, in segments of fast rapping this can entail a significant loss of data, so is not unproblematic). Nonetheless, I would suggest that a blanket rule of transcribing the first phone and the vowel nucleus in such instances is a defensible practice, as often the first

is the most prominent (as in alliteration). But I will leave that to the annotator's discretion, and welcome any suggestions for a solution on this point.

2.7.4 Step 4 – Adobe InDesign

The fourth step serves to import the Excel data via Adobe InDesign's data merge tool and to tabulate it in such a way that we are left with something similar to what the tabular method provides, but with colour coding in separate cells. At this point we still have the lyrics transcribed alongside our colours, so the file produced at Step 4 can be useful in its own right if we wish to read flow and lyric data simultaneously. Once the data has been imported as multiple records, the table is ready to be transferred to Adobe Illustrator, where it can be converted to a brush and applied around a circle in an editable vector format.

2.7.5 Step 5 – Adobe Illustrator

One of the greatest benefits of having the flowprint applied as an Adobe Illustrator custom brush is that the thickness of the flowprint is fully editable by simply adjusting the stroke width, as per Figure 16.



Figure 16. Using Adobe Illustrator to edit flowprint without compromising data.

The brush can also be applied in a straight line (as per the tabular method), or applied around any shape, as well as edited (for direction and spacing). Since the file is a vector format, it can also be output for production at any size without diminishing quality.

2.7.6 Step 6 – Adobe After Effects

The final step of the process is optional, but can be a useful way of ‘linking’ the flowprint back to the song itself, such that it can be analysed in real time. Adobe After Effects can be used to animate a flowprint alongside the music it represents. A transcriber can import a video or sound file, link their flowchart to an animated ‘clock wipe’ sequence, set the track duration in the animation settings, and output a video file that contains the music (or video file), overlaid by a flowprint that animates in real time. This can be incredibly useful for tracking the interaction of lyrics and flow, and particularly engaging for a student audience.

Flowprints: A Revised Method for Visualising Flow in Rap (Discussion)

In the previous section I have moved to a completely different genre, from written poetry to a consideration of flow in rap music, and manifestations of dialectics in rhythm, rhyme and sound. I suggested at the outset that it was a matter of necessity for my aims to develop and discuss in detail a novel system (flowprints) for empirically studying and diagrammatically representing flow in rap. However, though I have detailed the functionality and the potential benefits of the system *within hip-hop*, despite introductory remarks I have not yet elucidated the system's broader implications for what lies at the crux of this thesis — the issue of poetic thought. It is to these issues I can now turn, in light of what has been gleaned from both the flowprint system and O'Hara's poetry in the first chapter.

It is worth briefly considering, to begin with, what may be construed as a contradiction in the approach I have taken in the preceding chapter and my arguments that fall in line with Heidegger's concerns regarding the nature of technology — a concern that will continue to be relevant and elaborated in the chapters that follow. I have argued that the power and ontological import of art is that it allows us to move beyond a conception of objects in the world as inert matter that we subject to our experience, domination and control. Rather, I have argued that the experience of art entails a thinking-into-being of Dasein's self-reflexivity; an encounter with the process by which we are always-already making sense of our worlds. In direct contrast to this, following Heidegger, I have suggested the opposing kind of thinking is a technological mode of thought — thinking as a form of rationality to operate, via technology, on a world of mere things. By suggesting the flowprint system as a viable method for empirically studying the phenomenon of flow, then, it may seem that I am endorsing a system that embraces technology as a means for uncovering the workings of a form of art, and in so doing abstracting the meaningful experience of art as a form of abstracted knowledge; of symbolised logic.

The important distinction to make here is that what the flowprint system is designed to uncover is not the *experience* of art as poetic thought, but the means by which such thought operates — the conditions of experience rather than the experience itself. Importantly, Heidegger's critique of technology should not be understood as a criticism of technology *per se*, but rather as a diagnosis of a cultural and historical progression toward increasingly abstracted modes of thought. Iain Thomson (2011) notes this specifically, when he writes:

What Heidegger teaches us [...] is that the view, shared by both Marxism and liberalism, of technology as a neutral tool that can be used for either constructive or destructive purposes is far too simplistic. In fact, technology reinforces a particular historical drift, owing to the ontotheology it expresses, and Heidegger's great merit is to have helped us discern the underlying historical direction in which we are still moving as our sense of reality becomes increasingly technologised [...] technologies can be used, to be sure, to combat technologisation (i.e., enframing), but to use them so (i.e., to use our technology without being used by it), we must first learn to recognise and resist their tendency to serve empty optimisation.¹

Accordingly, the flowprint system should be understood as just such an instrument of technology being used to combat technologisation. Its goal is not to reify sound — to (mis)construe meaningful experience as meaningless abstraction — but rather to examine the inner workings of the artwork that afford poetic thought; that facilitate the self-reflexive artistic experience. With this in mind, it is worth further exploring this in terms of rhythm, time, affect and cognition.

Rhythm

As should be clear, the issue of flow is primarily one of rhythm, which is to say the manipulation of temporality. As Alf Gabrielsson (2014) points out, rhythm is central to the creation of (possible) meaning in all music, writing: 'music takes place in time, and the temporal organisation of the sound events achieved through rhythm simply *must* be of fundamental importance.'² (original emphasis). Throughout the flowprint system, it has become clear that flow in rap is centred around rhyme patterns being 'bent' around central pivot points demarcated by the drumbeat of backing instrumentation; the time measure — in Armstrong's (2011) terms — is navigated around the time beat of backing instrumentation.³ As such, flow should be understood as a dialectic of rhythm; a tension that has to be navigated to create stylistic consistencies across a rapper's work in order to create their own flow. But the issue of rhythm cannot be taken for granted, as there is much debate about precisely what it entails (indeed, Gabrielsson suggests that 'the attempts at definitions may be counted in hundreds').⁴ The definition that is most pertinent to the analyses that have come to light throughout the previous chapter is what Amittai Aviram

¹ Thomson, I. *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 19.

² Gabrielsson, A. 'The Complexities of Rhythm', in Dowling, W.J. and T.J. Tighe, eds., *Psychology and Music: The Understanding of Melody and Rhythm* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2014), 93.

³ Armstrong, I. 'Hegel: The Time of Rhythm, the Time of Rhyme', *Thinking Verse I* (2011), pp. 124-136, 130.

⁴ Gabrielsson, A. 'The Complexities of Rhythm,' 94.

simply calls in 'The Meaning of Rhythm' (2006) the 'conventional meaning' of rhythm.⁵ He describes this definition as follows:

both in music theory and in general discourse, rhythm can mean three distinct things: (1) a regular beat; (2) a pattern of various elements (such as a poetic meter in Greek or Latin) which is organised in relation to the regular beat and which is ultimately repeated as a higher-order rhythm; (3) a *realisation* of the beat or the pattern, which need not be regular, but whose very irregularities foreground the regular beat against which it is organised and in relation to which it is perceived.⁶

For my purposes here, it is this third aspect that is most relevant to flow. As has been shown, the 4/4 time measure of rap music is a constant. Accordingly, flow is that 'whose very irregularities foreground the regular beat against which it is organised and in relation to which it is perceived.'⁷ It is worth recalling here the issue of drag in rap, and Jay-Z's pronouncement that on any song a rapper necessarily 'adds his own rhythm. Sometimes you stay in the pocket of the beat [...] so that the beat and flow become one. But sometimes the flow chops up the beat [...]'⁸ It is in this way that drag can be seen as one of the central elements of *tension* in rap music. On the one hand the beat exists as a constant, while a rapper's flow must exist as an irregularity: they must 'add their own rhythm.' As I have argued in the previous section, while rap historically tended to stay 'in the pocket of the beat', in order to create a distinctive flow a rapper flows with either a tight or loose drag, while necessarily staying within what I have called the acceptable flow range. This tendency toward but necessarily outside the beat (in order to create distinct patterns) is one of tension: like quicksand the beat pulls flow toward it, but a rapper must resist falling 'into the pocket' for too long in order to resist the flow becoming monotonous. For a listener, this requires the simultaneous cognitive tracking of at least two different levels of rhythm: of the beat, and also of the rapper's flow (and indeed often various levels of complexity within each). As Gabrielsson notes, this duality of rhythm is ubiquitous across musical genres:

When we listen to music, we often follow the beat by overt movements, such as tapping the feet or fingers in synchrony with the beat [...] Sometimes one can feel the pulse at two different rates, one of them at,

⁵ Aviram, A. 'The Meaning of Rhythm', in Verdicchio, M. and R. Burch, eds., *Between Philosophy and Poetry: Writing, Rhythm, History* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2006), 161.

⁶ Ibid., 161.

⁷ Aviram, A. 'The Meaning of Rhythm,' 161.

⁸ Jay-Z. *Decoded* (London: Virgin, 2011), 44.

say, twice the rate of the other, and perhaps you use one foot to follow the slower one and the other foot (or the hand) to accompany the faster one. Whatever the case, a feeling of regularity is established, a safe ground in the ongoing musical flow.⁹

What Gabrielsson refers to as the ‘safe ground’ in rap exists as the backing instrumentation, while the flow is registered at a separate (but not altogether separate) layer. Both Gabrielsson and Henkjan Honing, professor in Music Cognition at the University of Amsterdam, refer to this layering as a ‘framework’ or a ‘structure.’ For Honing (2012), this system has ‘a *metrical structure* that a listener might assign to it’¹⁰ ‘A rhythm is often interpreted in a metrical framework,’ Honing writes, ‘be it a regular pulse (or beat) or a hierarchically organised interpretation of two or more levels of beat.’¹¹ The beat thus becomes a framework within or against which additional layers — in this case of flow — become meaning-laden points of tension. As Gabrielsson writes, ‘the meter provides a cognitive framework upon which to hang the more complex rhythms.’¹² This framework, Gabrielsson suggests, ‘provides for the introduction of aesthetically important tensions between regularity and variation, between stability and instability.’¹³ The important point here is that, though pitch and timbre are no doubt instrumental in creating (possible) meaning, what is central to flow is rhythm, specifically as the deliberate and manipulation of varying levels of time.

Ontological and Virtual Time

It might seem strange to claim that what is being manipulated in rap music (or indeed in narrative or poetry) is time. After all, surely any song of four minutes in length is the same duration as any other. There is a difference, however, in music — just as in poetry and narrative — between real time and *perceived* time; the flow of time as experienced by the listener. As W. Jay Dowling and Dane L. Harwood point out in *Music Cognition* (1986),

Stravinsky (1956), discussing ways in which a piece of music establishes its own temporal world, notes that some pieces exist more or less in the ‘normal flow of time’ while others are ‘dissociated’ from that normal flow. Pieces closely related to the normal flow are said to be based on ‘ontological’ time, closely paralleling

⁹ Gabrielsson, A. ‘The Complexities of Rhythm,’ 96.

¹⁰ Honing, H. ‘Structure and Interpretation of Rhythm in Music’, in Deutsch, D., ed., *The Psychology of Music*. Third Edition (San Diego: Elsevier Science, 2012), 371.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 371.

¹² Gabrielsson, A. ‘The Complexities of Rhythm,’ 64.

¹³ *Ibid.*

clock time. Those that depart from the normal flow are based on what we here call virtual time.¹⁴

To the extent that a flowprint transcribes rhythm in discrete blocks representative of real time, they primarily transcribe rhythm *in the music*, rather than rhythm *for* the listener. Yet what Dowling and Harwood call ‘virtual time’ can also be gleaned from a flowprint. For instance, in the second verse of ‘DNA’ by Kendrick Lamar, which sees a sudden, dramatic increase in flow density and syllable stress, the flowprint clearly shows an increased saturation of phones. This signifies a certain magnification of virtual time, whereby *for the listener* the temporal experience of the song is sped up, as Lamar’s flow increases in speed and intensity. Accordingly, flow here becomes a way of navigating a dialectic of ontological and virtual time; the rapper creates their own ‘temporal world’ for the listener, in which time, as guided by flow, seems to speed up and slow down.

While it is difficult to make any definitive claims about the precise nature of virtual time, precisely because it is a perceptual phenomenon, it is worth noting that the shift from considering ontological to virtual time parallels a shift that has occurred within music theory at large, namely from theory divorced from the listener experience to theory integrated with the listener experience as a cognitive act. As Honing notes, there has been

[...] an important shift from studying the music theoretical aspects of music, that is, as notated in the score [...] to studying the cognitive aspects of music, that is, as performed and perceived. This shift is partly based on the realisation that there are important differences between what is notated in a score, what can be measured in a sound signal, and what is perceived by the listener [...] the listener constructs a metrical interpretation while listening to music. Further aspects of rhythm, such as timing and tempo, are also clearly of a perceptual nature — next to being an intrinsic aspect of performance — and cannot directly, at least not without a model, be measured in a rhythmic signal. Hence the fields of perception and cognition play an important role in the study of musical rhythm.¹⁵

To the extent that the rap listener must track various levels of a metrical framework simultaneously, within a constructed temporal world, the flow of rap can be seen as a distinct

¹⁴ Dowling, W.J. and Harwood, D.L., eds., *Music Cognition* (Orlando: Academic Press, 1986), 182.

¹⁵ Honing, H. ‘Structure and Interpretation of Rhythm in Music,’ 370.

possibility of poetic thought as *aural cognition*. As noted by Wooyong Yi [et al.] (2014), one approach to cognition through music is known as *ECA*; an Enactive Cognitive Approach to Music. One of the main assertions of ECA is that ‘similar to behaviours such as a handshake, music perception occurs in the process of interaction among environments (music) and the body.’¹⁶ Given that this is the case, music is not only cognitive but *cognitively embodied*, and so the results of thinking *through* music tend toward physiological affect. For instance, returning to Lamar’s flow increasing in speed and density, evidence suggests, as one might expect, that a listener’s arousal level becomes higher after listening to fast-tempo music than after listening to slow-tempo music.¹⁷ Given that both ontological time (as defined by tempo) and virtual time (as controlled by flow) speed up at points throughout Lamar’s ‘DNA’, combined with the fact arousal levels are directly correlated with speed, it follows that flow is a cognitively embodied phenomenon which is crucial to creating (possible) meaning and affect in a listener. In this light we can understand the physiological underpinnings for the claim, which I have made in the previous chapter, that the chaos and violence referenced in the song’s lyrics are enacted in flow: the lyrics say to the listener ‘this musical chaos is what my environment feels like,’ while the flow makes the listener *feel* that chaos. As such, flow can be understood as poetic thought as aural cognition, as an experiential dialectic between different temporal levels.

Embodiment and Affect

The ECA approach briefly outlined above helps not only to explain the effects of music, but the cause — why music takes the form it does. William Forde Thompson and E. Glenn Schellenberg, for instance, quote research by Paul Fraisse (1982)¹⁸ that suggests that music is constrained in large part by our normal bodily rhythms. Fraisse, they write,

noted that three distinct temporal phenomena (walking pace, heart rate, sucking rate in newborns) tend to have a rate of between 60 and 120 events per minute, a range that also includes the tempi of most pieces of music. The implication is that music may be linked to physiological motion.¹⁹

¹⁶ Yi, Wooyong et al. ‘Music Perception as Embodied Cognition: Behavioral Evidence of Auditory Cue Effect,’ *Contemporary Engineering Sciences* 7:1 (2014), pp. 1215-1223, 1216.

¹⁷ See Thompson, W. and Schellenberg, E. ‘Listening to Music’, in Colwell, R., ed., *Menc Handbook of Musical Cognition and Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 107.

¹⁸ Fraisse, P. ‘Rhythm and Tempo’, in Deutsch, D., ed., *The Psychology of Music*. First Edition. (New York: Academic Press, 1982), pp. 149-180.

¹⁹ Thompson, W. and Schellenberg, E. ‘Listening to Music,’ 107.

Aside from explaining why music, including rap music, commonly lies within a certain tempo range, this also begins to explain why deviations in virtual time should have physiological affect for the listener. Just as there is a phenomenal, affective experience associated with a sudden increase in heart rate, so we should expect an increase in arousal when rhythms that usually coincide with our body's natural rhythms shift toward their upper or lower limits. Moreover, and to begin to move in the direction of our next chapter, insofar as flow is linked to affect via embodied cognition, it becomes *emotionally* salient, and can be a vehicle for establishing empathy for the artist (as one might indeed feel empathy for Lamar given the chaotic environment outlined in 'DNA'). As Marc Leman writes in *Embodied Music Cognition and Mediation Technology* (2008):

[...] the corporeal articulation, and the sensing of force and acceleration, impact the emotional system. The experience of the acting body (kinaesthesia) is then combined with the emotions that are actually felt. There is neurophysiological evidence that centres for action representation and execution (mirror neuron areas) are anatomically connected with centres for emotional processing (limbic system). Empathy is thereby assumed to be mediated by affective qualities rather than by sensory qualities [...]²⁰

The next chapter will move to consider poetic thought specifically as emotional tension that has the ability to encourage empathy for readers in the real world. But it is interesting to note here the link between mirror neuron areas and the limbic system. Given this connection, if it is true that in 'DNA' Lamar effectively establishes empathy in a listener, research supports the idea that this is achieved, at least in part, via virtual time shifts in flow, which activate mirror neurons and in turn create emotional affect. To this end, a flowprint becomes a window not only into the ontological rhythms of a song, but the techniques by which the artist creates possibilities for poetic thought as rhythmic tension; as meaning established through (synchronisation with and deviations from) the natural rhythms of the listener's body.

I have argued in the first chapter that a poem is both the text and the cognitive event of its being read; what I called a 'thinking into being of Dasein's self-reflexivity.' Along these lines, what can be said of rap? In phenomenological terms, rap songs can likewise be thought of as a thinking-into-being, what for Jarvis is a self-reflexive subjectivity *per se*; that which brings subjectivity back

²⁰ Leman, M. *Embodied Music Cognition and Mediation Technology* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 123.

to itself.²¹ Though I have employed the conventional definition of rhythm for use here, rhythm (or flow) as a form of cognition is closer to what Aviram highlights as a pre-Socratic view of rhythm, which has been endorsed variously by Émile Benveniste, Julia Kristeva, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, and especially Henri Meschonnic and Charles Bernstein.²² According to this view of rhythm, it is closely bound up with both embodiment and subjectivity. As Aviram writes,

Akin to the verb *rheō*, to flow, *rhythm* in its pre-Platonic sense denotes the shape (*schēma*) of a moving object such as the water of a stream or the body of a dancer. [...] From the point of view of these post-Benveniste theorists, the conventional meaning of rhythm today is informed by *measure*, what Plato calls *metron*. These theorists wish to return us to the pre-Socratic sense, where, they believe, rhythm is closely bound up with subjectivity and discourse.²³

In light of the view of rap as a form of embodied cognition — of poetic thought as the navigation of rhythmic dialectics — etymologically it is entirely fitting that to rap is fundamentally to control flow. While in a technical sense rhythm in rap should be understood as irregularities against the constant of backing instrumentation, at a higher level, flow should be understood as a manifestation of poetic thought, fundamentally embodied, and neurologically rooted to both affect and subjectivity.

Rhythm as Cognition

The idea of music as a form of cognition is of course not new, and is considered at length in Dowling and Harwood's *Music Cognition* (1986),²⁴ Mary Louise Serafine's *Music as Cognition: The Development of Thought in Sound* (1988),²⁵ and Henkjan Honing's *Musical Cognition: A Science of Listening* (2017),²⁶ among others.²⁷ Indeed, 'music cognition is a vital topic for scholars,' as Richard Colwell (2006) suggests, 'in medicine, psychology, in educational

²¹ See Jarvis, S. 'Musical Thinking: Hegel and the Phenomenology of Prosody,' *Paragraph* 28:2 (2005), pp. 57-71, 66.

²² See Aviram, A. 'The Meaning of Rhythm,' 161.

²³ *Ibid.*, 162.

²⁴ Dowling, W.J. and Harwood, D.L. *Music Cognition*.

²⁵ Serafine, M.L. *Music as Cognition: The Development of Thought in Sound* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

²⁶ Honing, H. *Musical Cognition: A Science of Listening* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2017).

²⁷ See also Ashley, R. et al. *The Routledge Companion to Music Cognition* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2017); Honing, H. *The Illiterate Listener: On Music Cognition, Musicality and Methodology* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011); Leman, M. *Embodied Music Cognition and Mediation Technology* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008).

psychology, and in music theory, as well as for music educators.²⁸ Yet, while the concept of music as cognition is not new, what is new is rap music as a genre, relatively speaking, and particularly scholarship on the musical dimensions of rap flow. Since rap has distinctive features such as drag, flow density and rhythmic synchronicity, and since it is inherently a genre defined by the use of rhythm, it is of particular interest to the field of music cognition, since rhythm as the control of (virtual) temporality has been largely neglected, despite being perhaps the most central musical feature to the notion of music as cognition. As Thompson and Schellenberg (2006) note:

studies of pitch have dominated the field of music cognition over the past 20 years, paralleling a similar emphasis in music theory and education.²⁹

This has led to a downplaying of the importance of rhythm, and so to a neglect of the most fundamental aspect of music cognition. As Dowling and Harwood suggest,

The neglect of rhythm was especially unfortunate for the psychology of music because rhythmic information is, if anything, more fundamental to music cognition than pitch information.³⁰

What I have attempted through the development of the flowprint system, further to a tool for aiding the empirical analysis of rap, is a further emphasis on rhythm in the field of music cognition. Given that rap is the genre of music in which rhythm is the core means by which (possible) meaning is created, and through which a rapper defines their own flow (and thus their own identity as a rapper), further development of the flowprint system should begin to elucidate not only the complexities of rap but further nuances in music cognition.

Having seen how poetic thought functions as tension — both ontological and rhythmic, and in entirely different mediums — the discussion can now turn to poetic thought as it occurs as *emotional* tension. Bearing in mind the concept of self-reflexivity, as well as the connections that have been raised between mirror neurons and the limbic system, I now turn to the work of Sharon Olds to explore emotion in greater depth, and how it might contribute to the view of poetic thought as the navigation of dialectics.

²⁸ Colwell, R. *Menc Handbook of Musical Cognition and Development*, v.

²⁹ Thompson, W. and Schellenberg, E. 'Listening to Music,' 75.

³⁰ Dowling, W.J. and D.L. Harwood. *Music Cognition*, 179.

Chapter 3: Why Reading Sharon Olds Makes You a Better Person

This chapter was published under the same title as an article in *Cordite* Issue 87.¹

See cordite.org.au/scholarly/olds-makes-you-a-better-person

Extract from Denise Levertov's final interview October 27, 1997.

Nicholas O'Connell: In the essay "Some Affinities of Content," you spoke about how you responded to the goal of Northwest poets to submerge themselves in something larger than individual ego, in their case, nature. Do you try the same approach in your poetry?

Denise Levertov: I hope I do. I'm certainly very tired of the me, me, me kind of poem, the Sharon Olds "Find the dirt and dig it up" poem, which has influenced people to find gruesome episodes in their life, whether they actually happened or not. Back when Robert Lowell and Anne Sexton were the models for neophytes, you had to have spent some time in a mental hospital to qualify as a poet. Now you have to have been abused. I know perfectly well that lots of people really have been abused, but it's unfortunate to use the fact of abuse as the passport to being a poet. I'm certainly tired of that kind of egotism.²

'Egotism.' 'Shallow pretence.'³ 'No abstraction and no surprise, only the videotape of life played back at full volume.'⁴ The loudest critics of Sharon Olds repeat the same complaints that met confessional poets some sixty years ago, chastising her work for being self-obsessive. Poets should speak, the argument runs, to experience that is collective and, by virtue of being collective, profound. As Patricia Meyer Spacks (1987) lamented, referencing the work of Anne Sexton:

art requires more than emotional indulgence, requires a saving respect for disciplines and realities beyond the crying needs, the unrelenting appetites, of the self.'⁵

The means may be the self, but the end must be the collective.

¹ Page, J. 'Why Reading Sharon Olds Makes You a Better Person,' *Cordite* 87:1 (2018). Online. URL = cordite.org.au/scholarly/olds-makes-you-a-better-person/

² Quoted in *Modern American Poetry* website, by the Department of English, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Accessed June 4, 2017. Online. URL = http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/g_l/levertov/oconnell.html

³ Logan, W., quoted in Hoagland, T. 'The Unarrestable Development of Sharon Olds.' *The American Poetry Review* 38:1 (2009), pp. 7-9, 8.

⁴ Kirsch, A., Ibid.

⁵ Quoted in Lerner, L. 'What Is Confessional Poetry?' *Critical Quarterly* 29:2 (1987), pp. 46-66, 59.

Yet, as literary theory in the intervening decades has shown, no individual can speak for the collective *per se*, bound as they are by the confines of their culture, gender, race, class, as well as the inherently constructed nature of that self that defines lyric poetry (which, as Maria Takolander has recently argued, is in turn bound by the technology that writes it).⁶ And this is to say nothing of the political implications: that, in universalising any poetic self, as some argue, we necessarily privilege certain voices over others, and so reinscribe dividing lines that have historically pushed female, non-white voices to the margins.⁷

If Olds' poetry can be useful, as she professes is her intention,⁸ it seems we must continue to wrestle with questions that, for a few centuries of debate, we still don't have good answers. Do we see the 'I' in Olds' work (and other confessional poetry), as a single (egotistical) voice (and so useless), or a collective, universal voice (a voice Ben Lerner has recently called 'an impossibility'),⁹ or somewhere in between? If the voice can speak to (or for) all, in any sense can we speak of it having a universal effect?

I argue here that recent work in the fields of emotion, cognition and evolutionary psychology provides one interesting avenue for reviving the outdated, universal 'I' of lyric poetry, and thus its usefulness, while avoiding enacting dichotomies that perpetuate the divisive literary status quo. Taking the Pulitzer Prize-winning collection *Stag's Leap* (2012) as a case study,¹⁰ I suggest that Olds' poetry exploits cognitive systems that are in essence universal (by which I mean common evolutionary adaptations). In so doing, it accomplishes in a significant way the romantic ideal of poetry that can speak to all; poetry that, in the long-faded words of Shelley, 'exist[s] in the mind of the creator, which is itself the image of all other minds.'¹¹

Finally, I wish to suggest that the reading of Sharon Olds' poetry makes one a better person, to the extent that it has the ability to remove barriers that inhibit empathy. This is so because it manipulates a relationship between valence and appraisal that is a universal evolutionary adaptation. I will suspend my argument on this point until the poetry has been

⁶ Takolander, M. 'Confessional Poetry and the Materialisation of an Autobiographical Self. *Life Writing* 14:3 (2017), pp. 371-383.

⁷ For a defence of this argument, see Lerner, B. *The Hatred of Poetry* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016), 62.

⁸ Quoted in Kellaway, K. 'Sharon Olds: 'I Want a Poem to be Useful'', *The Guardian*, 5 January 2013. Online. Accessed May 12, 2018. URL = <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/jan/06/sharon-olds-interview-stags-leap>.

⁹ Lerner, B. *The Hatred of Poetry*, 62.

¹⁰ Of course, this makes my argument something of a straw man, since my subject material was published some fifteen years after Levertov's death. Nonetheless, *Stag's Leap* exhibits the same confessional qualities of Olds' earlier work, and so likely would have elicited similar disapproval. And in any event, I am far more concerned with proving Olds right than in proving Levertov wrong.

¹¹ Shelley, P.B. *A Defense of Poetry* (Boston: Ginn & Co., 1891), 10.

considered, but it is worth keeping in mind that the thrust of my argument is in large part a defence of (or rather, prescription for) Olds' poetry on pragmatic grounds. The contention is that, insofar as reading this work affords a particular, unusual form of emotional response (what I refer to as dialectical meta-emotion), the sustained experience of such emotional responses may strengthen neural pathways that are conducive to empathy, patience and increased emotional nuance.

My argument, then, consists of three premises and a conclusion:

- p*₁ emotion throughout *Stag's Leap* is largely dialectical meta-emotion, which creates a short-circuiting of hardwired cognitive appraisal and emotional valence;
- p*₂ emotion serves as the *means* of expression throughout the collection, rather than the result of expression;
- p*₃ Olds' poetry promotes an ability for readers to experience dialectical meta-emotion in the real world;
- C* Olds' poetry can make readers more empathetic and thus, in a small way at least, better people.

3.1 Universality and the Lyric 'I'

When Olds first submitted poetry for publication in the early 1970s she was told, by her own account, 'this is a literary magazine. If you wish to write about this sort of subject, may we suggest the *Ladies' Home Journal*. The true subjects of poetry are... male subjects, not your children.'¹² If entirely unwarranted, it is perhaps unsurprising that such a response would be penned at a time when women's writing was still grossly underrepresented, and while post-structuralism was simultaneously dismantling the self that had previously underwritten meaning in language and authorship in art. While one line of argument attacked confessional poetry for its self-indulgence, a parallel argument attacked the legitimacy of the self that wrote it.

Yet despite the monumental impact of theorists such as Barthes and Foucault, in the intervening decades a number of feminist historians and literary critics, and indeed Sharon Olds herself, have insisted on the legitimacy of employing the decisively female lyric 'I.' They do so on the grounds that the death of the Author merely constitutes a further marginalisation of subjects that had already been denied a voice. As Nancy K. Miller (1986) writes:

¹² Quoted in Durrant, S. 'Sharon Olds: Confessions of a Divorce.' *The Guardian*, 2013. Online. Accessed May 4, 2018. URL = <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2013/jan/26/sharon-olds-american-poet-divorce>.

the postmodernist decision that the Author is dead,
and subjective agency along with him, does not
necessarily work for women and prematurely
forecloses the question of identity for them.¹³

And this is true not only in the domain of creative writing. As Katie Barclay points out:

Feminist historians have been reluctant to let go of
the 'subject', perhaps because, as Susan Bordo
suggests, subjectivity symbolizes the essence of
personhood, which has only recently been granted
to women and which is still challenged through
attacks on their bodily autonomy.¹⁴

In an interview with *The Guardian*, Olds has stated that 'I wish to write about my life partly as stories representative of any ordinary woman,'¹⁵ In order to conceive of it as such, we will need to revive what was previously decried as an anachronistic (or impossible) 'I.' The self present in the poems ahead needs to be conceived, tentatively, as both individual and collective, and legitimised in light of the arguments put forth by Miller and Barclay (among others). This entails, as Miller puts it, acknowledging 'contradictions, the gap, and the (perhaps permanent) internal split that makes a collective identity or integrity only a horizon, but a necessary one.'¹⁶ It is a voice that speaks *from* the individual, *for* the (decisively female) collective, and in some respects (as I will argue), *to* all.

3.2 Emotion, *Emotionality* and Meta-Emotion

What does it mean to claim that emotion is the means, rather than the result of expression? Before explaining and justifying this claim, I must first briefly distinguish between some different theories of emotion in order to frame what is to come. The kind of emotion that I will be dealing with lies at the intersection of three concepts: firstly, in line with what Lisa Feldman Barrett (2016) has called the *feeling tradition* of emotion;¹⁷ secondly, involving what Katrin Pahl (2015)

¹³ Miller, N.K. 'Changing the Subject: Authorship, Writing and the Reader', in De Lauretis, T., ed., *Feminist Studies, Critical Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp.102-120, 106.

¹⁴ Barclay, K. 'Composing the Self: Gender, Subjectivity and Scottish Balladry,' *Cultural and Social History* 7:3 (2010), pp. 337-353, 337.

¹⁵ Kellaway, K. 'Sharon Olds: 'I Want a Poem to Be Useful.'

¹⁶ Miller, N.K. 'Changing the Subject,' 116.

¹⁷ Barrett, L.F. et al. *Handbook of Emotions*. Fourth Edition. (New York: Guilford Press, 2016), 5.

calls *emotionality*;¹⁸ and, thirdly, also including what Eva Maria Koopman (2015) calls *meta-emotion*.¹⁹

Barrett [et al.] observes three distinct traditions in the theories of emotion, and within those some fifteen discrete approaches. The three traditions she delineates are the *feeling* tradition (according to which emotions are subjective states); the *motivational* tradition (according to which emotions are tendencies toward certain behaviours); and the *evaluative* tradition (according to which emotions are fundamentally a matter of appraisal).²⁰ The feeling tradition of emotion, according to Barrett, is a view that has been endorsed in various forms by Descartes, Hume, James, Lange, Damasio, and Barrett herself, among others. It holds, in a nutshell, that emotions are particular subjective feelings — particular *quale* of a distinctive type.²¹ On this view, it is sufficient to be experiencing an emotion that one has a particular subjective experience, which may trigger or coincide with physiological changes.²² When I refer to emotion *per se*, I will mean this subjective experience on the part of the reader.

The second term I employ is ‘emotionality’, borrowed from Katrin Pahl. Pahl suggests ‘emotionality’ is more appropriate than ‘emotion’ when analysing literary texts, as a way of avoiding a certain ‘taxonomic impulse’ (the term ‘emotion’, as Pahl rightly suggests, tends to conjure up a hierarchy of the most salient emotions, thus conceiving of them as stable and fixed, rather than fluid, dynamic and nuanced).²³ Emotionality is used to refer to a specific phenomenon in literature, namely points of conflict or contradiction in emotional states, objects or language. Deliberately defining emotionality ‘as minimally as possible’ so as to allow its particulars to change over time, Pahl defines emotionality as ‘a transformational or jumbling force that puts things or people at odds with themselves.’ ‘A text is emotional,’ she suggests, ‘when it is incongruous and (self-)transforming.’²⁴ This term is useful because it allows us to locate and speak of emotion in the language of the text itself, rather than in the author or in the reader. I will

¹⁸ Pahl, K. ‘The Logic of Emotionality,’ *PMLA* 130:5 (2015), pp. 1457-1466, 1458.

¹⁹ Koopman, E.M. ‘Why Do We Read Sad Books? Eudaimonic Motives and Meta-Emotions,’ *Poetics* 52:1 (2015), pp. 18-31, 18.

²⁰ Barrett, L.F. et al. *Handbook of Emotions*, 5.

²¹ Ibid.

²² On some views, such physiological changes are considered separate to the emotion, on others (such as in William James) the physiological changes constitute the emotion itself. For Eric Shouse, subjective experience is merely ‘feeling’, and only becomes emotion once it is made social: ‘Emotion,’ he writes, ‘is the projection/display of a feeling.’ This entails that ‘the display of emotion can be either genuine or feigned.’ But if there is no feeling underlying an emotion (i.e. the emotion is a ‘feigned’ projection), then it cannot be emotion at all (if emotion is indeed the projection/display of a feeling). For this reason I put aside Shouse’s concept of emotion as projection in favour of tying emotion directly to feeling itself. See Shouse, E. ‘Feeling, Emotion, Affect,’ *M/C Journal* 8:6 (2005). Online. Accessed May 3, 2018. URL = <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0512/03-shouse.php>.

²³ Pahl, K. ‘The Logic of Emotionality,’ 1457.

²⁴ Ibid.

use *emotionality*, then, when analysing at the level of language, and retain the word ‘emotion’ for use when examining feeling on the part of the reader.

The last term for use here is the concept of *meta-emotion*, borrowed from Eva Maria Koopman. As the name suggests, meta-emotion is simply emotion *about* emotion, such as a certain joy in one’s melancholy, a guilt in one’s pleasure or surprise in one’s happiness.²⁵ Meta-emotion is thus a higher-order emotional response that necessarily entails appraisal, where regular emotion needn’t involve appraisal (as I am treating ‘emotion’ as subjective feeling). The best way to imagine these three aspects of emotion intersecting is as a tiered system, which we can roughly represent as follows:

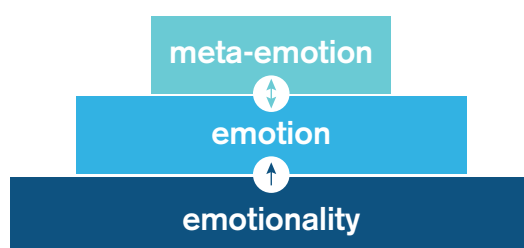


Figure 1: The relationship between emotionality, emotion and meta-emotion

At the base level of the text we have an abundance of emotionality, which is always in excess of any one reading (this is similar to what Adorno refers to as the *language character* of the text).²⁶ This emotionality then gives rise to emotion as affective response in the reader; a particular feeling, supported by physiological changes. This response (and the conditions that evoke it) are then appraised, giving rise to meta-emotional responses which may be congruent with the emotional response or, more often in *Stag’s Leap*, contradictory and dialectical in nature. Armed with these helpful terms, we can now turn to a critical reading of the work itself, beginning with the issue of dialectical meta-emotion in *Stag’s Leap*, and returning later to the issue of emotion as the means versus the result of expression.

3.3 Emotionality in *Stag’s Leap*

Stag’s Leap recounts the collapse of Olds’ marriage, divided into the four seasons over which it occurred. The opening poem in the collection is rich with emotionality, brimming with contradictions that enact a tension between ecstasy and grief, as the initial steps are taken toward

²⁵ Koopman, E.M. ‘Why Do We Read Sad Books?’ 19.

²⁶ According to Adorno, *language-character* is comprised of two aspects of the text: the excess of meaning over subjective intention and the dependence of meaning on form. See Jarvis, S. *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 103.

the speaker and her husband's divorce. In the very first lines (in fact, in the first title), the narrator positions the reader as confidant, tacitly acknowledging their knowledge that the collection is to detail the collapse of her marriage:

While He Told Me

While he told me, I looked from small thing
to small thing, in our room, the face
of the bedside clock, the sepia postcard
of a woman bending down to a lily.²⁷

'While He Told Me' begins by enacting a number of dualities and positioning the reader (with the narrator) in a state of liminality. The title immediately puts the reader in the pivotal moment of the relationship's decline, omitting all backstory. The reader surmises that what is being told may regard the beginning of a new relationship between the husband and another woman (referred to simply as 'her' later in the collection); or, at the very least, what is told is an intention to part. The enormity of the situation emotionally is contrasted with the relative 'smallness' of the space: 'I looked from small thing / to small thing, in our room.' The omission of a name or descriptor and the resulting starkness of the pronouns in 'While *he* told' [...] in *our* room' sets 'he' and what is being told (large) against the 'our' and 'I' looking at small symbols of time passing: the clock, the sepia postcard. Such dualities have an oppressive, depersonalising effect, phrasing the exchange in a way that negates the narrator's agency: she replies not in words but only in (decisively small) actions.

On the other hand, the lines are ambiguous. We are not given precisely what is told, nor how it is said; rather, we are only given what is occurring during and after the telling takes place. The opening lines are a periphrasis, revealing a large amount of emotional meaning (we immediately understand the hierarchical dynamic of the relationship) from limited semantic content (since we don't get, here or elsewhere, the details of exactly *what* is said). From the very first lines in the poem we are drawn into a state of emotional liminality, with enough to understand that the narrator's relationship is collapsing, without enough to understand why. Indeed, much of *Stag's Leap* creates, quite intentionally, this state of liminality, which the title 'Stag's Leap' represents. As Olds explains in a TED reading titled 'The poetry of the in-between':

When a stag leaps off a cliff — a low enough cliff, a
kerb, maybe — to get away from a hunter, the deer in
mid-leap is between danger and hoped-for safety.
And a poem is in between its writer or speaker and its
hearer or reader. Right now, physically, a poem is

²⁷ Olds, S. *Stag's Leap* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013), 12.

going to be in the air, between me and you; from one
(me) to the one (of each of you). At the end of a long
marriage, it's in between the old love and troubles
and the new... love and troubles.²⁸

Given the above comments, it is fair to say that Olds is quite consciously achieving such liminality in the text. This emotional uncertainty sets the backdrop for the emotional(ity) inversions that occur later in the poem, where we read:

each time I woke, I lay in dreading
bliss to feel and hear him sigh
and snore. Near sunrise, behind overcast, he got
up to go in and read on the couch,
as he often did,
and in a while I followed him,
as I often had,
and snoozed on him, while he read, and he laid
an arm across my back. When I opened [...] ²⁹

A survey of the metrical patterning here reveals a falling into metrical regularity as the speaker begins to 'snooze', then a disintegration of metrical regularity precisely at the moment of her (literal and metaphorical) waking; the transition from love and affection to distance and parting. While the narrator 'snoozes' on her husband the lines comprise two iambs ('and snoozed on him'), two anapaests ('while he read, and he laid') and three iambs ('an arm across my back'). But before the second line here falls into iambic regularity, we receive the jarring interruption of 'When I opened':

an arm across my back. When I opened
my eyes, I saw two tulips stretched
away from each other extreme in the old
vase with the grotto carved out of a hill ³⁰

The cadence here is diminished, collapsing into the prosody of ordinary speech. This is an instance of emotionality: a point at which there is 'conflict or contradiction in emotional states, objects or language.'³¹ Here we have conflict in both emotional states and in the language itself. To begin with, we have happiness peppered with fear, evidenced by the starkly enjambed 'dreading / bliss' — which is already contradictory — which then inverts further to melancholy tempered with calm:

²⁸ Olds, S. 'The Poetry of the In-between,' TEDxMet, 2015. Online. Accessed May 4, 2018.
URL = https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rrb_MK0lkkM.

²⁹ Olds, *Stag's Leap*, 12.

³⁰ Ibid., 12-13.

³¹ Pahl, K. 'The Logic of Emotionality,' 1457.

my eyes, I saw two tulips stretched
 away from each other extreme in the old
 vase with the grotto carved out of a hill
 and a person in it, underground,
 praying, my imagined shepherd in make-believe paradise ³²

The metaphors and iconography here are calming — the flowers in the vase, the religious iconography of the shepherd praying — yet they are decisively melancholy. The tulips (and the homophony on ‘two lips’ here adds another physical dimension to the distance created, particularly given the poem’s first half) ‘stretched / away from each other extreme’ turns a symbol of love into a symbol of the *absence* of love, while the praying shepherd is ‘imagined’, and paradise ‘make-believe’, turning symbols of hope into symbols of naivety and despair. Emotionality within the text thus confuses a reader’s expected emotional response, by couching ostensibly positive imagery within negative descriptors. Here, then, we have emotionality (as inversion) *inverting*, underscored by inversion at the level of rhythm.

As the poem progresses, we move from a soothing rhythm conveying a mixture of happiness and fear into a jarring rhythm expressing a melancholic calm. Everything flips (happiness and fear into unhappiness and calm; a soothing rhythm into a jarring rhythm); all contradictions remain in place but are inverted. The result is a disconnect between what we might think of as the dominant mood (happiness/unhappiness), the underlying or sub-dominant mood (fear/calm), and the cadence of expression (rhythmic/arrhythmic). We can visualise this process as follows:

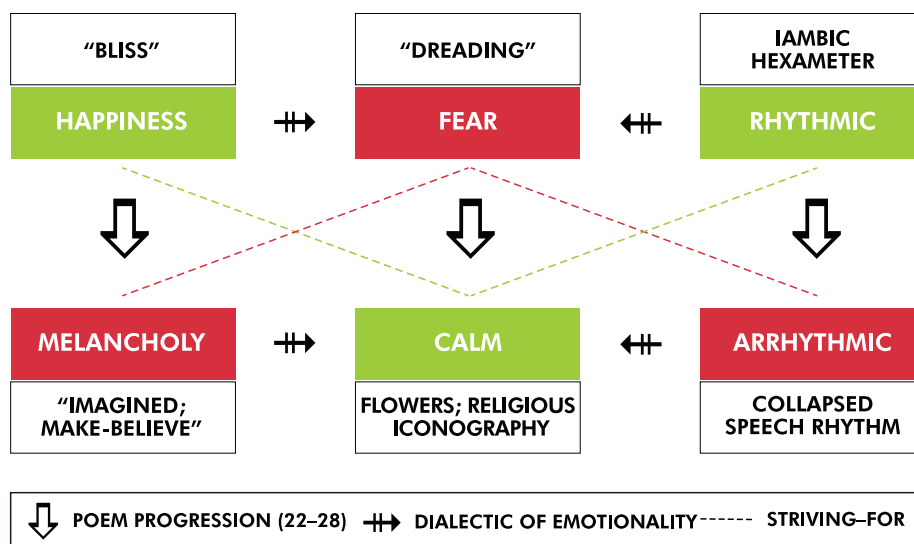


Figure 2: Emotionality (as inversion), inverted.

³² Olds, *S. Stag's Leap*, 13.

Frustrated reader expectation can be understood as a *striving-for* (or *expectance of*) the requisite (or appropriate) sub-dominant mood and cadence, the background expectation against which existing/apparent connections are projected.

3.4 Shifting Deixis in *Stag's Leap*

In the second poem, 'Unspeakable', we experience a deictic, temporal shift, such that 'now' comes to mark a presence in the past:

Now I come to look at love
in a new way, now that I know I'm not
standing in its light. I want to ask my
almost-no-longer husband what it's like to not
love, but he does not want to talk about it,
[...]³³

Note that the speaker does not look at things differently now that she 'is not / standing in its light', but rather because she *knows* that she is not standing in its light. This is something of an Aristotelian view of love, wherein the legitimacy of love is contingent on the truth conditions on which that love is based.³⁴ On such a view the legitimacy of emotions can shift — one can realise retrospectively that, despite *feeling* in love, one was actually not (because one of the conditions, such as fidelity, on which that love is based, did not hold). Similarly, the speaker here does not move from 'standing in [love's] light' to not [standing in love's light], but rather from *not knowing* she was not standing in its light to *knowing* she was not standing in its light — the shift is epistemic rather than ontic.

Slight differences in phrasing such as this have a profound impact on how we come to see the narrator in the poems, not only as suffering a destabilised present, but a destabilised past and future. Mary Lane sees these temporal gaps as pivotal to the text's creation of a lyric self. She diagnoses

a linguistic tension that arises in the gap between I speaking in the present and the I remembered in the past. In its refusal to transcend that gap, Olds's lyric stance can then be seen not as resting on an essential self that unifies the poem but as a literary technique to explore the nature of that discursive I.³⁵

³³ Olds, S. *Stag's Leap*, 14.

³⁴ Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*, H. Rackham., trans., (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926), see *Book IX*.

³⁵ Lane, M. "And I Will Tell About It": The Dialectical Poetry of Sharon Olds,' Published Dissertation, Indiana University, 2000, 14.

This is furthered by the ever-shifting deixis in terms like ‘now’, ‘almost-no-longer’ and ‘the end.’ Each term is unstable, lacking a fixed start and end point, pulling toward the past (in the narrative, since we recognise the ‘now’, the ‘soon’ and even ‘the end’ as being past from the present narrative ‘I’ that exists over and above the ‘I’ of the current poem), while referentially pulling toward an uncertain future. This temporal slipperiness underpins feelings (in the narrator and the reader) of uneasiness, which culminates in the exchange referenced in the final five lines of the second poem:

I show no anger but in flashes of humor,
all is courtesy and horror. And after
the first minute, when I say, Is this about
her, and he says, No, it’s about
you, we do not speak of her.³⁶

There is a candidness in the admission that the narrator, unlike her husband, displays anger ‘in flashes of humour.’ She displays anger, tempered with a facetiousness that is consistent with the double-edged nature of other emotions displayed thus far. Note the distinctly polarised terms, for example, in the next line’s ‘all is courtesy and horror’: courtesy marks the domestic, the polite, and emotional control, while horror marks the other-worldly, the uncontrollable, the extremes of emotion. As we have seen, such doublings of emotionality result in an emotional liminality, where there is a residual *striving-for* the requisite tone, rhythm or sub-dominant emotion that would match emotion presented in the text. The most obvious result of such liminality is, at the risk of seeming tautological,³⁷ a state of uncertainty in the reader. At this stage of the text the separation is only beginning, and the speaker is expressing a range of (often conflicting) emotions, most markedly fear, shock and apprehension. Accordingly, it is fitting here that we experience an unsettling balance of emotionality that is disorienting, aligning with the narrator’s emotional state.

The reader’s emotional response in ‘Unspeakable’, then, is some mix of confusion and sadness, which quickly shifts to surprise and perhaps shock in the final lines:

her, and he says, No, it’s about
you, we do not speak of her.³⁸

The crushing silencing of the husband’s refusal to speak of ‘her’, enacted in the poem’s abrupt ending, pulls the reader (with the speaker) from a state of confused ignorance into understanding

³⁶ Olds, *S. Stag's Leap*, 15.

³⁷ ‘Seeming’ because this is in fact not tautological — we have moved from emotionality (text) to (reader) affect.

³⁸ Olds, *S. Stag's Leap*, 15.

of at least one reason why the separation is occurring. And yet it is a closure without closure, all we receive is the existence of 'her', nothing further. The information, similar to the opening lines of 'While He Told Me,' inspires two conflicting intellectual and emotional states: on the one hand we learn something, which inspires sympathy and empathy from the reader. On the other hand, so much is withheld, which inspires some frustration and unease (the very next lines in the collection have shifted topic, time and tone).

The reader's emotional responses are thus conflicted: surprise, sadness and empathy, underpinned by frustration in the lack of narrative closure. What we experience is dialectical meta-emotion that is vastly incongruent with our usual emotional experience. In our daily lives, the experience of sympathy and empathy for someone is rarely accompanied by feelings of frustration and unease. This explains why the shift toward the end of the second to third poem is such a compelling moment in the work, not only because we have learnt something new, but we are *feeling* something new (or at least rare). It is also the first instance at which Olds creates conflicting, dialectical meta-emotions; emotions that, as I will argue, have the ability to increase a propensity for empathy in the reader. A brief digression into some terminology from evolutionary psychology will help frame the arguments to come.

3.5 The Importance of Appraisal and Valence

For the past few decades the field of evolutionary psychology has been advancing the broad hypothesis that the architecture of human psychology has, like the rest of our biological makeup, been the result of adaptation to ancestral environments under the weight of natural selection.³⁹ As eminent cognitive psychologist Steven Pinker (2016) explains:

An explanatory hypothesis for some emotion or cognitive faculty must begin with a theory of how that faculty would, on average, have enhanced the reproductive chances of the bearer of that faculty in an ancestral environment.⁴⁰

The field is divided on innumerable topics, as one would expect, and even the general premise is not without its critics.⁴¹ But I wish to take one general (and generally uncontentious) claim from the field for use here, namely the insight that, by and large, there is a correlation between what we like

³⁹ See Tooby, J. and Cosmides, L. 'The Theoretical Foundations of Evolutionary Psychology,' in Buss, D.M., ed., *The Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology*. Second Edition (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2016), pp. 3-87.

⁴⁰ Pinker, S, 'Foreword,' in *Ibid.*, xii.

⁴¹ For a consideration of the most prominent critiques, see Confer, J.C. et al. 'Evolutionary Psychology: Controversies, Questions, Prospects, and Limitations,' *American Psychologist* 65:2 (2010), pp. 110-126.

and what is good for us (or at least, what we like and what was good for our ancestors). To use the most obvious examples, the reason food, sex, water, fresh air, the view of the ocean and open landscapes elicit pleasure in us is because those of our ancestors drawn to them were more successful at survival and reproduction than those that were not. The psychologist Paul Bloom puts the basic point succinctly in *How Pleasure Works* (2010) as follows:

Animals need water to survive, and so they are motivated to seek it out. Pleasure is the reward for getting it; pain is the punishment for doing without.⁴²

There are two interrelated relationships being raised here. The first is between genetic advantage and appraisal (we generally judge positively those things that are or have been genetically advantageous). The second is between appraisal and valence (we receive pleasure from those things we judge positively). It is this second relationship that I am concerned with here, with an emphasis on the fact that these relationships have an evolutionary heritage and thus can be seen as natural and hardwired (though of course not inflexible).

The relationship between valence and appraisal extends, importantly, to our social as well as our biological and physiological interactions, underpinning the forces of love and empathy, as well as aversion and conflict. In the process of judging someone's actions, or assessing any social situation, there is a tendency toward experiencing pleasure when judging positively and displeasure when judging negatively, a fact attested to by the language we use to express our emotional experience — 'disgust' is both a physiological revulsion and a state of disapproval; 'desire' both a feeling of attraction and a state of approval. Crudely put, this general relationship can be expressed as follows:

⁴² Quoted in Bloom, P. *How Pleasure Works: The New Science of Why We Like What We Like* (London: Bodley Head, 2010), 33.

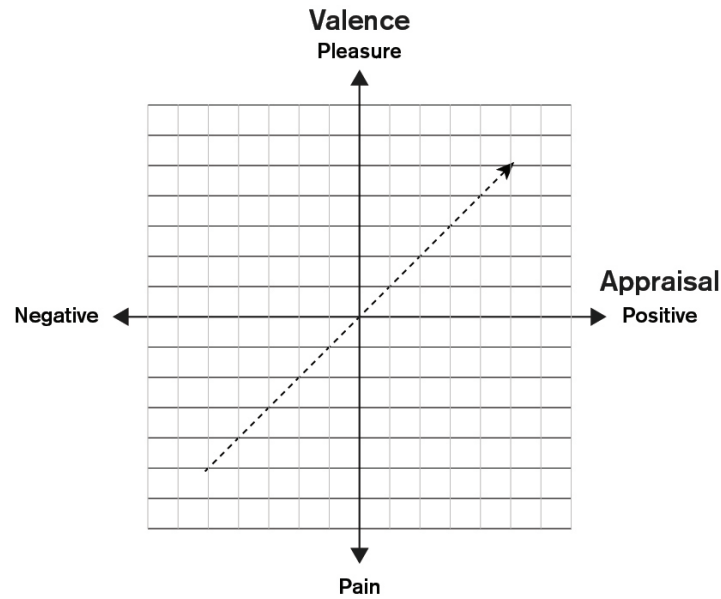


Figure 3: Natural correlation of valence and appraisal.

For graphic simplicity, here I am employing a one-dimensional model of valence (a polarity of good/bad, pleasure/pain). As Vera Shuman (2013) notes:

one-dimensional valence plays a central role in current emotion theories, such as theories of core affect and the psychological construction of emotion in which valence constitutes, together with arousal, core affect.⁴³

Nonetheless, a more nuanced view of valence may be desirable, and Shuman [et al.] have made positive steps toward such a view. Shuman [et al.] hypothesise two distinct levels of valence — macro and micro — arguing that valence can be effected on different micro levels (the five studied, though not exhaustive, are pleasantness/beauty, goal conduciveness, power, compatibility with the self (self-congruence), and compatibility with norms (moral goodness)).⁴⁴ An important implication is that ‘not all appraisals may be available at birth (e.g., moral goodness), and they may differ in salience.’ Accordingly, they write, not all micro-valences may be present at every moment in time.⁴⁵

Multiple levels of micro-valence will likely be involved when reading poetry, and a consideration of these would further enrich the current study. Here, however, I limit the consideration to the macro level, which entails the ‘integration of complex affective experiences

⁴³ Shuman, V. et al. 'Levels of Valence,' *Frontiers in Psychology* 4:1 (2013), pp. 1-17, 5.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

into a common currency.’⁴⁶ The valence axis in Figure 3 thus presents macro-valence as a summary of micro-valences that are necessarily more complex.

The *correlation* between valence and appraisal, however, distils a relationship that Barrett calls valenced core affect. Core affect entails the interaction of appraisal (or in Barrett’s terms, *valuation*, meaning ‘analysis in which something is judged as helpful or harmful in a given instance’) and changes in ‘the homeostatic (core affective) state of the individual.’⁴⁷ As evolutionary psychology has shown, this relationship has evolutionary underpinnings, but it is also cross-cultural, and manifests in the way we experience and describe emotion. As Barrett writes:

It is possible to say that valence is an invariant part of emotion experience. All individuals focus on valence as an aspect of their experience.⁴⁸

[...] All known human languages have words to communicate pleasure and displeasure and the pleasure-displeasure dimension appears pancultural in emotion lexicons. The valenced aspect of core affect has been called many things—hedonic tone, utility, good–bad mood, pleasure–pain, approach–avoidance, rewarding–punishing, appetitive–aversive, positive–negative—but the similarity is clear.⁴⁹

Indeed, the basic relationship between appraisal and valence appears in various forms within fields as diverse as consumer research (where customers judge positively those companies that elicit certain feelings),⁵⁰ film (where directors frame the appraisal of particular characters by eliciting physiological responses in an audience)⁵¹ and psychological studies on beauty (where, according to one recent article, the apprehension of beauty requires cognitive appraisal).⁵² In each instance, valence can influence appraisal, and vice versa. In film, for instance, a director can make an audience judge a character negatively by eliciting negative feelings when they are present onscreen. Similarly, if a screenwriter wants an audience to experience negative feelings at a particular point, they can have a character behave in a way that elicits negative judgement. Acclaimed director Sidney Lumet in his seminal *Making*

⁴⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁷ Barrett, L.F. 'Valence Is a Basic Building Block of Emotional Life,' *Journal of Research in Personality* 40:1 (2006), pp. 35-55, 39.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 40.

⁵⁰ See Di Muro, F. and Murray, K.B. 'An Arousal Regulation Explanation of Mood Effects on Consumer Choice,' *Journal of Consumer Research* 39:3 (2012), pp. 574-584. See de Hooge, I.E. 'Predicting Consumer Behavior with Two Emotion Appraisal Dimensions: Emotion Valence and Agency in Gift Giving,' *International Journal of Research in Marketing* 31:4 (2014), pp. 380-394.

⁵¹ See Lumet, S. *Making Movies* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), 123.

⁵² See Briellmann, A.A. and Pelli, D.G. 'Beauty Requires Thought,' *Current Biology* 27:10 (2017), pp. 1506-1513.

Movies (1996), for instance, describes using different lenses to shoot particular characters, and one specific lens for a protagonist because he ‘wanted an aura around him of gentility and tenderness.’⁵³ In these ways, while perception can guide feeling, feeling can be manipulated to guide perception. This is a phenomenon Barrett refers to as *affective realism*: the ability of feelings to influence what we perceive.⁵⁴

The poetry of Sharon Olds (and indeed the work of many great poets, and other artists) consciously runs against the grain of this evolutionary link between valence and appraisal, effectively inverting the natural tendency of affective realism. As we have already seen in one instance, Olds employs emotionality that consists of conflicting dominant and sub-dominant emotions. The most profound effects of her work, however, operate at the level of meta-emotion. Olds’ work often has us feeling positively while judging negatively (and occasionally feeling negatively while judging positively), such that our experience of the hardwired relationship between appraisal and valence is inverted:

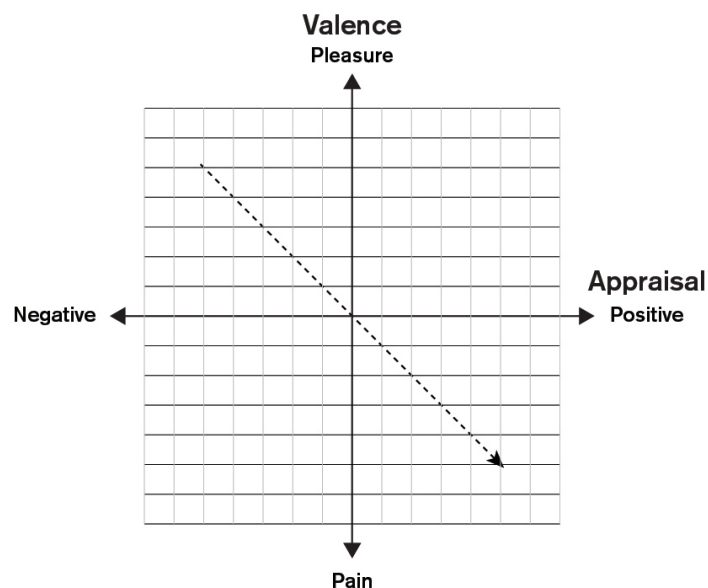


Figure 4: Inverted correlation of valence and appraisal.

Below is a brief table of some of the points throughout *Stag’s Leap* at which dialectical meta-emotion occurs (though this list is far from exhaustive). I present this as evidence, and then explore three of these points in order to elucidate exactly how this occurs (space precludes my exploring all instances). Throughout, we are looking for exactly how emotion, emotionality and

⁵³ Lumet, S. *Making Movies*, 123.

⁵⁴ Barrett, L.F. et al. *Handbook of Emotions*, 75.

meta-emotion are functioning, with an emphasis on points at which appraisal and valence run in an inverted way (for the *reader*) as outlined above.

Poem title	Lines	Appraisal	Valence
Telling My Mother	I thought it would be a pure horror, but it's just home, Mom's house and garden, earth, olive and willow, beech, orchid, and the paperweight dusted with opal, inside it the arms of a nebula raking its heavens with a soft screaming.	Negative	Positive
Stag's Leap	dreamy. When anyone escapes, my heart leaps up. Even when it's I who am escaped from, I am half on the side of the leaver. It's so quiet, and empty, when he's left. I feel like a landscape, a ground without a figure. <i>Sauve</i> [...]	Positive	Negative
Known to Be Left	I guess that's how people go on, without knowing how. I am so ashamed before my friends—to be known to be left by the one who supposedly knew me best.	Positive	Negative
Love	I let him go, I lay and stretched on love's fucking stretcher, and let him wander on his own the haunt salt mazes. I thought	Positive	Negative
Bruise Ghazal	sleep. Even as we speak, the work is being done, within. You were born to heal. Sleep and dream—but not of his return. Since it cannot harm him, wound him, in your dream.	Negative	Positive
Left-Wife Bop	time. <i>Please, not with her,</i> <i>please</i> , and he said, <i>All right</i> , and I don't know why, when I figured it out, later, that he'd gone to dig up our bar of gold, I didn't mind. [...]	Negative	Positive
What Left?	we perfected what lay between him and me, I did not deceive him, he did not deceive me, as if I did not leave him, he did not leave me, I freed him, he freed me.	Negative	Positive

Table 1: Instances of Dialectical Meta-Emotion in *Stag's Leap*

3.6 Dialectical Meta-Emotion in 'Telling My Mother'

'Telling My Mother' details the difficult moment at which the narrator informs her mother of the impending divorce, much to her 'shock and dismay'. Yet, for such a melancholic moment in the narrative, here the speaker contrasts (and at points intertwines) the sadness and seriousness of the immediate situation with the beauty and intricacy of the surrounding environment:

a doughnut and a hairnet, I fed her. On the gnarled
magnolia, in the fog, the blossoms and buds were like

all the moons in one night—full,
gibbous, crescent. I'd practiced the speech,
bringing her up toward the truth slowly,⁵⁵

There is a parallelism here between the intradiegetic and extradiegetic narrative; between the narrator in the past as character and the narrator in the present.⁵⁶ Just as the past speaker (as character) is 'bringing [her mother] toward the truth slowly,' so the current narrator brings the reader slowly, gently toward the critical moment, via examinations of the physical environment. One imagines her gaze drifting as she musters the strength to inform her mother of the news. The reader experience is a real-time anticipation of the instant of revelation, complete with the apprehension presumably shared by her mother.

The lead-up is, in terms of appraisal, an objectively grim situation; we appraise the situation as negative. Yet the moment is foregrounded by positive imagery: 'a cypress... bending luxuriously,' 'a gnarled magnolia' and 'buds and blossoms' imagined as phases of the moon. The choices here are at once real and surreal, suggesting both familiarity and stability (note the definite articles in '*the* gnarled / magnolia') and transience and decay (in 'gnarled' and the lunar phases). The imagery creates the sense of a decisively unpleasant conversation taking place in a pleasant location, diverting the reader's experience (as valence, and with the speaker) to be largely positive, distracted from the seriousness of the task at hand by the beauty of the surrounding environment.

Later in the poem we read 'I did not work to lose him, and I lost him / and I've told my mother,' followed shortly after by

I thought it would be a pure horror,
but it's just home, Mom's house
and garden, earth, olive and willow,
beech, orchid, and the paperweight
dusted with opal, inside it the arms of a
nebula raking its heavens with a soft screaming.⁵⁷

Here, after the telling has passed, there is a calming, familiar domesticity to the scene. A prevalence of spondees ('just home'; 'Mom's house') and near-weighted trochees ('garden'; 'olive'; 'willow'; 'orchid') slow the metrical patterning from a prior drumming of anapaests ('and I lost...'; 'and I've told...'), as the poem's emotional tone turns from apprehension to resignation.

⁵⁵ Olds, *S. Stag's Leap*, 22.

⁵⁶ I borrow these terms from Rimmon-Kenan and her building on the work of Genette. See Rimmon-Kenan, S. *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. Second Edition. (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 95.

⁵⁷ Olds, *S. Stag's Leap*, 23.

And although there is here, as earlier in the poem, a focus on aesthetic beauty, it is fitting that the final image in the poem is one of a (paper)weight, a literal and metaphorical symbol of oppression, as well as enclosure, suppression and guilt. It is as if the poem builds by collecting, line by line, a physical universe of natural beauty — blossoms, moons, garden, earth, olive, beech and so forth — that is gradually interiorised in the ‘nebula raking its heavens’ inside the small paperweight. In the final two words of the poem all beauty becomes a symbol of repressed pain (‘a pure horror’), as the universe attempts ‘a soft screaming.’ The silencing density of the glass means the screaming can only be ‘soft’, and the debilitating synaesthesia (a flawed logical move from tactile to (in)audible) silences it even further. Objects and scenes thus become the means for cognitively displacing the narrator’s emotional state, externalising the internal (emotional) world by reducing the irreducible (physical) environment.

The strength of the final line (particularly the final two words) relies on a sudden conceptual, imagistic reversal — all symbolism in the poem moves from expanse to enclosure, from nature to artifice. Throughout the poem we experience pleasurable imagery, putting our emotional experience at odds with our appraisal — we experience pleasurable affect despite knowing/judging that this is an objectively unpleasant time in the narrative arc. And when this flips in the final line, when all symbolism becomes ‘trapped’, the result is a devastating revelation of solitude and silence, just when Olds (as intradiegetic character) experiences the same. The emotional impact of the poem, its (possible) meaning, relies entirely on this dialectic between *feeling* and *knowing*; meta-emotion here means positive valence despite negative appraisal — feeling pleasure while knowing pain. This process occurs in reverse elsewhere in the collection, most notably in the title poem of the collection, to which we now turn.

3.7 Dialectical meta-emotion in ‘Stag’s Leap’

The title poem in the collection, ‘Stag’s Leap’ details how the label of a stag making a small leap from a precipice, pictured on Olds’ favourite red wine (which supplies the title and cover art for the collection), reminds the speaker of her husband escaping their marriage. A third of the way into the poem we read:

[...] When anyone escapes, my heart
leaps up. Even when it’s I who am escaped from,
I am half on the side of the leaver. It’s so quiet,
and empty, when he’s left. I feel like a landscape,
a ground without a figure. *Sauve* [...] ⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Ibid., 29.

As in ‘While He Told Me’, in ‘Stag’s Leap’ we experience a gradual metrical shift that underpins a change in emotional tone. There is a movement from excitement (‘when anyone escapes, my heart / leaps up’) to resignation (‘I am half on the side of the leaver’) to melancholy (‘it’s so quiet, / and empty, when he’s left’). Metrically this shift entails a progression from iambic hexameter (‘when anyone escapes, my heart / leaps up’) to three anapaests (‘I am half on the side of the leav[er]’) to sustained use of spondees (leaver, quiet, empty, landscape, figure). This progression (or regression), this *slowing down* in metrical pacing, entails a shift in valence on the part of the reader. This is so because irregular meter and rhyme is likely to lead to relatively negative emotional response when following moments of metrical regularity. As Christian Obermeier [et al.] has concluded from reader-response testing into regular versus irregular meter, ‘regular meter and rhyme lead to a heightened aesthetic appreciation and intensity of processing as well as more positive emotional responses.’⁵⁹ Accordingly, at the level of reader affect, lapses in Olds’ metrical regularity should entail lapses at the level of valence. Combine this with polysemous references to being ‘left’ — in the phrases ‘I am half’ and also ‘on the side’, and at the level of emotionality we have a slowing of metrical pace, while at the level of emotion a decrease in valence (negative affect). And yet this coincides with *positive* appraisal. In spite of her being ‘left’, the narrator displays joy in the ‘escape’ of her partner, her heart ‘leaping up.’

If it is true that we see this as a positive attribute, it runs counter to the reader experience of emotionality (and resulting emotion) in the poem. As readers, we judge the speaker positively while experiencing a certain negativity of affect in the movement from metrical regularity to irregularity. Our meta-emotion — our response to our own emotional response — is thus dialectical; negative valence in spite of positive appraisal.

There remains one brief example of how this occurs before we can progress to considering what this all means for emotional responses in the real world, this time from a poem toward the end of the collection, ‘Left-Wife Bop.’

3.8 Dialectical Meta-Emotion in ‘Left-Wife Bop.’

In ‘Left-Wife Bop’, the narrator recalls her ex-husband asking to visit their house ‘one last time,’ and later realising that he had gone to dig up a bar of gold he had buried nearby during the early days of their marriage:

⁵⁹ Obermeier, C. et al. ‘Aesthetic and Emotional Effects of Meter and Rhyme in Poetry,’ *Frontiers in Psychology* 4:1 (2013), 8.

time. *Please, not with her,*
please, and he said, *All right,* and I don't know
why, when I figured it out, later,
that he'd gone to dig up our bar of gold,
I didn't mind. [...] ⁶⁰

The final line here provides resolution on several fronts: in narrative, rhyme and rhythm. The slant rhymes that run from *time* to *right* to *why* create reader expectation of rhyme closure, which is provided in the final line: I didn't *mind*. As the lyric 'I' acts (in narrative terms) as our focaliser throughout — we 'learn' as she learns, see as she sees — our valence is necessarily intertwined with hers. Yet, as stated, there are narrative levels: the extradiegetic (the present narrator, and the 'I' that considers the event after the fact) and the intradiegetic (the 'I' of the event itself). In J.J. Winkler's (2008) terms this is an instance of *many-mindedness*: 'several personal perspectives, whose multiple relations to each other set up a field of voices and evaluations.'⁶¹ This is important because we often focalise with the narrator at one level (the intradiegetic level) while experiencing affect at another (the extradiegetic level). This is precisely what happens when we learn, in lines 10-12 of 'Left-Wife Bop,' that the speaker's husband went to their home to dig up their bar of gold. We learn what the speaker in the narrative learnt, and are accordingly judging the ex-husband in negative light. The lyric self at the extradiegetic level, however, 'didn't mind' — and so while our appraisal runs parallel with the intradiegetic level, valence runs parallel with the extradiegetic level. We feel pleasure in the consistency of rhyme and the closure of narrative rhythm and rhyme, even as we appraise the situation negatively.

Of course, insofar as the poems are all immaculately crafted, we experience aesthetic pleasure throughout the collection. Yet, as has been shown in the first two examples, Olds withdraws the pleasures of meter and rhyme just at those points we might expect them to be the most prevalent, while providing them at the points they often seem most out of place. While a cursory reading might construe this as a 'silver lining' poetics over the top of what is (as Levertov has it) 'find the dirt and dig it up poetry,' it is not enough to simply say that Olds' poetry is bittersweet. The complex poetics that underpins the narrative in *Stag's Leap* deliberately manufactures dialectical meta-emotion, which creates a short-circuiting of the hard-wired relationship between cognitive appraisal and emotional valence. It does this in a number of ways: through imagery, syntax, meter, rhyme, and a split between narrative levels (and no doubt in other ways not considered here). Such techniques encourage the reader to experience affect and emotion in novel ways, acting as the means of expressing (possible) meaning. This takes us back

⁶⁰ Olds, S. *Stag's Leap*, 102.

⁶¹ Winkler, J.J. 'Double Consciousness in Sappho's Lyrics,' in *Sexuality and Gender in the Classical World*, McClure, L., ed. (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), pp. 39-76, 43.

to my second premise (emotion serves as the means, rather than the result of expression), which can now be concluded in light of the evidence garnered thus far.

3.9 Emotion as Means of Expression

Returning to the matter of emotion as the *result* versus the *means* of expression, the classical view of emotion holds that emotional response, particularly when generated from a text, involves something of a causal chain in which some stimulus occurs in the text, which is then interpreted, resulting in an emotional response. Jenefer Robinson (2005), for instance, argues that despite the existence of conflicting approaches, most theories of emotion agree that there are a number of ingredients necessary for an emotional response. ‘Most theorists agree’, she writes, ‘that interpretation of a stimulus, physiological arousal, expressive behaviour, action tendencies, and subjective feelings are all involved in emotion.’⁶² The phrase ‘involved in’ here is ambiguous (are these all necessary conditions for an emotion?), and certainly many theorists reject that some of these (such as appraisal) are required for emotion.⁶³ Nonetheless, this way of conceiving of emotion is that of a timeline; something like a domino theory of emotion, in which a stimulus causes a cognitive act, which triggers an emotion, which then triggers some physiological effects.

This picture (known as the ‘latent variable model’) has more recently been superseded by an ‘emergent variable model’, which posits that ‘emotions do not cause, but rather are caused by their measured indicators.’⁶⁴ In either case, however, emotions are posited as the result of expression and interpretation — a picture which does not, at least in the case of reading Olds’ poetry, adequately capture the way emotion is functioning. It is not the case that we read these poems, interpret their meaning, generate an emotional response and then experience physiological effects (or any reordering of these). Rather, as the above analyses have made clear, emotionality exists at the level of language, which, upon reading, gives rise to an emotional response as pure subjective feeling (affect). When this affect is tempered with our appraisal of the events/characters, the experience is one of dialectical meta-emotion, where our emotional response as feeling comes into conflict with our meta-emotion as appraisal of the characters/situations represented in the work. There are points at which, as has been shown, the syntax, metre and sonic qualities of the text create a soothing rhythm, even as they recount points of pain and trauma. At such points in the poem we are, in the moment of emotional experience,

⁶² Robinson, J. *Deeper Than Reason: Emotion and Its Role in Literature, Music, and Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 76.

⁶³ Indeed, all names mentioned thus far in the feeling tradition reject this claim. See Barrett, L.F. et al. *Handbook of Emotions*, 5.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

caught between positive valence and negative appraisal (and there are, as we have also seen, points where the inverse occurs). If it is true, as my argument suggests, that the text's most poignant (possible) meanings arise at such moments, it follows that what is being expressed is being expressed *through* emotion, rather than emotion being a domino that is knocked over by expression and interpretation. Emotion, in other words, is the means, not the result, of expression.

There are two interrelated systems by which we can ground the claim that dialectical meta-emotion as it occurs in *Stag's Leap* promotes the experience of dialectical meta-emotion in the real world. The first is via recent research by Barrett regarding constructed emotion and affective realism — the idea that how we feel structures what we see (as opposed to the inverse). The second is via a wealth of research in recent decades on neuroplasticity.

Barrett has recently argued for a view of emotion that rejects what she calls the classical view of emotion (which includes what I above called a domino theory of emotion), according to which emotions are universally generative of shared physiological responses. This view holds that emotions like anger, fear and disgust have distinct effects that can be recognised from within and from without, and have corresponding neurological 'fingerprints.' In contrast to this, Barrett argues for a theory of constructed emotion, which construes emotions as constructed meanings that are posited over physiological and neurological responses to external stimuli. This way of conceiving emotion accounts for why it is that the same emotions can result from various bodily responses, which are further subject to both individual and cultural variability. Moreover, it puts the horse back before the cart: physiological changes give rise to emotion, rather than the inverse. Accordingly, being subject to certain environmental influences can create a tendency to interpret and experience certain physiological changes as emotion. As Barrett puts it,

Your genes turn on and off in different contexts, including the genes that shape your brain's wiring. (Scientists call this phenomenon plasticity.) That means some of your synapses literally come into existence because other people talked to you or treated you in a certain way. In other words, construction extends all the way down to the cellular level. The macro structure of your brain is largely predetermined, but the microwiring is not. As a consequence, past experience helps determine your future experiences and perceptions.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Ibid., 34.

Bringing this back to Olds' poetry, insofar as the experience of dialectical meta-emotion is a novel experience (running against the grain of the hardwired relationship between valence and appraisal), the more we create the conditions for such experiences (which is to say, the more we read), the greater the likelihood that when met with similar inputs we will construe and experience the resulting emotion in a dialectical way. The experience affords us new ways of experiencing emotion; in Barrett's terms, it increases our *emotional granularity*, such that we have a new meaning framework for interpreting affect. In other words, the next time we experience negative appraisal in real-world situations, the more open we are to the possibility of experiencing positive valence — pleasure — coextensively. In social situations such negative appraisal might mean the judgement of others' actions, just as (on occasion) we judge the actions of the narrators' husband in the narrative (and 'her', and at times the speaker herself). If that judgement does not coincide with negative valence — subjectively *feeling bad* — it removes the most significant obstacle to our empathy: it enables feeling positively while thinking negatively about a person (or situation, or event). Indeed, Feldman-Barrett suggests affective realism may be helpful to keep in mind in such situations:

[...] the next time a good friend snaps at you, remember affective realism. Maybe your friend is irritated with you, but perhaps she didn't sleep well last night, or maybe it's just lunchtime. The change in her body budget, which she's experiencing as affect, might not have anything to do with you. [...] Even simple actions like taking a drink become moments of affective realism.⁶⁶

While I agree entirely with the point, the situation outlined here involves remembering that affective realism affects others rather than *employing* affective realism to change ourselves, which I suggest is possible through art. Insofar as how we feel is inextricably linked to how we perceive and behave, if we can manufacture tendencies toward particular feeling-behaviour patterns, we can create more space for empathy and thus become more morally attuned. This is not an easy task, of course, but recent research suggests it may be possible through repetition and the strengthening of neural networks.

As the theory of constructed emotion suggests, it is through repetition that we construct our meaning frameworks for emotion, such that the requisite emotions for particular experiences become naturalised. Insofar as we can experience novel emotional responses, such as dialectical meta-emotion, we can deliberately repeat these experiences to promote the neural pathways that

⁶⁶ Ibid., 75.

associate experiences with specific emotions. This is to make use of the brain's *plasticity*, an aspect of human neurology that has only in recent decades begun to be understood. The basic premise of neuroplasticity is that brain functions are not fixed to specific regions, nor are synaptic connections stable. Rather, brain regions can adapt to perform specific functions, and neural pathways can be (and necessarily are) created and strengthened through a combination of novel experience and repetition. As neurologist Shad Helmstetter writes in *The Power of Neuroplasticity* (2014),

Neural pathways are created by repetition, repetition, repetition [...] When your brain gets a new message, it will first do a quick search to see how that message fits with other information that's already stored there. If it's a new message, your brain will store it, at least temporarily. Then, if that same message is repeated, your brain will begin to form a new neural pathway.⁶⁷

Supposing it is true that emotions are constructed through frameworks of meaning that can be altered, and that *emotional granularity* can be increased via the introduction of novel emotional experience. Supposing further that through repetition these novel emotions can become habituated via the creation and strengthening of neural pathways. If these two points are true, and if Olds' poetry offers novel ways of experiencing emotion (as dialectical meta-emotion), it follows that this poetry promotes an ability for the reader to experience dialectical meta-emotion in the real world. Insofar as this can enable us to know something negative and yet feel something positive (or, occasionally, vice versa), it is likely to promote our capacity for empathy, patience and emotional nuance. It is likely, in other words, to make us better people.

3.10 A Final Note on Universality

There is something greater at stake in arguments for any kind of universality than simply whether meaning is accessible for audiences outside the author's intended range. In claiming universality for certain texts, some argue, we necessarily privilege certain voices over others and so reinscribe dividing lines that have historically pushed female, non-white voices to the margins. Ben Lerner expresses this concern eloquently in *The Hatred of Poetry* (2016) as follows:

The lyric—that is, the intensely subjective, personal poem—that can authentically encompass everyone is an impossibility in a world characterized by difference and violence. This is not to indict the desire for such a poem (indeed, the word we often use for such desire is “Poetry”) but to indict the

⁶⁷ Helmstetter, S. *The Power of Neuroplasticity* (Scotts Valley: Createspace Independent Publishing, 2014), 60.

celebration of any specific poem for having achieved
this unreachable goal because that necessarily
involves passing off particularity as universality.⁶⁸

By this line of argument, calls to universality create a value-laden dichotomy between texts that are universal and texts that are not — and those that are not are necessarily voices that speak from positions of marginalisation. Accordingly, arguments for universalism perpetuate the marginalisation they seek to dismantle. Arguing that the universal is not only ‘impossible’ but potentially harmful, Lerner goes on to quote Claudia Rankine and Beth Loffreda:

What we want to avoid at all costs is... an
opposition between writing that accounts for race...
and writing that is “universal.” If we continue to
think of the “universal” as better-than, as the
pinnacle, we will always discount writing that
doesn’t look universal because it accounts for race
or some other demeaned category.⁶⁹

Indeed, it may be the case that it is impossible to make claims to universality without at best whitewashing and at worst reinscribing histories of oppression. On the other hand, certain claims to universality may be necessary not only to explain the appeal of great works of art, but to reframe them as points of connection rather than points of divide. For her part, Olds certainly intends a certain accessibility, if not universality, in the voice of her poems. She writes of her work that ‘it doesn’t feel personal. It feels like art — a made thing — the ‘I’ in it not myself anymore, but, I’d hope, some pronoun that a reader or hearer could slip into.’⁷⁰ The argument outlined here may imply a loophole in the seeming paradox that the call to universality entails a reinscription of the status quo. We may, in other words, be able to conceive of (emotional) mechanisms that are universal, while recognising that particular texts exploit such mechanisms in ways that have both universal and reader-specific effects. If it is possible to make claims to universality without perpetuating the divisive literary status quo, it is only by emphasising that universals lie in readers and not in texts.

The claim that art makes us better people is of course not new, with a history spanning back to at least Aristotle’s *Poetics*, even if it has lost popularity under the scrutiny of postmodern discourses that reject some of the quasi-essentialist ideas I have endorsed here. But there is something worth reviving in the notion that reading poetry can, in empirically-grounded ways,

⁶⁸ Lerner, B. *The Hatred of Poetry*, 62.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁷⁰ Macdonald, M. ‘Olds’ Worlds,’ *The Guardian*, July 2008. Online. Accessed May 2, 2018. URL = <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/jul/26/poetry>.

make us better people, and the fact that the claim may be trite doesn't make it untrue. The more we understand about emotion from a psychological and neurological point of view, the better we can understand why it is that human beings are universally drawn to create and consume poetic works. In Olds' case, the poetry is not (only) compelling for its poetic virtues, and it is certainly not a 'me, me, me kind of poetry.' On the contrary, Olds' work in *Stag's Leap* is an *us, us, us* kind of poetry. It consciously runs against the grain of our hardwired (shared) relationship between valence and appraisal. In so doing it allows us richer avenues for emotional experience, and a way of altering the links between our feeling and behaviour. In these ways it may make us more empathetic and, in a small way at least, better people.

Why Reading Sharon Olds Makes You a Better Person (Discussion)

In the first two chapters I outlined in detail some of the potentials for poetic thought as a manifestation of both ontological and rhythmic tension. In the preceding chapter and the chapters that follow I have begun to move toward slightly more practical applications for poetic thought, in the case of Sharon Olds discussing poetic thought as emotional tension that has real-world implications for the promotion of empathy. As with the examination of Frank O'Hara and Heideggerian phenomenology, I have attempted to reconsider where thinking occurs, and have suggested that in the case of Olds this occurs at the point of (emotional) connection between reader and text. Further, I have once again argued that poetic thought is fundamentally involved with the navigation of dialectics. In light of the evidence that has been amassed in the preceding discussion, I now wish to begin to consolidate some of the arguments made thus far, and the implications they might have for emotion theory, aesthetics, poetic thought and poetic pedagogy.

Emotional Affordances

Several of the philosophies and conceptual frameworks that have been discussed have clear overlaps. The phenomenology of Heidegger, for instance, stresses the inextricability of the subject and object in acts of perception, since perception is the confluence of an actor with their environment. Similarly, Gibson's affordances refer to the organism-specific potentialities of aspects of the environment, while what I have called the *environment-at-hand* suggests that (certain) poems are in essence linguistic crystallisations of artistic affordances within equipment in the world. Bringing this all together with the theories of emotion that have been discussed in the previous chapter, it is striking the degree to which these concepts intertwine with a picture of emotion as an actor-environment interaction. As Robinson (2005) suggests,

[...] emotions are essentially ways in which organisms interact with their environments [...] fish and even insects respond emotionally to their environments, and some non-human mammals have a fairly rich emotional life. Human beings, with their capacity for language, enjoy more diverse and subtly differentiated emotional states than do fish or monkeys, but their emotions too are not essentially private events but interactions with the environment [...]¹

¹ Robinson, J. *Deeper Than Reason: Emotion and Its Role in Literature, Music, and Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 18.

I have argued that neuroplasticity allows for an individual to deliberately repeat novel emotional experiences to promote the neural pathways that encourage emotional granularity. If emotions are ‘essentially ways in which organisms interact with their environment’, then the repetition of such novel emotional experiences (for instance, the experience of dialectical meta-emotion) is essentially a method for altering what we might think of as *emotional affordances* within the world. Moreover, if our mode of being-in-the-world is that of inherently engaged meaning-makers, as Heidegger suggests, then poetic thought as the navigation of emotional tension becomes an avenue for not only highlighting but indeed altering the nature of *Dasein*; we can come to alter the meaning potentials of the environment and so reconfigure our experience of being-in-the-world. Margaret Weldhen in part highlights this possibility for poetry to change our experience of the world when she notes in ‘Morality and the Metaphor’ (1980) that:

[...] ‘poeta’ is the kind of language we can ‘dwell in’. It is the ‘house of being’, to use Heidegger’s phrase. Both Coleridge and Heidegger take the view that ‘poeta’ is the fundamental form of language. Then language as long as we are capable of ‘dwelling’ in rather than merely ‘using’ it, clearly cannot be merely a tool, if we see it this way. For through ‘poeta’ [...] we keep our grasp of the ‘world’ and so our humanity.²

The concept of the *environment-at-hand* does indeed entail using language as a tool — which is to say as equipment for a particular purpose (for that of writing a poem) — but, as Wheldon suggests, it is not *merely* that. The broader implication for poetry as a mode of thought is that we can come to keep and indeed alter our ‘grasp of the ‘world’, and so our humanity.’ To the extent that this can be done in a way that increases empathy in the real-world experience of the reader, poetry can make one ‘a better person’ not only in the sense of being more morally attuned, but in the sense of being more attuned to their own nature of being.

Feeling Versus Thought

Included in the pervasive dualisms that have already been outlined is a longstanding distinction between rational and bodily processes, which has gradually begun to be worn down. Bernard Harrison and Heather Gordon (1983) neatly summarise the core danger of this division as follows:

[...] the danger of this ‘feeling’ versus ‘thought’ fallacy — whether one is arguing for more infusion of ‘cognition’ or for more ‘feeling’ — lies in the under or

² Weldhen, M. ‘Morality and the Metaphor,’ *Higher Education Quarterly* 34:2 (1980), pp. 215-228, 222.

over-valuing of one aspect of thought, at the expense of another; feeling is seen as a 'merely' personal, undistinguished outpouring of emotion; thought is seen only as the exercising of rational processes.³

The philosophy of Heidegger and, to an even greater extent, that of Merleau-Ponty have systematically attacked this dichotomy, emphasising instead the dynamic integration of humans and human bodies with our surrounding environments. Even as I have drawn on such philosophies, however, there may be a risk in the kind of readings I have suggested in re-establishing this dichotomy. Katrin Pahl (2015) puts this danger succinctly when she notes:

Affect theory invited considerations of text or speech in texts as expression, and this gets often translated into expression of interiority even as affect theory means to counteract notions such as interiority and subjectivity. It is crucial to avoid such backsliding.⁴

As has been seen, Pahl's solution is to locate emotion in the text as *emotionality*, thereby being able to 'analyse the text as emotional rather than presume an emotion or affect to be represented or expressed by the text.'⁵ My own suggestion has been to see emotionality as part of a tiered system, with emotion and dialectical meta-emotion as being grounded in the text's emotionality. The important point here is that the claim that emotion is the means rather than the result of expression (that is; the claim that emotionality gives rise to an emotional response as pure subjective feeling — affect — which is then tempered with our appraisal of the events/characters) runs directly counter to the 'feeling versus thought' fallacy. This is so because at each stage of the generation of (possible) meaning, cognition and feeling are deeply intertwined via core affect — the interaction of appraisal and changes in the homeostatic (core affective) state of the individual. While at face value the textual analyses in the preceding chapters might seem to express the narrator's interiority (indeed this is a claim that Peter Schwenger makes explicitly in reference to O'Hara),⁶ it must be stressed that the notion of dialectical meta-emotion is deeply antithetical to both interiority and the feeling/thought divide. Instead, it postulates the integration of cognition and feeling — a poetic thinking we might consider a form of *emotional cognition*.

³ Harrison, B. and Gordon, H. 'Metaphor Is Thought: Does Northtown Need Poetry?' *Educational Review* 35:3 (1983), pp. 265-278, 267.

⁴ Pahl, K. 'The Logic of Emotionality,' *PMLA* 130:5 (2015), pp. 1457-1466, 1458.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1458.

⁶ Schwenger, P. *The Tears of Things: Melancholy and Physical Objects* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 8.

Poetic Thought for the Reader

I have claimed that poetic thought entails the navigation of dialectics, yet the focus over the first three chapters has gradually shifted: from the poet to the musician and then, in the previous chapter, to the reader. My claim is that poetic thought occurs in a multiplicity of ways: it is involved both between the artist and their artwork during the point of creation and the reader or audience and the artwork during its being read/heard. Poetic thought, I am suggesting, is the central process by which (possible) meaning is created in and through artworks. This begins to reveal one possible answer to the difficult question of what underpins aesthetic enjoyment. Francis Steen alludes to this mystery when he writes in 'A Cognitive Account of Aesthetics' (2006):

At the cognitive roots of art is a subjective phenomenology of aesthetic enjoyment. Private and intimate, or ostentatiously public, such feelings constitute, on the one hand, a centrally gratifying dimension of being alive, and, on the other, a mystery, a gift without a card.⁷

Why, for instance, as Eva Maria Koopman (2015) asks, do we read sad books for enjoyment?⁸ If the theory of poetic thought as the disentanglement of dialectics holds weight, then a possible answer to the mystery of aesthetic enjoyment is that poetic thought connects us most directly to our inherent contradictions. As Koopman points out, in *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (1986)⁹ Martha Nussbaum argues that 'strong feelings help us gain an extended, embodied sense of human experience.'¹⁰ Similarly, Koopman's own research suggests that 'as sad books appear to address both needs for feeling and meaning-making, they serve a unique function for all readers.'¹¹ In this respect we can see the tiered system of emotionality, emotion and dialectical meta-emotion as addressing the nature of *Dasein* (humanity as inherently engaged meaning-makers) while also the need for feeling (and feeling as cognition). To this end, as Nussbaum suggests, poetic thought here helps us gain an extended, embodied sense of human experience, while also increasing our emotional granularity (thus making us better people).

⁷ Steen, F. 'A Cognitive Account of Aesthetics,' in Turner, M., ed., *The Artful Mind: Cognitive Science and the Riddle of Human Creativity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 57

⁸ Koopman, E.M. 'Why Do We Read Sad Books? Eudaimonic Motives and Meta-Emotions.' *Poetics* 52:1 (2015), pp. 18-31.

⁹ Nussbaum, M. *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 363.

¹⁰ Koopman, E.M. 'Why Do We Read Sad Books?' 27.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

While in previous chapters poetic thought was conceived as dialectics of ontological and rhythmic tension, it could be argued that poetic thought as emotional tension is an aspect of poetic thought common to all aesthetic experience. One of the foremost philosophers of art, R. G. Collingwood, for instance, has stressed the centrality of emotion for all cognitive acts. As Harrison and Gordon write:

Collingwood's work ranged over theories of science and of art; in his statements on aesthetic experience he emphasised the emotional basis of all new thought, and of the continued presence of emotion in advanced stages of thought. He held that the one source of art is from ideas that are 'germinated from primary emotional responses to living'; it is these ideas that endow language with meaning, and it is language that enables their expression and communication.¹²

While a (re)consideration of emotion and dialectical meta-emotion in the poetry of O'Hara and the rap music of the second chapter would derail the current discussion unnecessarily, it is worth pointing out that the framework of core affect could equally be applied to the poetry and songs examined; poetic thought can occur on various levels for any artwork, even as I am considering such levels in isolation. While I will not argue that emotional tension is a necessary condition for poetic thought (as Collingwood's view seems to suggest), insofar as being human entails a 'need for feeling', in Koopman's terms, emotional tension may be one of the most pervasive manifestations of poetic thought. In any event, the analyses of the previous chapter and the concept of poetic thought as emotional tension do raise the important point that — contrary to the views of Peter Lamarque, who I come to now — art should be valued for being *useful*.

The Usefulness of Art

A view I particularly wish to distinguish my claims for poetic thought from is that art should be valued first and foremost for its own sake. Peter Lamarque (2010) has argued for this view when he suggests that art's role is not utility; art is, he controversially suggests, useless.¹³ 'Of course,' Lamarque concedes, 'artworks obviously do have uses' (and he goes on to list historical instances of this fact), but their value lies not in their utility. Accordingly, and drawing on Kant's categorical imperative, here Lamarque argues that we should appreciate art as an end in itself, which is to say by viewing it not in terms of utility, but as an intrinsic good. To this end, he

¹² Harrison, B. and Gordon, H. 'Metaphor Is Thought: Does Northtown Need Poetry?' *Educational Review* 35:3 (1983) pp. 265-278, 270.

¹³ Lamarque, P. 'The Uselessness of Art,' *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 68:3 (2010), pp. 205-214, 206.

puts himself against philosophers such as Noël Carroll, Berys Gaut, Martha Nussbaum and Richard Eldridge, whom he takes to argue

[...] not only that the moral and the aesthetic are intimately entwined, but also that part of what is good about art, why art should be valued, is its capacity to sharpen, clarify, or educate our moral sensibilities, also perhaps to deepen self-knowledge and enhance our knowledge generally about human affairs and human emotions. Art, they think, is useful for just such reasons. Art is good, they seem to be saying, at least partially in virtue of being good for you.¹⁴

Against such ‘moralists’, Lamarque suggests that any artwork is necessarily an ‘embedded, intentional object’ and that an absorption in ‘the properties of such an intentional object can afford an intrinsically valuable experience.’¹⁵ Given the usefulness of any artwork inevitably changes, wanes or entirely disappears over time, without negating the work’s status *as* an artwork, and indeed often determining this status (in the case of portraits of nobility, for instance), Lamarque proposes that the trajectory of a work as it tends *away from utility* is a tendency that moves it *toward art*. He writes:

great works of art, even those with a strong initial usefulness, in personal, political, or religious terms, tend to grow into a benign uselessness as time passes and conditions change, yet without diminishing their status as valued works of art. Indeed that status is enhanced. They attain a new dimension of value, toward art, one might say, away from utility.¹⁶

Accordingly, Lamarque argues that ‘a work cannot be objectively valued as art [...] until it has gone some way toward satisfying the test of time.’¹⁷

The plausibility of the suggestion I have made that art, or at least poetry, should be valued for its usefulness (specifically its utility to make us better people) seems to hang on this opposition Lamarque draws between utility and artfulness — an opposition I do not think holds in all (or indeed most) cases. It is not clear for instance, at least in the case of poetry, that an artwork should ‘tend to grow into a benign uselessness as time passes and conditions change.’ As outlined in the first chapter, Adorno’s concept of the language-character of art suggests a necessary multiplicity of

¹⁴ Ibid., 207.

¹⁵ Ibid., 211.

¹⁶ Ibid., 211.

¹⁷ Ibid., 212.

meaning-potentials that always exceed an artwork itself, meanings which are necessarily context-dependent.¹⁸ The contingency of meaning, however, does not suggest that such meaning is limited (rather, it is *unlimited*) or that artworks will tend toward uselessness over time. Indeed, as I will come to argue in the next chapter, the meaning-potentials of certain artworks (such as the poetry of Charles Simic) will tend to *increase* if the social conditions in which they are read are increasingly implicated in the poetic thought that the work enacts. To the extent that certain artworks can come to be particularly pertinent within the social conditions in which they are read, and to the extent that they can thus become increasingly useful, Lamarque's suggestion that a move *away* from utility is a move *toward* art falls apart, since this seemingly entails the implausible claim that when poetries such as Simic's suddenly become more useful they suddenly cease to be art. We might be better to say, then, that utility and artfulness are not opposing poles, but simply two metrics by which to judge a work. Whatever defines art as such (a question too broad to approach here), certainly a great deal of art's *value* derives from its usefulness, which may increase or decrease over time (as will be evidenced more clearly in the chapter that follows).

Pedagogical Implications

While the conceptual mechanisms through which poetic thought can make one a better person are complicated — or at least take some time to unravel — we should bear in mind that the process by which this occurs is very simply by reading the works. The idea that reading a certain poetry can make one a better person obviously has significant implications regarding the place of poetry within education. Of course, this is a question that is often raised outside literary studies. For instance, in an article titled 'How and Why Does Poetry Matter? And What Do We Do About That?' (2010),¹⁹ educator Patrick Dias has stressed the urgency of questioning both the significance of poetry and the related question of how it is taught. He writes:

There are two aspects to this attending to music, to visual art, and to a literary work. One is that we need to be engaged, and the other, that we need to trust ourselves as listeners, viewers, and readers. This involves a process of familiarisation where poems become familiar objects, where they are read without the injunction that they must be fully and clearly understood, where one learns to set a poem aside to return to, if one wishes, at a more propitious time.²⁰

¹⁸ Jarvis, S. 'Prosody as Cognition,' *Critical Quarterly* 40:4 (1998), pp. 3-15, 10.

¹⁹ Dias, P. 'How and Why Does Poetry Matter? And What Do We Do About That?' *LEARNIng Landscapes* 4:1 (2010), pp. 21-27.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

Dias goes on to quote the philosopher Susanne K. Langer, who suggests that ‘the entire qualification one must have for understanding art is responsiveness.’ ‘Perhaps cultivating responsiveness’, Dias suggests, ‘is the agenda we must commit ourselves to if poetry is to matter.’²¹

This responsiveness, an openness to the possibilities of meaning — rather than a fixed didacticism that proposes a poem ‘must be fully and clearly understood’ — is central to poetic thought as emotional tension. Given Pahl’s notion of emotionality existing within the language of the text, combined with language-character as the indeterminacy (of cultural contingency) of linguistic meaning, responsiveness here means not only ‘familiarisation,’ but an attendance to a multiplicity of meaning-potentials both within and around the text. If we are to defend poetry as useful, as I have done, it should accordingly be with the caveat that since emotionality is fluid, poetic thought as emotional tension is likewise fluid, and so the uses of certain poetries may shift over time. Accordingly, as Dias suggests, if poetry is to matter *effectively*, we need to be responsive not only to the poems themselves, but to both their uses and the ways they are taught. This matter of use will continue to lie at the core of the discussion that makes up the next chapter.

While the work of Frank O’Hara, the rap artists of the second chapter and Sharon Olds have served to highlight the potentialities of poetic thought largely on an individual level, the chapter that follows moves to a consideration of how poetic thought can function as political tension; how poetic thought can run against the grain of social processes that are increasingly reifying. This entails a digression into critical theory, examined alongside the work of former U.S. Poet Laureate Charles Simic. With a conceptual groundwork of Heideggerian phenomenology in place, the analyses that follow aim to both extend and contract the discussion; contracting the textual analysis to a more fine-grained look at a particular poetic technique (what I call atten(s)ion), while expanding the reach of poetic thought beyond the artist, the artwork and the reader and into the socio-political realm.

²¹ Ibid., 24.

Chapter 4: A Rock, and a Hard Place: Atten(s)ion in the Poetry of Charles Simic

At the time of writing, this chapter is currently under review for publication in *Contemporary Literature*.

In my poetry, images think. My best images are smarter than I am.

— Charles Simic (2003)¹

We are in a hard place. This constitutes, crudely put, the starting point for critical theorists of the Frankfurt School philosophers — Lukács, Horkheimer, Adorno, Honneth, Habermas, among others — who set out to diagnose and elucidate (if not remedy) social pathologies; that is, aspects of modernity that inhibit equality, connection and individual and collective flourishing. Enter the pathology of *reification*, the premise that in post-industrial society humans and human relationships become increasingly commodified and *thing-like*, while lifeless objects increasingly come to take on the characteristics of the human. As a specific concept, reification received its first, most salient exploration in Georg Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* (1923),² later to be employed by Horkheimer and Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944)³ and discussed by Joseph Gabel, Lucien Goldmann, Karel Kosik, and the Praxis School in Yugoslavia during the 1960s.⁴ Most recently, Axel Honneth reintroduced the term in *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea* (2008),⁵ revising the term to fit within his focus on recognition as the basis for social change, while Judith Butler, Raymond Geuss and Jonathan Lear offered critiques and reconfigurations that factor in familial relationships, politics and semantics. In the years since, the term has been revisited variously by Kevin Floyd,⁶ Wade Bell,⁷ and Fredric Jameson.⁸ Despite Žižek's claims that reification is obsolete,⁹ the term has very much been brought back to life.

¹ Quoted in Atchley, J.H. 'Charles Simics Insomnia: Presence, Emptiness, and the Secular Divine,' *Literature and Theology* 17:1 (2003), pp. 44-58, 46.

² Lukács, G. and Livingstone, R., trans., *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (London: Merlin Press, 1971).

³ Adorno, T. and Horkheimer, M. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, Noerr, G.S and Jephcott, E., eds. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

⁴ See Martin, J. 'Introduction,' in Honneth, A. and Jay, M., ed., *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 7.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Floyd, K. *The Reification of Desire: Toward a Queer Marxism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

⁷ Bell, W. 'A Phenomenological Take on the Problem of Reification,' *Moderna Språk* 108:2 (2014), pp.1-16.

⁸ Jameson, F. 'Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture,' *Social Text* Vol. 1 (1979), pp. 130-148.

⁹ Quoted in Lijster, T. 'All Reification Is a Forgetting': Benjamin, Adorno, and the Dialectic of Reification,' in Gandesha, S. and Hartle, J.F., eds., *The Spell of Capital: Reification and Spectacle* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 55.

Since social pathologies constitute problems that permeate the social world, it is perhaps unsurprising that the predominant concern in the above literature has been with the human, the socio-political; how relations have become increasingly mediated, commodified, and instrumentalised. The other side of the coin — the reification of the physical world — has seemed of secondary concern to philosophers, despite considerations of archeologists,¹⁰ ecologists,¹¹ and sociologists.¹² This human-centric tendency of analysis has been highlighted in a recent article by Christopher Breu, titled ‘The New Reification, or Quotidian Materialism’ (2018). Breu argues that the material turn of the twenty first century has failed to pay adequate attention to forms of systemic materialism central to Marxist theory. In this vein, Breu contends that reification needs to be considered in reference to ‘a collective politics that is about both subjects and objects (including the thingly quality of objects) in equal measure.’¹³

Taking this sound advice as a starting point for a literary approach, I wish to examine the poetics of one of America’s foremost ‘thingly’ poets, namely Charles Simic, whose work enacts and interrogates the dynamics of reification in ways that have both philosophical and political import. I examine four of Simic’s poems, considering specifically how they interrogate the limits of knowledge (in ‘Stone’), the limits of perception (in ‘The White Room’), the limits of language (in ‘The Old World’) and finally the limits of meaning itself (in ‘Description of a Lost Thing’). It is my intention to illustrate not only how Simic’s image-based poetry uniquely and directly engages with (and at times transcends) reification, but how the concept of reification can aid literary criticism in our analyses of poetic works. It is shown that the work of Charles Simic is best understood as work of *atten(s)ion*: an attention to objects in-the-world that pushes against (but cannot collapse) the tension of phenomenological apprehension of world.

Since reification comes in a myriad of forms and flavours, before progressing to Simic’s poetry, however, I first outline exactly what the reification I have in mind looks like. This is done via a critique of Honneth’s consideration of reification in his recent *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea* (2008).

¹⁰ See, for instance, Olsen, B. ‘Material Culture After Text: Re-Membering Things,’ *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 36:2 (2003), pp.87-104.

¹¹ See Levins R. and Lewontin, R. ‘Dialectics and Reductionism in Ecology,’ *An International Journal for Epistemology, Methodology and Philosophy of Science* 43:1 (1980), pp. 47-78.

¹² See Silva, S. ‘Reification and Fetishism: Processes of Transformation,’ *Theory, Culture & Society* 30:1 (2013), pp. 79-98.

¹³ Breu, C. ‘The New Reification, or Quotidian Materialism,’ *American Literary History* 30:1(2018), pp. 188-199.

4.1 Reification, Reconfigured

Honneth neatly summarises Lukács' original concept of reification as entailing a trifold reification of objects, other subjects and selves, as follows:

Subjects in commodity exchange are mutually urged (a) to perceive given objects solely as 'things' that one can potentially make a profit on, (b) to regard each other solely as 'objects' of a profitable transaction, and finally (c) to regard their own abilities as nothing but supplemental 'resources' in the calculation of profit opportunities.¹⁴

Dissatisfied with Lukács' account of reification as 'not sufficiently complex, not sufficiently abstract',¹⁵ Honneth goes on to argue for a reification with recognition at its core. He suggests that several philosophical threads — that of Heidegger's notion of care, John Dewey's practical involvement, and Lukács' engaged praxis — can be understood as expressing a common argument, namely

the notion that the stance of empathetic engagement in the world, arising from the experience of the world's significance and value (*Werthaftigkeit*), is prior to our acts of detached cognition.¹⁶

Honneth thus puts recognition at the nexus of reification, '[tracing] the diverse dimensions (intersubjective, objective, and subjective) of the social phenomenon of reification back to the fact of forgetfulness of recognition.'¹⁷ Putting aside whether this is plausible for the characterisation of the reification of social relations, it is the manner in which Honneth characterises the reification of the natural and physical world that causes deep problems for his account of recognition.

What does reification of the *physical* world look like? For Honneth, it consists in

our failing to be attentive in the course of our cognition of objects to all the additional aspects of meaning accorded to them by other persons. Just as is the case with the reification of other persons, a "certain blindness" is here at hand. We then perceive animals, plants, or things in a merely objectively identifying way, without being aware

¹⁴ Honneth, A. *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea*, 22.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 75.

that these objects possess a multiplicity of
existential meanings for the people around us.¹⁸

Save a small handful of other mentions, this constitutes the most exhaustive consideration Honneth offers on the reification of the physical world, and it seems to me both curiously brief and somewhat inconsistent with reification as conceived by Lukács. Recalling that Lukács characterises reification of objects as ‘to perceive given objects solely as ‘things’ that one can potentially make a profit on,’ Honneth attempts to reframe this in terms of a forgetfulness of recognition, namely the recognition that objects are imbued with the values of others. For Lukács, then, reification of objects is fundamentally a matter of objects being imbued with and determined by human value, while for Honneth reification of objects is *forgetting* to imbue objects with, and determine them by, human value. Importantly, since ‘the meanings accorded objects by other people’ presumably may also include meanings that entail the potential for profit, reifying an object in Lukács’ sense may mean *unreifying* in Honneth’s.

The central problem of reification for Lukács was a ‘reversal of meanings’ between nature and man, by which nature falls under the domineering gaze of instrumental reason (an idea further developed by Horkheimer and Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944). As Lukács puts it in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923):

[...] precisely this is the great danger in every 'humanism' or anthropological point of view. For if man is made the measure of all things, and if with the aid of that assumption all transcendence is to be eliminated without man himself being measured against this criterion, without applying the same 'standard' to himself or — more exactly — without making man himself dialectical, then man himself is made into an absolute and he simply puts himself in the place of those transcendental forces he was supposed to explain, dissolve and systematically replace. At best, then, a dogmatic metaphysics is superseded by an equally dogmatic relativism.¹⁹

At least as presented in *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea*, Honneth’s conception of reification as it applies to objects commits precisely this mistake of making man the measure of all things. In so doing, it begins to fall into the process of reification itself, by which objects are only valuable insofar as they are valuable to the human subject. The physical world becomes subsumed under (and thus dominated by) human control. What we need, then, is a concept of

¹⁸ Ibid., 63.

¹⁹ Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 187.

reification that avoids both anthropocentrism and strict subject/object dualism, as well as an antidote to reification that might begin to reveal what Wade Bell (2014) poignantly calls ‘the spectre of Eden’; that is, what an *unreified* state of being may look like.²⁰ As is often the case with difficult questions, I believe tentative answers can be found in literature, and in this case a good starting point to search for the spectre of Eden is in the ‘thingly’ poetry of Charles Simic.

4.2 Stone (from *What the Grass Says*, 1967)

The poets, so we believe, remind the philosophers,
again and again, of the world 's baffling presence.

- Charles Simic (1994).²¹

Published in 1967, Simic’s first collection of poetry, *What the Grass Says* (1967), quickly established what would become dominant concerns, motifs and stylistic devices throughout Simic’s extensive bibliography of some thirty collections to date. His style is clearly influenced by early twentieth century imagist poets, and coloured by an everydayness popularised by the New York School during the 1950s and 60s. His preoccupation with philosophy, particularly Heidegger, has led to a poetry saturated with metaphysical ruminations, self-consciously flawed attempts to transcend its own limits to get at what lies beyond, behind or beneath language. ‘The poem’s difficulty,’ Simic writes in ‘Notes on Poetry and Philosophy’ (1989), ‘is that it presents an experience language cannot get at. Being cannot be represented or uttered — as poor realists foolishly believe — but only hinted at. Writing is always a rough translation from wordlessness into words.’²² This attempt at translating wordlessness into words is most strikingly evident in his poem ‘Stone’, a fine example of Simic’s engagement with the theme of reification. It begins:

Go inside a stone
That would be my way.
Let somebody else become a dove
Or gnash with a tiger’s tooth.
I am happy to be a stone.²³

The first stanza drifts from abstraction and hypotheticals to the concrete and the actual, beginning with an imperative — ‘Go inside the stone’ — which becomes hypothetical as the speaker enters

²⁰ Bell, A. ‘A Phenomenological Take on the Problem of Reification,’ 2.

²¹ Quoted in Lysaker, J. ‘White Dawns, Black Noons, Twilit Days: Charles Simic’s Poems Before Poetry,’ *TriQuarterly* 110:1 (2001), pp. 525-580, 525.

²² Simic, C. ‘Notes on Poetry and Philosophy,’ *New Literary History* 21:1 (1989), pp. 215-221, 219.

²³ C. Simic and Abelson, J., ed., *What the Grass Says: Poems* (Kayak: A Magazine of Modern Poetry, 1967). For all subsequent quotations, reference is omitted.

the poem in ‘that would be my way,’ later collapsing into the actual in ‘I am happy to be a stone.’ If the stanza is hypothetical, grammatically the first lines should read ‘[To] go inside a stone / that would be my way,’ while the last should read ‘[I would be] happy to [become] a stone.’ In grammatically holding the hypothetical and the actual alive as two open possibilities, the poem enacts an ontology that is all encompassing: the speaker both *is* and *is not* the stone; the dove and tiger’s tooth are both real *and* metaphorical synecdoches. This lays the groundwork for an exploration of ecological wholeness as the poem continues:

From the outside the stone is a riddle:
No one knows how to answer it.
Yet within, it must be cool and quiet
Even though a cow steps on it full weight,
Even though a child throws it in a river,
The stone sinks, slow, unperturbed
To the river bottom
Where the fishes come to knock on it
And listen.

The semantic and metrical (anapaestic) parallelisms in ‘Even though a cow steps’ and ‘Even though a child throws’ mark the beginning of a shift in which the human subject is drawn to the periphery and the stone comes to the centre of the poem’s meaning potentials. In this way the second stanza sees an increase in what has been called *ecomorphism*; the process by which, contra anthropomorphism, the human merges with the surrounding ecology. As Ashton Nichols writes in *Beyond Romantic Ecocriticism* (2011),

Ecomorphism is the antithesis of anthropomorphism. Instead of seeing myself at the center of my world, I can now help both myself, and the world around me, if I come to see my own activity—indeed, all human activity—in terms of its connectedness to nonhuman life.²⁴

Consider, once again, the parallelism between the cow and the child in the lines above, and the fishes presented as curious and engaged. Here human agency is just one among many, with the fish exhibiting ostensibly human traits (interest, curiosity). Where elsewhere ‘cool’ and ‘quiet’ — once again both literal and metaphorical — may be anthropomorphising as applied to a stone, here the logic is reversed such that the attributes are the essence of the stone itself — what it *must be*. No one knows how to ‘answer it,’ both in the sense of solving a riddle, but also in the sense of *responding to*, as the fishes listen but do not (or cannot) reply. There is something no doubt mystical involved in the stone as riddle, as something of a sage to the fish, and its stoic lack of

²⁴ Nichols, A. *Beyond Romantic Ecocriticism: Toward Urbanatural Roosting* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 77.

response to 'outside' interference. Yet, though the speaker 'is' the stone, here the reader and speaker are placed as outside spectators (note 'the stone sinks,' rather than 'I sink' or 'I would sink'). The mystical is thus evoked but not embodied, it lies between the speaker, around but not entirely within the stone itself, permeating the language of the poem and maintaining the tentative dualities (subject/object, hypothetical/actual, speaker/spoken) enacted in the first stanza.

Such dualities are brought together in the third and final stanza, where we read:

I have seen sparks fly out
When two stones are rubbed.
So perhaps it is not dark inside after all;
Perhaps there is a moon shining
From somewhere, as though behind a hill—
Just enough light to make out
The strange writings, the star charts
On the inner walls.

There is a 'zooming in' here by which the vastness of the physical world, but also the life world, comes to exist within the stone. Far from being 'dark inside', the stone contains a world in itself, which conceptually blends religiosity, secular awe and mysticism. Indeed, Simic's poems have often been seen as expressing a certain mysticism, a religiosity that is no less reverent for being secular. 'For Simic,' Donovan McAbee suggests, 'the materiality of things is nearly sacred.'²⁵ Victor Cartoski (1977) goes even further, writing that in Simic's poetry

[...] things are, simply put, sacramental. That is, they are sacred signs of a spiritual reality by which man may attain grace, for in Simic's poetry there is no conflict whatsoever between God and the natural world He created.²⁶

Simic himself has said 'awe is my religion, and mystery is its church.'²⁷ This awe and sense of mystery is evoked in 'Stone' via imagery that is based on the conceptual metaphor of vision as knowledge, underwritten with Christian iconography of divinity as light. As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson point out in *Philosophy in the Flesh* (1999), the representation of thinking as perceiving and knowledge as light are deeply historically ingrained conceptual metaphors. 'We get most of our knowledge,' they point out, 'through vision.' 'This most common of everyday experiences leads us to conceptualise knowing as seeing.' As examples they point to

²⁵ McAbee, D. 'Metaphysical Suspicions: Charles Simic as Agnostic Theologian,' *Christianity & Literature* 61:2 (2012), pp. 281-306, 295.

²⁶ Contoski, V. 'Charles Simic: Language at the Stone's Heart,' *Chicago Review* 28:4 (1977), pp. 145-157, 148.

²⁷ Quoted in McAbee, D. 'Metaphysical Suspicions,' 282.

‘An Aid To Knowing Is A Light Source,’ and ‘Being Able To Know Is Being Able To See.’²⁸ Within ‘Stone’ such references of light shining denote secular knowledge, but also have clear Christian undertones, as Jesus is consistently referred to throughout the Bible as ‘the Light’, which represents wisdom (Ecclesiastes 2:13; Psalm 119:130),²⁹ health (Luke 11:34),³⁰ and salvation (1 John 1:7).³¹

Here light has decisively positive connotations — knowledge, purity, direction, salvation. Yet the poem also contains a thread of ecological foreboding. The common phrase ‘the writing on the wall,’ for instance, originates in the biblical book of Daniel, in which idolatrous Babylonians attending a feast witness a disembodied hand writing mysterious words that bring an ominous warning of the king’s demise.³² Simic himself identifies as a Serbian Orthodox (though admits ‘Tuesday I may be a believer. Wednesday a blasphemer. It always seemed to me that religious life, religious ideas are at the heart of our existence. You can’t avoid God.’)³³ Such biblical references entail a witnessing of a lifeworld within the lifeless, religiosity within the secular, and ecological danger within ‘cool’ and ‘quiet’ indifference. The poem thus interrogates the limits of knowledge both on secular and religious grounds, blurring the boundaries of the human and non-human (subjective and objective), the divine and the banal, and repositioning the human within a larger ecological whole. All this comes to comprise what Andrew Epstein (2016) calls a ‘sceptical realism,’ and what I term a poetics of *atten(s)ion*.

4.3 Sceptical Realism and Atten(s)ion

A sustained attention to the meaning potentials of the everyday often involves what Andrew Epstein has considered sceptical realism.³⁴ This is a realism that entails a penetrative focus on banal everyday objects that traditionally have been thought inappropriate as sources of poetry. Simultaneously, it is an attention that admits it cannot grasp the real; an attention that knows and reveals its own limits. As Epstein writes,

²⁸ Lakoff, G. and Johnson, M. *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 540.

²⁹ *The Holy Bible: New International Version, Containing the Old and the New Testament* (Grandville: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1978), 3491; 3163.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 5394.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 5492.

³² *Ibid.*, 4651.

³³ Quoted in McAbee, D. ‘Metaphysical Suspicions,’ 282.

³⁴ Epstein, A. *Attention Equals Life: The Pursuit of the Everyday in Contemporary Poetry and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 9

even as these [sceptical realist] writers insist on the importance of attending to and presenting the real, they are acutely aware that we have no access to an unmediated reality, that the “real” can never be disentangled from how it is constructed and imagined via our languages and forms of representation.³⁵

Indeed, this dialectic of capturing the uncapturable is precisely what Simic professes as his intention in his work, which he characterises as *anti-poetry*. ‘What interested me,’ he writes in ‘Notes on Poetry and Philosophy,’

was the discipline, the attention required, and the dialectics that went with it. You look and you don’t see. It’s so familiar that it is invisible [...] Plus, all genuine poetry in my view is anti-poetry.³⁶

‘Stone’ is just such an anti-poem, blending numerous conceptual spaces into what Hazel Smith calls a *hyperscape*, ‘a postmodern site characterised by difference: it breaks down unified concepts [...] remoulds them into new textual, subjective and political spaces.’³⁷ Here such ‘sites of difference’ constitute an inversion of the processes of reification, where the ‘unified concepts’ of human and non-human, subject and object, divine and banal, are blurred into a new textual space. The multiplicity of meaning potentials here include the human, but are largely ecomorphic — the stone is not an object under the subject’s gaze, but lies at the centre of the poem, while the subject is blurred on the periphery of meaning.

Like Heidegger’s phenomenological critiques in *Being and Time*, ‘Stone’ works to destabilise the subject/object dichotomy that it initially enacts. The meanings that it accords the stone include human meanings (religious, mystical and secular), but only to the extent they are intertwined within a larger ecology underwritten with a danger of collapse. If *unreification* means restoring the thingliness to the object — not, as Honneth would have it, restoring the human(e) to the thing — then the attention accorded in ‘Stone’ is decisively unreifying. It positions the object at the nexus of human and non-human meaning potentials; the objects’ significance is inherent (part of its thingliness) and, much as we may wish, we cannot become (totalise, subsume, reify) the stone. This is a poetry, then, that draws what I term *atten(s)ion*: an attention to objects in-the-world that pushes against (but cannot collapse) the tension of phenomenological apprehension of

³⁵ Ibid., 9.

³⁶ Simic, C. ‘Notes on Poetry and Philosophy,’ 217.

³⁷ Smith, H. *Hyperscapes in the Poetry of Frank O’Hara: Difference, Homosexuality, Topography* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 1.

world. Accordingly, Simic's poetry illuminates the irreconcilability of one-way (human centric) conceptions of reification, such as Honneth's, while simultaneously working to unreify the material world it examines.

Importantly, Christopher Breu (2015) has distinguished between two strains of materialism: on the one hand, the systematic materialism central to Marxist theory (exemplified by the reification discussed) and a new materialism — including work done by Bruno Latour, Jane Bennett and Stacy Alimo — in which 'the abstract or the universal is never invoked.'³⁸ As Breu notes,

if the material turn is going to mean more than just a new reification (however redemptive), it needs to put the two forms of materialism [...] (the concrete and the systemic) into dialogue. We need to think about nonhuman as well as human actors, but both need to be understood in terms of systems as well as what world-systems analysts call anti systemic movements, or the forms of global resistance that can help produce a different, more just, world economy and ecology.'³⁹

The anti-poetry of Simic is situated at this dialogue between old and new materialisms. It is a poetics that uses the everyday as a means to unreify an increasingly reified world. The dialectical materialism exemplified by 'Stone' simultaneously pushes apart and pulls together the human and the material world. On the one hand it accords (or returns) things their thingliness; their meaning potentials that lie outside the limits of human knowledge, while on the other it stresses the ecological interrelation of the human and material worlds.

Having seen how 'Stone' wrestles with its own limitations to know, to grasp and to make whole, I now turn to a work that explores the limits of perception and the indeterminacy of consciousness; the inextricability, that is, of perception and world.

4.4 The White Room (from *The Book of Gods and Devils*, 1990)

The obvious is difficult
To prove. Many prefer
The hidden. I did, too.
I listened to the trees.

³⁸ Breu, C. 'The New Reification, or Quotidian Materialism,' 198.

³⁹ Ibid., 198.

They had a secret
Which they were about to
Make known to me,
And then didn't.⁴⁰

'The obvious is difficult / To prove' recalls Simic's pronouncement of things that are so familiar that they are 'invisible.' Here, once again, he is concerned with interrogating the limits of meaning, the division between subjects and objects, their 'hidden' secrets. Throughout 'The White Room' the speaker performs the sceptical realism Epstein describes, reaching for the immaterial that lies beyond language — the secrets of trees, for instance — while acknowledging this is always out of reach. The work continues:

Summer came. Each tree
On my street had its own
Scheherazade. My nights
Were a part of their wild

Storytelling. We were
Entering dark houses,
More and more dark houses
Hushed and abandoned.

The speaker refers to Scheherazade, the narrator and protagonist of *Arabian Nights*, who was able to delay her execution for a thousand nights through telling stories to the king, ultimately avoiding execution to become queen. In 'The White Room,' trees become 'kingly figures', each with its own storyteller of this kind, while the nights of the speaker are merely part of their stories. This ironic reversal — of writing the trees' story such that the trees in fact write the narrator's story — is simultaneously a questioning of the stability of the lyric 'I' and ultimately the mimetic act itself. Much as language tries to grasp the real, language as representation is prey to the conditions in which it is formed. This can be understood in terms of Auerbach's conception of mimesis as representation. As he famously writes of biblical narratives in *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (2013):

Doctrine and the search for enlightenment are
inextricably connected with the physical side of the
narrative — the latter being more than simple "reality";
indeed they are in constant danger of losing their own
reality, as very soon happened when interpretation
reached such proportions that the real vanished.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Simic, C. *Sixty Poems* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2007), 17. For subsequent quotations, reference is omitted.

⁴¹ Auerbach, E. *Mimesis : The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* Trask. 50th Anniversary Edition. Trask, W.R., trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 51.

In 'The White Room' the real has not entirely 'vanished', but is nonetheless hidden, obscured and out of reach. The speaker's search for enlightenment is put in danger as the real becomes surreal, and the poem gradually becomes a microcosm of literature's search for ultimate truths; language's ability to pin down reality. It continues with the strikingly elusive lines:

There was someone with eyes closed
On the upper floors.
The thought of it, and the wonder,
Kept me sleepless.

The truth is bald and cold,
Said the woman
Who always wore white.
She didn't leave her room much.

Perhaps the most enigmatic feature of the poem is 'the woman / who always wore white.' Is she the one 'with eyes closed / On the upper floors'? Neither the speaker nor the reader is allowed to know, remaining 'sleepless' in dark 'wonder.' It does seem, however, that the woman represents some mystical knowledge — she knows 'the truth' to be 'bald and cold', though she is inaccessible; she 'didn't leave her room much.' There seems to be something angelic about the figure. Biblical angels are often described as wearing white, including those entombed with Jesus' body.⁴² The woman might represent, on this reading, a broken connection between the speaker and divine revelation. The speaker seeks knowledge, order and truth, but is ultimately aware of their own (and the poem's own) limitations. Henry Hart (2005) has noted this tendency to question the divine in Simic's work at length, writing that

[...] if Simic's quester searches the heavens like a modern astronomer [...] his ultimate goal is defined with the paradoxes of mysticism. He is supposed to hear the beat of a divine heart that is silent, to dismantle the silences of both a dead god and an empty heaven so that he can hear the orderly music (or "beat") of the sphere, and to use bodily metaphors to describe a communion with a cosmic source that is bodiless and beyond metaphors.⁴³

This attempt to 'dismantle the silences of both a dead god and an empty heaven' is evident in the reference to the one 'with eyes closed / On the upper floors.' Notably, the figure is above the speaker, inspiring sleeplessness and wonder, but not revelation. Similarly, the woman is angelic in her always wearing white and her access to truth... yet she lies out of reach. This is the

⁴² *The Holy Bible: New International Version*, 5,299.

⁴³ Hart, H. 'Charles Simic's Dark Nights of the Soul,' *The Kenyon Review* 27:3 (2005), pp. 124-157, 127.

paradox of mysticism to which Hart refers; the divine that is both present and absent is ‘the beat of a divine heart that is silent.’ As Simic himself contends, ‘It makes absolutely no difference whether gods and devils exist or not. The secret ambition of every true poem is to ask about them even as it acknowledges their absence.’⁴⁴

As in ‘Stone’, light here plays a central role. Darkness and the night represent the ‘hidden’, the ‘secret’, mystical qualities of those things that elude the speaker’s grasp. Instrumental reason, on the other hand, is represented as light — ‘the sun pointing’ on ‘one or two things’ which are ‘difficult in their obviousness’ — difficult precisely because they ‘make no noise’ (share no secrets) under observation that hides as much as it reveals:

The sun pointed to one or two
Things that had survived
The long night intact,
The simplest things,

Difficult in their obviousness.
They made no noise.
It was the kind of day
People describe as “perfect.”

‘Difficult in their obviousness’ echoes the opening lines (The obvious is difficult / To prove), once again tying the familiar to the invisible, the at-hand to the latent. In the final stanzas this culminates in an attempt, finally, to pin down meaning by invoking the divine explicitly:

Gods disguising themselves
As black hairpins? A hand-mirror?
A comb with a tooth missing?
No! That wasn’t it.

Just things as they are,
Unblinking, lying mute
In that bright light,
And the trees waiting for the night.

The speaker falters in their attempt — ‘No! That wasn’t it’ — conceding the things ‘as they are’ possess possibilities that always transcend the human gaze. ‘Unblinking’ and ‘lying mute’ convey latent possibilities for movement and speech (perhaps to ‘tell secrets’) while the trees wait for the night, at which time *things as they are* not exist, even if some do not ‘survive.’ In this way ‘The White Room’ accomplishes two things: on the one hand it dismantles the autonomy of the lyric self, placing it in a discursive, ecomorphised collective of narrative possibility. On the other hand,

⁴⁴ Quoted in McAbee, D. ‘Metaphysical Suspicions,’ 282.

it creates a distinctively secular animism, in which things possess meaning possibilities that lie beyond a gaze that simultaneously reveals and obscures. This is reminiscent of what Merleau-Ponty calls the ‘enigmatic world’ that can’t be pinned down by human attention. As he argues in *The World of Perception* (2004),

the way we relate to the things of the world is no longer as a pure intellect trying to master an object or space that stands before it. Rather, this relationship is an ambiguous one, between beings who are both embodied and limited and an enigmatic world of which we catch a glimpse (indeed which we haunt incessantly) but only ever from points of view that hide as much as they reveal, a world in which every object displays the human face it acquires in a human gaze.⁴⁵

In this way, ‘The White Room’ performs the difficulty of obviousness that it diagnoses, drawing attention to the limits of perception.

Whether the untelling trees, the angelic woman upstairs, or the things ‘unblinking’ and ‘mute,’ here truth is always just out of reach. Here, once again, the thingliness of the object is reimbued — the black hairpins, the hand-mirror, the comb, the trees — all transcend the human (the speaker’s and our own) grasp. If ‘The White Room’ is a self-reflexively flawed attempt to speak the unspeakable, it is simultaneously a way of sketching what Wade Bell calls ‘the spectre of Eden’; that is, what an unreified world looks like. Such a world exhibits what Simic calls ‘a baffling presence,’⁴⁶ ‘the strangeness that the world exists.’⁴⁷ Unreification here entails a reinscription of a world that is always at arm’s length, ‘hidden’ even in that ‘bright light’ of the human gaze that seeks to know, to instrumentalise, reify, oppress. This reality that Simic’s poetry seeks to grasp is unknowable in ‘Stone,’ and unseeable in ‘The White Room.’ Yet it is perhaps at its most unspeakable in the poem to which I now turn, ‘The Old World.’

4.5 The Old World (from *The Book of Gods and Devils*, 1990)

‘The Old World’ is a poem of bridging; of bridging the past with the present, the material with the immaterial, the transient with the eternal. The opening stanza establishes two interwoven lyric subjects: the lyric ‘I’ of the present who remembers, and the ‘I’ of the past — the ‘I’ who

⁴⁵ Merleau-Ponty, M. *The World of Perception*. Davis, O., trans. (London: Routledge, 2004), 69.

⁴⁶ Simic, C. ‘Notes on Poetry and Philosophy,’ 217.

⁴⁷ Huber, S. ‘Questions for Charles Simic (Interview),’ *Yale Literary Magazine* 23:2 (2011), pp.46-50, 48.

‘tasted’, ‘toasted’ and to whom the wine whispers in the final line. The first speaker in ‘The Old World’ is immediate and present:

I believe in the soul; so far
It hasn't made much difference.
I remember an afternoon in Sicily.
The ruins of some temple.
Columns fallen in the grass like naked lovers.⁴⁸

It is interesting to note how interconnected the lexical choices and imagery are throughout the second stanza:

The olives and goat cheese tasted delicious
And so did the wine
With which I toasted the coming night,
The darting swallows,
The Saracen wind and moon.

‘Tasted’ and ‘toasted’ are not only sonically, but also semantically linked — both to the flavour of the wine, cheese and olives, and visually with the darkening of the ‘coming night.’ Likewise, the ‘darting swallows’ tie together the wind (darting) and the tasting of food and wine (swallows), while the relative darkness and lightness of the olives/wine and cheese echo the relative darkness of the coming night and whiteness of the moon (linked also by the near-rhyme of ‘wine’ and ‘night’). These visual and verbal parallelisms are called into question in the third stanza:

It got darker. There was something
Long before there were words:
The evening meal of shepherds...
A fleeting whiteness among the trees...
Eternity eavesdropping on time.

Here the poem engages both directly and indirectly with language’s ability (or lack thereof), once again, to pin down reality, to ground experience. Like the imagery in the preceding stanza, here the off-rhymes (words/shepherds, evening/something, trees/eternity, fleeting/eavesdropping) work as an attempt to draw together disparate threads — to contain, to make whole. Yet the rhymes are imperfect; there is a gap between intention and execution, just as there is a gap between the immaterial and the material, language and reality, eternity and time. The enjambment in the first couplet, moreover, shimmers between two meanings: firstly between ‘there was something / long before there were words’ and, secondly, ‘there was something long / before there were words’,

⁴⁸ Simic, *Sixty Poems.*, 32. For subsequent quotations, reference is omitted.

where ‘something long’ is set against the transience of words, just as the (long) ‘evening meal of shepherds’ is set against the ‘fleeting whiteness among the trees’, and ‘eternity’ set against the relative transience of time. This speaks to the sceptical realism noted by Epstein (2016), but here the scepticism is directly tied to language as the medium of truth. As Simic remarks,

I’m one of those who believes that there is something that precedes language. The usual view is that there is some kind of equivalence between thought and language, that if you can’t verbalise it you can’t think it. I’ve always felt that there is a state that precedes verbalisation, a complexity of experience that consists of things not yet brought to consciousness, not yet existing as language, but as some sort of inner pressure. Any verbal act includes a selection, a conceptualisation, a narrowing down.⁴⁹

Here Simic points out the fragility of language. Since it is through language that we apprehend, understand and communicate the world, language itself becomes an instrument of reification, insofar as it seeks to totalise the thing through ‘selection, a conceptualisation, a narrowing down.’ Yet, the thingliness of the object is transcendental; it exists through time as a sort of ‘inner pressure,’ but moreover through a gathering of its constitutive elements, its qualities and meaning potentials, which exceed the predicative limits of language. Indeed, the etymology of the word — the Old Norse/Old English *ping* and Old High German *thing*: ‘assembly, gathering, duration’⁵⁰ — speaks to the temporal and transcendental potentialities of the real. ‘The Old World’ seems to reference this state, this ‘inner pressure’ that exists prior to and separate from the reifying tendency of language. The speaker longs for the poetic word to capture the ‘complexity of experience’, but ultimately concedes the rift between language and experience in the final lines:

The goddess going to bathe in the sea.
She must not be followed.
These rocks, these cypress trees,
May be her old lovers.
Oh to be one of them, the wine whispered to me.

The goddess that bathes in the sea — who may be Hera, Athena or Aphrodite, all of whom bathed to replenish their youth⁵¹ — is here a symbol of both youth and eternity, while the speaker cannot follow, trapped as they are on the side of time, transience, and the limitations of language. There is longing in ‘oh to be one of them’, as if the speaker desires to transcend their limitations and

⁴⁹ Quoted in Lysaker, J. ‘White Dawns, Black Noons, Twilit Days,’ 548.

⁵⁰ See Olsen, B. ‘Material Culture After Text: Re-Membering Things,’ 98.

⁵¹ Hard, R., and Rose, H.J. *The Routledge Handbook of Greek Mythology* (London: Routledge, 2004), 43.

reach that ‘something / long before there were words,’ that soul on which mere belief cannot make ‘much difference.’

This is not to say that the poem is grim. Rather, the work entails a wrestling with its own limits to transcend the reification of language. In this vein the poem is best read as echoing Adorno who, in *Aesthetic Theory* (1970), sees art as the antidote to reification, even as it must function through processes of reification in order to grasp at the ungraspable of what lies beneath language and subjective experience. As Thijs Lister explains in *The Spell of Capital* (2017):

It is precisely the enigmatic character that is part of every genuine aesthetic experience, which makes such an experience into a model, one might say, for a non-dominative relationship to the world of things that resists identity thinking. Adorno writes: ‘Art stands as plenipotentiary for the in-itself that does not yet exist.’ In other words, the aesthetic experience is exemplary for what a full experience might be in a society that is not dominated by functional relationships. Such a mode of relating to objects has an eye for the meaning inherent in the object itself, beyond the meaning the subject projects on it.⁵²

Insofar as ‘The Old World’ enacts and wrestles with these distances between the corporeal and spiritual, the human and the material world, language and experience, it becomes a vehicle for interrogating the meaning inherent in the material world, ‘beyond the meaning the subject projects on it.’ To the extent it succeeds, the aesthetic experience of the poem partially sketches the spectre of Eden, becoming, as Lister puts it, ‘exemplary for what a full experience might be in a society that is not dominated by functional relationships.’ Having seen how Simic interrogates the limits of knowledge, perception and language, there remains one final poem to examine in order to bring this all back to the issue of reification as outlined at the outset, in a work that interrogates the limits of meaning itself. Penned some thirteen years after ‘The White Room’ and ‘The Old World,’ the work to which we now turn is Simic’s ‘Description of a Lost Thing.’

4.6 Description of a Lost Thing (from *My Noiseless Entourage*, 2005)

Having once remarked that he found ‘it’ to be the most interesting word in the English language,⁵³ Simic’s ‘Description of a Lost Thing’ is something of a tribute to Being itself, the

⁵² Lister, T. *The Spell of Capital*, 63.

⁵³ Quoted in Scarry, S. ‘World of Objects: The Poetics of Charles Simic.’ Published Dissertation. The University of Montana (2004), 3.

mysteriousness of existence. Namelessness and noiselessness feature heavily here, as they do throughout Simic's work (indeed, 'Description of a Lost Thing' comes from his collection *My Noiseless Entourage* (2005)), betraying an affinity for absences as a kind of presence. As J. Heath Atchley (2003) writes,

Simic's line implies that metaphysics, under its own scrutiny, is grounded in a darkness, a fundamental unknowability that nonetheless exerts a presence.⁵⁴

Although the title of the poem is 'Description of a Lost Thing', the contents are not a series of predicates, but more so a description of what 'it' is *not*. The poem opens,

It never had a name,
Nor do I remember how I found it.
I carried it in my pocket
Like a lost button.
Except it wasn't a button.⁵⁵

Here 'it' is only present through its absence, defined by its negativity, through a host of negations: 'never'; 'nor'; 'lost'; 'except'; 'wasn't.' Despite the title, 'it' is both found ('I found it') and lost ('like a lost button'), sitting both inside and outside the poem. The second stanza seems to shift away from the lost object to a list of dark, nightly locations, where the last line has a confusing deictic shift:

Horror movies,
All-night cafeterias,
Dark barrooms
And poolhalls,
On rain-slicked streets.

What is it that is *on* the 'rain-slicked streets'? The syntax implies it is the movies, cafeterias, barrooms and poolhalls, which entails a surreal blending of interior and exterior. Perhaps 'it' is on the street, particularly if we focus on the line that follows: 'On rain-slicked streets. / It led a quiet unremarkable existence.' (Though the full stop, of course, problematises this reading). Or is it the speaker? (Just as they, at the end of the poem, get off on an empty platform with no town in sight). The parallelism between 'it never had a name', and the speaker exiting at a 'nameless station' suggests that 'it' is indeed the poem's final destination (as 'somebody' says), and so the speaker finds themselves, paradoxically, finding a lost place in which they now find themselves lost (repeating the paradox of the first stanza). This reading is almost plausible, of course, were it

⁵⁴ Atchley, J.H. 'Charles Simics Insomnia,' 55.

⁵⁵ Simic, C. *Sixty Poems*, 96. For subsequent quotations, reference is omitted.

not for the title — can a place be a thing? — and the line ‘I carried it in my pocket’ — unless we read this metaphorically. That we are not granted a sensible way of reading relations and predicates throws the logical structure of the poem into disarray. In a sense, the poem is a search for the unknown. When ‘somebody’ tells the speaker ‘this is it’, s/he gets off at an empty platform / With no town in sight.’ *It* ‘vanishes’, but it vanishes from a place already vacuous; nameless, with forgotten origins, quiet, unremarkable.

Again, Atchley has observed at length this tendency for signification in Simic’s work to be held out of reach, as a way of underwriting his works with a profound secularity that refuses determinate meanings. He writes:

it is not simply the case, though, that nothing stands behind Simic’s poetic images. Rather, it is the case that *nothing* stands behind Simic’s poetic images. That is to say, what I am calling nothing is metaphysically an emptiness; epistemologically, it is the disruption of the calculative tendencies of consciousness; psychologically, it is the relaxation of an ego that demands certainty or gratification.⁵⁶ (Original emphasis)

Recalling that reification is the process by which the non-human is imbued with the human — which is to say, the material world is totalised under the human gaze — the explicit refusal to grant meaning, to place signification in an ‘it’ that transcends the speaker and reader’s gaze, becomes an attempt to restore the transcendent thingliness of the physical world. It is a poetics, in other words, that writes itself on the periphery of its own limits, consciously failing at what the lyric subject has always strived for but cannot achieve. In underscoring the limits of reification, the work points to the spectre of Eden; the state at which humanity is situated within, rather than against, the ecological whole from which it arises. Throughout the poem reader and speaker become lost in their mutual search for the lost thing, such that object comes to define subject. Yet, where for other imagist poets meanings are drawn out from a presence, here meaning (or rather, meaninglessness *as* meaning) is called from a void. ‘Description of a Lost Thing’ can thus be seen as existential, but more accurately as meta-existential. Here existence precedes essence, but in reversing the subject object dialectic the poem interrogates the imperative for essence to be thrust on or over existence.

Situated (and decisively limited) embodiment is key to the poem’s meaning, to the speaker’s failing to retain a stable relation with the material world (exemplified by ‘it’). Again,

⁵⁶ Atchley, J.H. ‘Charles Simics Insomnia,’ 56.

here Merleau-Ponty might assist a reading of the work, who, following Heidegger, reintroduced physical embodiment as integral to our apprehension of world. As Bjørnar Olsen (2003) points out, however, even in foregrounding embodiment Merleau-Ponty remains somewhat trapped in an anthropocentrism that strips the object of its transcendence. As Olsen writes,

Merleau-Ponty talks about an oriented space in which the body is situated, but he does not seem very concerned with what orients it. The material inhabitants provide a context, but sit in silence, have no purpose or agency; much like the servants in the Victorian novels: there, but unaccounted for except as a useful part of the setting.⁵⁷

Of course, Merleau-Ponty was primarily concerned with perception, and as such it may be unfair to charge him with an anthropocentrism that was by his own account his starting point.

Nonetheless, Olsen's argument in following Merleau-Ponty's lead is for a re-emphasis on the material world; what he calls re-membering things. Olsen stresses that it is not only culture, intention, meaning that shapes the world, but the world that shapes culture, intention, meaning. To the extent that the material world is mystified in 'Description of a Lost Thing,' and objects possess possibilities that are impossible to pin down, Simic's project here is also this one of re-membering things, in so doing working against the grain of a reification that sees the world as a pin cushion for our injected meanings. The poem continues:

It led a quiet, unremarkable existence
Like a shadow in a dream,
An angel on a pin,
And then it vanished.
The years passed with their row

The question of how many angels can fit on the head of a pin questions the corporeality of the divine (since, if god and angels are immaterial, an infinite number may fit — or dance — on the head of a pin). Simultaneously, it is of course used to disparage theological arguments for being fruitless. That 'it' is like 'a shadow in a dream' and 'an angel on a pin' accordingly positions (or rather de-positions) the lost thing into a realm doubly unknown and unreal, twice removed from both the physical world (shadow in a dream) and spiritual world (angel on a pin). The similes are ironic, since they entail descriptions of the indescribable — a presence marked only by absence; an object marked only by the subjectivity that seeks it out. The poem then comes to a non-closure in the final lines, where we read:

⁵⁷ Olsen, B. 'Material Culture After Text: Re-Membering Things,' 97.

Of nameless stations,
 Till somebody told me this is it!
 And fool that I was,
 I got off on an empty platform
 With no town in sight.

Just as the speaker arrives at a nameless destination with no town in sight — the ‘thing’ still lost — so the reader arrives to a state of liminality, a circularity of trying to extract meaning from meaninglessness, the thing from *nothingness*. In drawing attention to its own limits, then, the poem becomes a mirror for our own meaning-making, illustrating that significance (and indeed signification) come from without rather than within. To the extent that this forces a gap between reader and poem, and so re-subjectifies the subject and re-objectifies the objective word, ‘Description of a Lost Thing’ pushes against (unreifies) but cannot collapse the tensions in what I have called a phenomenological apprehension of world. I have yet, however, to clarify precisely what this means.

4.7 Phenomenological Apprehension of World

By a phenomenological apprehension of world, I mean a view of the world consistent with those thinkers, such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, and more recent scholars in this vein, such as Hubert Dreyfus (1991)⁵⁸ and Iain Thomson (2011),⁵⁹ who have rejected the traditional ontological division between subjects and objects in favour of a more integrated approach that stresses the *interrelation* of subject and object. As Heidegger stresses, our mode of being (*Dasein*) not only depends upon but is *constituted* by those things in the world that we use for our purposive actions. As Heidegger puts it in *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (1927):

World is a determination of the Dasein’s being. This is expressed from the outset when we say that Dasein exists as being-in-the-world. The world belongs to the Dasein’s existential constitution.⁶⁰

In this respect, one of the core projects of phenomenologists has been a re-emphasis on *engagement* as our primary mode of being-in-the-world, and thus a drawing together of subject and object into a mutually defining whole wherein use of things (what Heidegger calls ‘equipment’) defines both us and equipment (as *ready-to-hand* or *present-at-hand*).⁶¹ A problem,

⁵⁸ See Dreyfus, H.L. *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).

⁵⁹ See Thomson, I.D. *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁶⁰ Heidegger, M. *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), 296-297.

⁶¹ See M. Heidegger. *Being and Time* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), 98.

however, here arises. Insofar as the phenomenological apprehension of world entails a drawing together of subject and object, it is (or can become) coextensive with a reification that defines the object purely on the subject's terms (and vice versa) — the thingliness of the object is subsumed under whatever use value (or exchange value) it may have for the human subject. Olsen's call to re-member things addresses precisely this concern, arguing that 'we have to relearn to ascribe action, goals and power to many more 'agents' than the human actor.'⁶²

As I hope to have shown, Simic's poetry works against this reifying tendency in a phenomenological apprehension of world. In paying attention to both human signification and that which eludes, escapes or transcends language — the thingliness of the thing — Simic's poetics forces a gap between subject and object where the poetic word necessarily fails to totalise, grasp or make whole. A gap, that is, but not a chasm. Simic's work cannot collapse the tension of phenomenology because, as we have seen, it is specifically ecocentric; it recognises the situatedness of humanity within a larger ecological whole, and as such cannot draw a strict subject/object duality. Simic's poetry thus, once more, works as a poetry of atten(s)ion; an attention to the everyday that works against the tension in a phenomenological apprehension of world. Where it most strongly succeeds it begins to unreify the world. We can visualise this shift in tension between subjects and objects, from phenomenology to Simic's poetry, as illustrated in Figure 1.

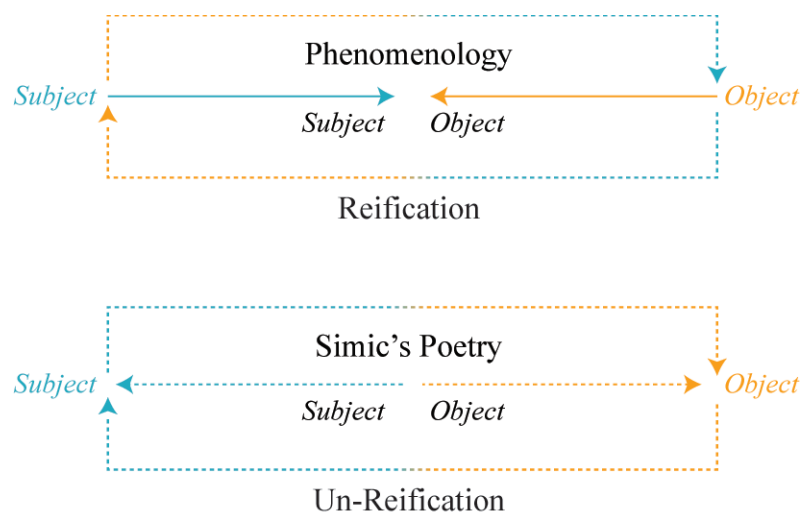


Figure 1. Unreification in Simic's poetry.

⁶² Olsen, "Material Culture after Text: Re-Membering Things.", 87.

The poetic word here, with all its aporias, gaps, indeterminacies and mystical qualities, forces a conceptual wedge between the poetic subject and the natural and physical worlds. It marks a cross-section where language reaches its own limits, more clearly expressed in Figure 2.

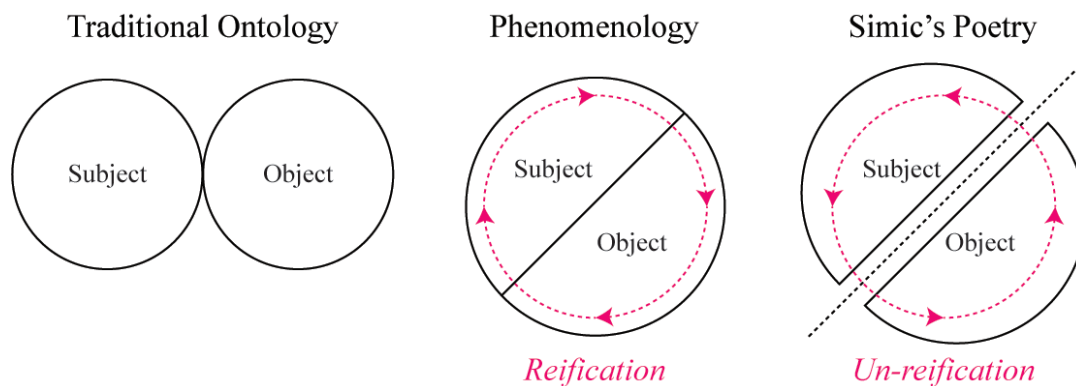


Figure 2. Pushing against the tension in phenomenological apprehension of world.

Simic's poetry, in other words, exists between a rock and a hard place: between a phenomenology that recognises the mutuality of subject and object (both in engagement and perception) and a reification that makes man the measure of all things; between a language that captures and communicates possible meaning and a language that is always inadequate, can never pin down the baffling presence of the world. It is a poetry that wrestles with its own limits, writing itself at the periphery of knowledge, perception, language and meaning, and employing visual images that destabilise the centrality of the human subject within a larger ecological whole. It reminds us that the human is not the measure of all things, and that if we are to work against reification we must, contra Honneth (2008), re-member things, seeing the physical world as having meaning beyond what we project upon it. By bringing critical theory to bear on Simic's poetry, then, we can see it as part of a decisively unreifying aesthetic approach, while illuminating how poetry can have not only literary and philosophical, but political import.

4.8 Conclusion

The concept of reification runs parallel with multiple familiar critiques of modernity: ontologically with Heidegger's critique of intentionality; politically with Debord's critiques in *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967);⁶³ and practically with Adorno's critique of mass culture. Like Simic's poetry, and as these theorists have rightly pointed out, we readers too exist in a hard place. In a hypermodernised, increasingly digital world, the processes of reification are

⁶³ Debord, G. *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1994).

ubiquitous, and evident from the grocery aisle (where the object takes the place of the human) to the world of online dating (where the human is reduced to a bundle of points and properties) to the increasing prevalence of artificial intelligence (where almost all aspects of our interactions and choices are now mediated by complex algorithms within global computer networks). For all the benefits such advancements bring, the concept of reification remains an important compass for recognising (if not critiquing) such social and technological trajectories. Moreover, those aesthetic endeavours, such as Simic's poetics, which work to underscore and at times transcend such tendencies, serve an increasingly important role if we are to imagine what an unreified world, if it is possible, may look like.

A Rock, and a Hard Place: Atten(s)ion in the Poetry of Charles Simic (Discussion)

I began the previous chapter by quoting Simic's claim that in his poetry, images think. While the discussion that followed elucidated in detail how Simic's poetry works to unreify an increasingly reified world, the related issue of thought — of how images might think — has largely remained a secondary concern. I now wish to introduce some further terminology that will help address this issue specifically, and in so doing begin to consolidate some of the themes that have begun to dovetail throughout the chapters thus far. These concepts include the foreground/background distinction, the idea of 'twofoldness', and what Adorno has diagnosed as the increasing abstraction of art. Through a brief consideration of these I argue here that Simic's work instantiates poetic thought as political tension, and that this thought is not only useful, but central to a movement toward what Wade Bell (2014) has called a spectre of Eden.¹

Foreground/Background

The distinction between foreground (or *figure*) and background (or *ground*), a central concept in Gestalt psychology,² has already been briefly raised in the first chapter, where I outlined Heidegger's view that in Van Gogh's *A Pair of Shoes* (1886) there is an irreconcilable tension between foreground and background. To recount briefly, the shoes in the painting are taken to draw out a background of meaning and engaged use. As we engage with the work and bring this background to the fore, however, we apprehend our own meaning-making engagement through the work, sending the foreground effectively into the background. This foreground/background distinction likewise helps to explain, at least as a starting point, poetic thought as it functions in Simic's work. To remain with Heidegger for a moment, the background for Heidegger functions like an atmosphere, present in its absence; the background is a network of unconscious forces that guide human engagement in a world of use. As Hubert Dreyfus (2012) explains:

Heidegger holds that the background *qua* background is a holistic atmosphere, an ambient light, or a world that we are *always already in*, and that must withdraw in order to enable us to deal with beings. To put it ontologically, 'beings – where ever and however we approach them – already stand in the light of being.'³

¹ Bell, W. 'A Phenomenological Take on the Problem of Reification,' *Moderna Språk* 108:2 (2014), pp. 1-16, 2.

² Dreyfus, H. 'The Mystery of the Background *qua* Background' in Radman, Z., ed., *Knowing Without Thinking: Mind, Action, Cognition and the Phenomenon of the Background* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

³ *Ibid.*, 5.

Though I have shown that beings need not necessarily withdraw into a background in order to engage with them authentically, the issue of background *qua* background nonetheless remains pertinent to both O'Hara and Simic's poetics. In O'Hara, it is precisely through engagement with the works that we encounter the very process by which we are always-already making sense of our worlds. In Simic, however, the foreground/background distinction helps illuminate the fact that meaning in a sense transcends *even this phenomenological apprehension of world*. This is so because even the background, at least as it pertains to art and engaged use, is anthropocentric, where the ecomorphism in Simic points to meanings that lie beyond subjective thought. As Dreyfus notes further:

For Heidegger [...] the background is our holistic nonconceptual coping skills, customs, and practices that light up the world and enable us to find our way around in it.⁴

It is worth recalling here Epstein's 'sceptical realism' that has become evident in Simic's poetry. This is a realism, once again, that entails a penetrative focus on banal everyday objects, while simultaneously an attention that admits it cannot grasp the real; an attention that knows and reveals its own limits. To the extent that such a sceptical realism reveals its own limits, and since the foreground/background distinction is inherently anthropocentric — the world of engaged use against a backdrop of background possibility — Simic's poetry can be seen to reveal (or at least, make present through its absence) that non-meaning which transcends meaning. Moreover, in so doing it is a poetics that wrestles with the twofold nature of *Dasein* itself as a dialectic between Being and non-being. In order to make this clearer, the idea of *twofoldness* will be helpful to explore here.

Twofoldness

'Twofoldness' comes up in a number of theorists, the most relevant for my purposes here being Richard Wollheim (1980),⁵ Jesse Prinz and Eric Mandelbaum (2015),⁶ John Gibson (2011)⁷ and, in earlier instances, Heidegger (1959).⁸ Wollheim has employed the term 'twofoldness' in

⁴ Ibid., 7.

⁵ Wollheim, R. *Art and Its Objects* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

⁶ Mandelbaum, E. and Prinz, J. 'Poetic Opacity: How to Paint Things with Words' in Gibson, J., ed., *The Philosophy of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁷ Gibson, J. 'The Question of Poetic Meaning', nonsite.org 4:2 (2011). Online. Accessed July 3, 2018. URL = <https://nonsite.org/article/the-question-of-poetic-meaning>

⁸ For a discussion of Heidegger's views on twofoldness see Pattison, G. *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to the Later Heidegger* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2013), 153-155.

relation to painting, as a way of referring to how viewers perceive a doubleness of both form and content. As Jesse Prinz and Eric Mandelbaum explain, for Wollheim ‘representational paintings afford a kind of double seeing: viewers see both what they represent and how they represent [...] paint and painted.’⁹ Adapting this view to poetry, Prinz and Mendelbaum argue for poetic opacity (the fact that poetry can, to put it crudely, ‘be a challenge to read’)¹⁰ as the distinguishing mark of the poetic. They write:

If poetic opacity distinguishes poems from other forms of writing, it may be a mark of the poetic [...] poetic opacity derives from words, and twofoldness derives from styles of painting.¹¹

For Prinz and Mendelbaum, then, twofoldness in poetry refers to the way in which ‘poets distract us intentionally with their words’; poetic opacity necessitates a double reading of both content and the additional meanings imbued through form. ‘Poetic opacity,’ they write ‘involves a process of finding meaning in the work. Thus we think reading poems may be a twofold process [...]’¹²

Similarly, John Gibson contends that poems are necessarily greater than the sum of their parts, and what he calls *twofoldness of content* entails a layering of both ‘the meaning of the lines’ and ‘the meaning of the poem itself’ (what he calls *work* meaning).¹³ Gibson writes:

[...] the double content of a poem is a doubleness of communicative content: the meaning of the lines that constitute the poem and the meaning of the poem itself. [...] This further meaning is what is often called *work* meaning, and it is a kind of meaning artworks, but few other things under the sun, bear. As a kind of work meaning, it is meaning that accrues to the poetic object itself, and it is almost always irreducible to any feature of its linguistic or semantic surface.¹⁴

Returning these complementary conceptions of twofoldness to the atten(s)ion I have argued for, a phenomenological twofoldness can be understood as the means by which images think in Simic’s work. As I have argued, in paying attention to both human signification and the thingliness of things, Simic’s poetics writes itself at its own limits: on the one hand it recognises the mutuality of subject and object (both in engagement and perception) while on the other it situates humanity

⁹ Mandelbaum, E and Prinz, J. ‘Poetic Opacity: How to Paint Things with Words,’ 75.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹² *Ibid.*, 78.

¹³ Gibson, J. ‘The Question of Poetic Meaning.’

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

within a larger ecological whole, rejecting a reification that makes man the measure of all things. Just as O'Hara employs the environment-at-hand to highlight the engagement of the poet (and, subsequently, the reader) in a world of use, Simic's images serve to re-member things, to restore a mystical quality to a world that cannot be totalised under the human gaze. To return to Atchley's poignant claim, '[...] *nothing* stands behind Simic's poetic images'; this nothingness an emptiness that means 'the relaxation of an ego that demands certainty or gratification.'¹⁵ In other words, while Simic's images do mean, they also point to the meanings that lie in the thingliness of the thing and so necessarily transcend human grasp. Twofoldness here, then, is not so much a twofoldness of content and form, nor of line-meaning and work meaning, but rather of meaning and *non*-meaning: images think because they serve as the symbolic interface between the reader and the limitations of thought.

It is interesting to note that the notion of twofoldness in large part originates in Aristotle, and Heidegger's later treatment of Aristotle, where not only language but Being itself entails a twofoldness of Being and non-being. As George Pattison (2013) explains:

Bearing in mind that Heidegger is not so much concerned with questions of perception but with the question of Being, we can see that even Being itself in its nominal/verbal twofoldness is not to be understood as a simple 'given', the ultimate object of categorial intuition, the foundation on which all other intuitions rest. For Being itself can only come to presence, can only be as being, on the basis of another twofoldness, namely, its relation to non-being, to what is not.¹⁶

For Heidegger, particularly in his later thought, Being itself is thus inherently antagonistic; it can only be 'unconcealed' (as we have seen, through an examination of beings) on the basis of a dialectic within Being itself. As Pattison writes, Being can 'stand out in unconcealment only on the basis of a rift or fissure in Being itself.'¹⁷ Just as meaning in Simic's poetics points to nothingness — the limits of meaning (which is to say, non-meaning) — so every instance of the unconcealment of Being for Heidegger points to what is not, to non-being. Walter A. Brogan examines this dialectical twofoldness at length in *Heidegger and Aristotle: The Twofoldness of*

¹⁵ Atchley, J.H. 'Charles Simics Insomnia: Presence, Emptiness, and the Secular Divine,' *Literature and Theology* 17:1 (2003), pp. 44-58, 56.

¹⁶ Pattison, G. *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to the Later Heidegger*, 155.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Being (2005), pointing out that Being is inherently a tension between coming into and going out of being; becoming and falling apart. Brogan writes that for Heidegger:

A progressively deepening understanding of the twofold, double character of the being of natural beings led to this final understanding of the twofoldness in its most radical sense, as contradictory relation, a saying from out of what is unable to be said, a being from out of not-being. That is, not just multiplicity in the sense that being has two parts, but an understanding of being as essentially divisive and agonistic. The folding of the manifold unfolds in both the sense of coming to be and in the sense of falling apart.¹⁸

These quotations help to elucidate Simic's ostensibly cryptic claim that writing poetry 'is always a rough translation from wordlessness into words.'¹⁹ Since all unconcealment entails what Brogan calls a 'saying from out of what is unable to be said,' a poetics such as Simic's that enacts a dialectic of meaning and non-meaning simultaneously enacts the twofold, contradictory nature of Being itself. In wording wordlessness Simic's poetics thus draws out not only the tensions inherent in a phenomenological apprehension of world, but of Being itself. It is *anti*-poetry not only because it is a poetry that underscores its own limitations, but because it represents a coming-into-being that simultaneously falls apart.

Abstraction

I have suggested that the increased saturation of society in virtual technologies, social media, automated and technologised consumer service, increasingly virtual workplaces and ongoing globalisation in the economic, social and academic fields has led (and continues to lead) to the reification of the modern citizen. Given this trend toward reification, Adorno has argued that it is no surprise that modern art has become increasingly abstract, as it seeks to capture the increasing abstractions of human experience. In this way Adorno argues that the abstraction of modern art is able not only to represent but to *critique* the very process of reification itself. As Adorno puts it in *Aesthetic Theory* (1970):

New art is as abstract as social relations have in truth become. In like manner, the concepts of the realistic and the symbolic are put out of service. Because

¹⁸ Brogan, W.A. *Heidegger and Aristotle: The Twofoldness of Being* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2012), 108.

¹⁹ Simic, C. 'Notes on Poetry and Philosophy,' *New Literary History* 21:1 (1989), pp. 215-221, 219.

the spell of external reality over its subjects and their reactions has become absolute, the artwork can only oppose this spell by assimilating itself to it.²⁰

It should be clear that this mimetic quality of modern art is precisely what we see in Simic's work examined within the preceding chapter. To take one example, in 'Description of a Lost Thing' both reader and speaker become lost in their mutual search for the lost 'it', such that object comes to define subject. As I have argued, where for other imagist poets meanings are drawn out from a presence, here meaning (or rather, meaninglessness *as* meaning) is called from a void. The work is thus abstract to the extent that meaning is held at arm's length, but mimetic to the extent that this process represents and critiques the process of reification itself. For Adorno, this means a calling for 'the language of things.' As he writes later in the same text:

The same process that traditionalists scorn as the loss of soul is what makes the artwork in its greatest achievements eloquent rather than merely the testimony of something psychological or human, as the contemporary prattle goes. Radicalised, what is called reification probes for the language of things. It narrows the distance to the idea of that nature that extirpates the primacy of human meaning. Emphatically modern art breaks out of the sphere of the portrayal of emotions and is transformed into the expression of what no significative language can achieve.²¹

The twofoldness of meaning and non-meaning (and Being and non-being) that has been examined is that which 'no significative language can achieve' — it is a decisively *unreifying* atten(s)ion that works through mimesis to point toward a spectre of Eden, toward what an unreified world may look like. To this end, Simic's poetics can be defended, once again against the claims of Peter Lamarque, as being valuable by virtue of its usefulness as a social critical tool. Indeed, this way of defending art is central to Adorno's approach. As Simon Jarvis notes, '[this] kind of defence of autonomous art as socially critical distinguishes Adorno's approach from any aesthetic appeal to art as inviolably or absolutely autotelic.'²² Insofar as Simic's hyper-modern poetics achieves (and increasingly so) 'the expression of what no significative language can achieve,' it should be valued for its socio-political usefulness; as anti-poetry that serves as another barometer to (if not another antidote for) increasingly pervasive social pathologies.

²⁰ Adorno, T.W. *Aesthetic Theory* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 90.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 148.

²² Jarvis, S. *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 123.

In the first chapter I have argued that O'Hara's poetics foregrounds the inherent meaning-making tendencies of poets and readers engaged in a world of use. To that extent, it is a poetics that foregrounds the nature of *Dasein* through the use of the environment-at-hand. Similarly, I have suggested that in Simic's poetry images think as the symbolic interface between the reader and the limitations of thought, as well as Being and non-being. In this respect, while O'Hara can be seen to enact the fundamental nature of being-in-the-world, Simic's elusive poetics outlines the peripheries of Being. Broadly speaking, these two approaches constitute a complementary poetics precisely because in the modern world the nature of being-in-the-world has begun to shift, and so an ongoing interrogation of both the core and crust of *Dasein* (through beings) is necessary to keep a finger on the pulse of our modes of existence within the world. As Wade Bell has argued:

As our sense of community and being-in-the-world is eroded by the capitalist mode of production, sentient beings and the social sphere begin to take on the objective, calculable properties of mere things. The complexity of human existence is forgotten and people are seen as social assets and/or liabilities, exploiters and exploited, producers and consumers, us and them.²³

To the extent that 'our sense of community and being-in-the-world is eroded by the capitalist mode of production', the tensions that have come to light in Simic's work can be seen as poetic thought as political tension; a dialectic of meaning and non-meaning, Being and non-being that attempts to point toward what an unreified world might look like. It is a poetics that uses the everyday as a means to unreify an increasingly reified world. The dialectical materialism exemplified by poems discussed in the previous chapter simultaneously pushes apart and pulls together the human and the material world: on the one hand they accord (or return) things their thingliness; their meaning potentials that lie outside the limits of human knowledge, while on the other hand stressing the ecological interrelation of the human and material worlds. There are significant practical implications that follow from the arguments here, which I will return to in closing. For now, this section has significantly expanded the possibilities for how we might see poetic thought as dialectics of meaning and non-meaning, Being and non-being. In so doing, it illuminates a further instance of the usefulness of poetic thought, particularly in a world that is increasingly digital, detached, reified.

²³ Bell, W. 'A Phenomenological Take on the Problem of Reification,' 5.

Chapter 5: The Detached Self

At the time of writing, this chapter is currently under review for publication in *Journal of Cognition and Culture*.

Bukowski claimed the majority of what he wrote was literally what had happened in his life [...] He even went so far as to put a figure on it: ninety-three per cent of his work was autobiography, he said, and the remaining seven per cent was 'improved upon'.¹

– Howard Sounes (2007)

Are we our autobiographies? Of course, the majority of us do not pick up a pen and scribe out our lives through over sixty published works, as Charles Bukowski did. But we all make sense of them through narrative, and roughly string together a story of who we are, how we came to be that person, where we're heading. For Daniel Dennett, such narratives are the locus of the self; a self which is an abstract 'centre of narrative gravity' that sits at the midpoint of the narratives our brain 'spins' about our lives.² Even for Dennett, whose contentious account of selfhood is perhaps the most narrative-centric (and often criticised for neglecting embodiment),³ the self is still entirely *attached*; that is, the self is only possible when it is engaged or invoked in the ongoing act of spinning narrative. Dennett's account, in line with the vast majority of theories on the self, has been what I think of as a *bottom-up* approach, focussing on how the self is temporally constructed (rather than *top-down*; that is, under what conditions the self is deconstructed, dismantled, destroyed). The general consensus in the bottom-up literature on the self seems to be that, whatever the self is, it is necessarily destroyed by bodily death.

There are, however, some notable exceptions. Drawing on earlier works in anthropology such as Alfred Gell (1998),⁴ as well as Andrew Strathern and Pamela J. Stewart (1998),⁵ Patrick Stokes (2011)⁶ and James Meese [et al.] (2015),⁷ for instance, have explored the relationship of selfhood with social media, questioning whether, or the extent to which, selfhood can 'live on'

¹ Sounes, H. *Charles Bukowski: Locked in the Arms of a Crazy Life* (New York: Grove Atlantic, 2007), 42.

² Dennett, D.C. *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 2017), 416.

³ For examples, see Menary, R. 'Embodied Narratives,' *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 15:6 (2008) pp. 63-84; Baker, L.R. 'Making Sense of Ourselves: Self-Narratives and Personal Identity,' *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 15:1 (2016), pp. 7-15; Brandon, P. 'Body and Self: An Entangled Narrative,' *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 15:1 (2016), pp. 67-83.

⁴ Gell, A. et al. *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

⁵ Strathern, A. and Stewart, P.J. 'Seeking Personhood: Anthropological Accounts and Local Concepts in Mount Hagen, Papua New Guinea,' *Oceania* 68:3 (1998), pp. 170-188.

⁶ Stokes, P. 'Ghosts in the Machine: Do the Dead Live on in Facebook?' *Philosophy & Technology* 25:3 (2012), pp. 363-379.

⁷ Meese, J. et al. 'Posthumous Personhood and the Affordances of Digital Media,' *Mortality* 20:4 (2015), pp. 408-420.

after bodily death through representation and engagement. Broadly speaking, the argument here is that selfhood is layered and *distributed*: ‘distributed in the milieu, beyond the body-boundary.’⁸ If the self exists as distributed beyond the body, these theorists contend, it may be possible for it to survive death in the form of social media accounts. Surprisingly, this top-down avenue of selfhood has been largely neglected within the philosophical debate, despite the fact it may have significant implications for both literary theory and our conception of the self.

Following Stokes and Meese, it is my intention here to begin to bridge the gap between bottom-up and top-down approaches to the self, between the philosophical literature and parallel arguments that have occurred within literary studies. Through the lens of the poetic self that emerges in the autobiographical poetry of Charles Bukowski, I wish to argue that the self is indeed distributed, and as such may survive death in the form of autobiography. To do so, I first sketch out the field of views on selfhood currently being contested, and pinpoint where the conception of selfhood I wish to endorse sits in relation to these views. Secondly, I move to a consideration and analysis of three ostensibly autobiographical poems by Charles Bukowski, arguing that Bukowski’s poetry creates a layered narrative self. Finally, I argue that selfhood is mediated by but can (and ultimately does) become *detached* from its source. I conclude that our views on the self need to be expanded in order to allow for the detached selves of autobiographical narrative and poetry.

5.1 Bottom-up Approaches to the Self

Various theorists, including Priscilla Brandon (2014),⁹ Richard Menary (2008)¹⁰ and Lynne Rudder Baker (2014)¹¹ have criticised Dennett’s view of selfhood as a narrative ‘centre of gravity’ and a ‘theorists’ fiction.’¹² Contrary to Dennett, these writers insist that both embodiment and a first-person ownership — a ‘mineness’ in Brandon’s terms¹³ — are both necessary for and prior to such a narrative self. Menary, for instance, refers to Dennett’s view as an ‘abstract narrative account,’ and criticises it for neglecting embodiment (‘the living body’) as a fundamental precursor to an established self. For Menary, the abstract narrative account is problematic since it entails ascribing mental states and sensations, such as pain, to a collection of narratives, rather than to the experiential self. As he writes,

⁸ Gell, A. et al. *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*, 104.

⁹ Brandon, P. ‘Body and Self: An Entangled Narrative.’

¹⁰ Menary, R. ‘Embodied Narratives.’

¹¹ Baker, L.R. ‘Making Sense of Ourselves.’

¹² Dennett, D.C. *Consciousness Explained*, 96.

¹³ Brandon, P. ‘Body and Self: An Entangled Narrative,’ 72.

abstract narrativists would need to deny that the self-ascriptions of sensations and mental states are ascriptions to the embodied self that is not narratively structured, and would need to endorse the claim that they are ascribed to the narratives themselves. So when I tell the story of how the cricket ball that hit me on the left fore-arm last Saturday ‘bloody well hurt!’ I am ascribing the pain in the forearm to a collection of narratives. This sounds wrong. *I feel pain [...] that is what the narrative is about, the narrative is about a subject who feels pain, and that subject who feels is me.*¹⁴

This leads Menary to the conclusion that ‘the self is, at least in part, a body.’¹⁵ I return to this in closing. More recently, however, Priscilla Brandon (2014) has pushed the point a step further, arguing that the relationship between the body and the narrative self is ‘entangled.’ As evidence, Brandon points to common instances in therapy where one changes their ‘self-understanding’ such that physical changes result from a change in narrative. ‘Several therapies,’ she points out,

are based on the assumption that changing one’s self-understanding will trigger change in one’s experience and create space to change one’s actions. In this process, the narrative is clearly the instigator rather than the result or the reporter of the change.¹⁶

For Brandon, then, the relationship between narrative and body is ‘interactive rather than unidirectional: not only does our body shape our narrative self, but our narrative self also shapes our body.’¹⁷ If the self is intimately and inextricably connected with the body, as Menary and Brandon suggest, the obvious question here arises — at which point during development does the self begin to emerge?

Following this line of thought, Lynne Rudder Baker (2016) has made an important distinction between persons and selves, and has claimed that the formation of *self* presupposes the existence of a robust first-person perspective; i.e. a *person*. She writes that

when a fetal human organism can support a rudimentary first-person perspective, a new entity—a person—comes into existence, and the person has a first-person perspective essentially.¹⁸

¹⁴ Menary, R. ‘Embodied Narratives,’ 79.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Brandon, P. ‘Body and Self: An Entangled Narrative,’ 77.

¹⁷ Ibid., 67.

¹⁸ Baker, L.R. ‘Making Sense of Ourselves,’ 13.

For Baker, personhood means this capacity for a first-person perspective, which becomes ‘robust’ when one develops the capacity ‘to conceive of oneself as oneself in the first-person.’¹⁹ As Baker admits, her claim that ‘persons are distinguished by first-person capacities’ only addresses how persons are distinct from non-persons; it says little of how persons are distinguished from one another. Accordingly, Baker writes that

my view of personal identity—which gives no hint about the qualitative differences among people—might usefully be supplemented by an appeal to self-narratives.²⁰

Nonetheless, Baker’s position is important to keep in mind as the first of several more scalar approaches to selfhood.

In another nuanced approach, Miriam Kyselo (2014)²¹ conceives of selfhood as an ‘achievement’ that is accomplished through our social interactions between two opposing poles: *participation* and *distinction*. For Kyselo, participation entails engagement within a social world of habits and behaviours, in which the individual acts as part of the crowd (she makes reference here to being in love, dancing the tango, and being at a concert).²² Distinction, on the other hand, refers to those processes by which one ‘stands out’ against the social collective. Importantly, this conception of selfhood is one of degrees: the self is achieved through ongoing, dynamic processes of collectivisation and individuation that variously embrace or negate the self. Accordingly, Kyselo makes the case that this model of selfhood helps explain ‘disorders of the self’ (such as autism and schizophrenia), as well as how one can lose oneself through isolation or complete social immersion, by drifting too far to either participation or distinction. She argues that

without distinction the individual would risk becoming heteronomously determined and forced to rely on the next best or only a limited set of social interactions. But without participation and its act of openness toward others, the individual eschews structural renewal, thus risking isolation and rigidity.²³

Kyselo thus sees sociality and individuation as opposing poles, while the body is the ‘means and mediator’ of the self. In a recent article, Joe Higgins (2018) has made fair criticisms of this view, arguing that ‘extreme participation’ or ‘extreme distinction’ need not jeopardise the self, since the

¹⁹ Ibid., 13.

²⁰ Ibid., 14.

²¹ Kyselo, M. 'The Body Social: An Enactive Approach to the Self,' *Frontiers in Psychology* 5:1 (2014), pp. 1-16.

²² Ibid., 10.

²³ Ibid., 9.

‘mineness’ (to borrow Brandon’s term) would presumably remain despite any social disorder. He suggests that

a subject of ‘extreme participation’ does not seem to be truly excised of their self-owned subjectivity. As long as bodily autonomy and phenomenal consciousness remain, it would seem that there are always aspects of experience that are inherently *for the subject*.²⁴

Accordingly, Higgins draws Kyselo’s opposing poles together into what he calls the ‘biosocial self’: ‘a mode of being in which the constitutive biological bodily and social processes (i.e. ‘biosocial processes’) of selfhood are nondecoupleable.’²⁵ For Higgins, then, participation and distinction are part of the same experiential space, and selfhood means ‘being a bodily-social modulator of the biosocial experiential space.’²⁶

Finally, Allan Køster (2017) has argued most explicitly for narrative selfhood as existing as a matter of degree — as scalar — rather than simply as present or absent. Drawing on discussions within contemporary narratology, Køster suggests that we

refrain from the notion that narrative is something the self *is* and to rather see embodied selfhood as a more encompassing phenomenon and embodied experiences as something that *possesses narrativity* to varying degrees.²⁷

This leads Køster to argue that ‘narrativity does not differ greatly from any other attribute. This sofa may show the quality of blueness but that does not make the sofa as such “a blue.”²⁸ Also drawing on psychotherapeutic practices, Køster describes an individual whose response to a recent breakup was ‘alien’ and ‘dislodged’, claiming ‘it was a narratable experience that had not yet achieved narrative integration.’ He suggests that in such cases self-narratives can be written ‘post-hoc’ in therapy, such that individuals are able to bring ‘narrative order’ to their experience and so ‘re-establish a narrative sense of self.’²⁹

²⁴ Higgins, J. ‘Biosocial Selfhood: Overcoming the ‘Body-Social Problem’ Within the Individuation of the Human Self,’ *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 17:3 (2018), pp. 433-454, 442.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 446.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 452.

²⁷ Køster, A. ‘Narrative and Embodiment — a Scalar Approach,’ *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 16: 5 (2017), pp. 893-908, 895.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 899.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 903.

5.2 Mortality

With the exception of Dennett, the consensus in the literature outlined thus far seems to be that, whatever the self is, it is necessarily eviscerated upon bodily death. Certainly, for all conceptions of selfhood that foreground embodiment, such as Brandon, Menary and Baker, the self cannot transcend death, since the ‘mineness’ of first-person experience is taken to be a necessary condition for selfhood. Similarly, for Køster, although narrative admits of degrees, such narratives are intimately connected to embodiment, and as such ‘selfhood must be understood as, first and foremost, embodied subjectivity.’³⁰ Even under enactivist accounts, such as Kyselo’s, it would seem the self is necessarily eviscerated after death, since social autonomy is maintained through processes of participation and distinction — and this social autonomy can only be preserved through the mediation of the body.

Somewhat surprisingly, Dennett is one of a handful of scholars that have argued that the self can, at least theoretically, survive bodily death. As he argues in a controversial passage of *Consciousness Explained* (1991):

If what you are is that organization of information that has structured your body's control system (or, to put it in its more usual provocative form, if what you are is the program that runs on your brain's computer), then you could in principle survive the death of your body as intact as a program can survive the destruction of the computer on which it was created and first run.³¹

It seems curious that Dennett makes this claim. If the self is greater than the sum of its (narrative) parts; if it is the ‘centre of gravity’ that lies at the nexus of self-narratives, presumably that elusive abstraction disappears along with the consciousness that allows it. If, on the other hand, that abstraction can be reformed in a new consciousness — artificial intelligence, for instance — it is hard to see how the abstraction itself could be transferred. Put another way, if the narratives of *person x* are able to be moved to *computer y*, does the self constituted by such narratives *copy* or *transfer* in the process? If it arises spontaneously from the constituent parts (if it copies), we run into a duplication problem.³² If it disappears from *person x* and appears in *computer y* (if it transfers), it seems entirely inconsistent to say that selfhood is an abstraction, since it is necessarily tied to (and thus a part of) the narratives that constitute it. One way to solve

³⁰ Ibid., 895.

³¹ Dennett, D.C. *Consciousness Explained*, 430.

³² For a consideration of this problem, see Baker, L.R. 'Making Sense of Ourselves,' 12.

this is to appeal to the first-person perspectives already explored. Another, which I prefer, is found in what I think of as ‘top-down’ approaches to the self.

5.3 Top-down Approaches to the Self

Top-down approaches to the self are those ‘post-death’ accounts, which focus less on how a self emerges through development, but rather under what conditions selfhood is dismantled. In the provocatively titled article, ‘Ghosts in the Machine: Do the Dead Live on in Facebook?’ (2011), Patrick Stokes (similarly to Baker) has drawn a sharp distinction between persons and selves, between ‘an entity with various forms of physical, psychological, organic, social and historical identity and persistence conditions’ (the person) and ‘the locus of self-reference built into self-experience’ (the self).³³ Accordingly, for Stokes, there is an important distinction to be made between our first-personal extinction and our third-personal survival, which he argues is possible to some degree in online social media platforms.

James Meese [et al.] (2015) has followed a similar line of reasoning. Drawing on Alfred Gell (1998; a work to which I return), Meese considers recent technological advancements in ventures that promise social media engagement that continues posthumously — facebook posts, tweets, pre-recorded birthday messages and so forth. Meese suggests that this kind of social media engagement is intimately linked to a person’s agency, and thus that a continuation of such engagement constitutes a continuation of ‘distributed personhood’:

This narration of a world is a kind of action that ‘makes it so.’ In this ‘pragmatic’ view of textual narrative, what appears on social media is not a simulacra or a metaphor for embodied relations, it is the locus of agency and being in the (online) world [...] we suggest that these technologies also function as a form of ‘distributed personhood.’³⁴

One problem that arises in both Stokes’ and Meese’s account is that, in delineating ‘selfhood’ and ‘personhood,’ it seems they have merely labelled the first-person ‘mineness’ of experience under a different name (selfhood) and in so doing have turned the matter of selfhood once again into a binary that one either has or lacks. As Stokes writes, ‘when it comes to *self* rather than *person*, the question ‘Will *that* be *me*?’ incorrigibly presents itself as all-or-nothing.’³⁵ Yet, if the self is

³³ Stokes, P. ‘Ghosts in the Machine: Do the Dead Live on in Facebook?’ *Philosophy & Technology* 25:3 (2012), pp. 363-379, 373.

³⁴ Meese, J. et al. ‘Posthumous Personhood and the Affordances of Digital Media,’ 416.

³⁵ Stokes, P. ‘Ghosts in the Machine: Do the Dead Live on in Facebook?’ 376.

the first-person perspective that contains all the ‘mineness’ of embodiment, as both Stokes and Meese suggest, it seems inconsistent then for Meese to label our online narratives ‘the locus of agency and being.’³⁶ Indeed, the appeal to personhood as ‘distributed’ under this self/person binary comes to mean nothing more than one’s personality manifests in various material, linguistic, analogue and digital forms.

If the person/self distinction is warranted, as I believe it is, what we should be distinguishing between is not personhood and the self but personhood and an embodied first-person perspective. Where I differ from Stokes and Meese, moreover, is that I suggest that embodiment is *also* scalar, and the self sits at this intersection of personhood and embodiment. On this view, the self *develops* along with the body, and as one becomes a more complex person (through ageing, forming relationships, developing interests, setting goals and so forth). Ultimately, this self then also degenerates to some degree toward bodily death, at which point the self remains as personhood (and in the form of social media, for instance). We can visualise these two planes as intersecting as follows:

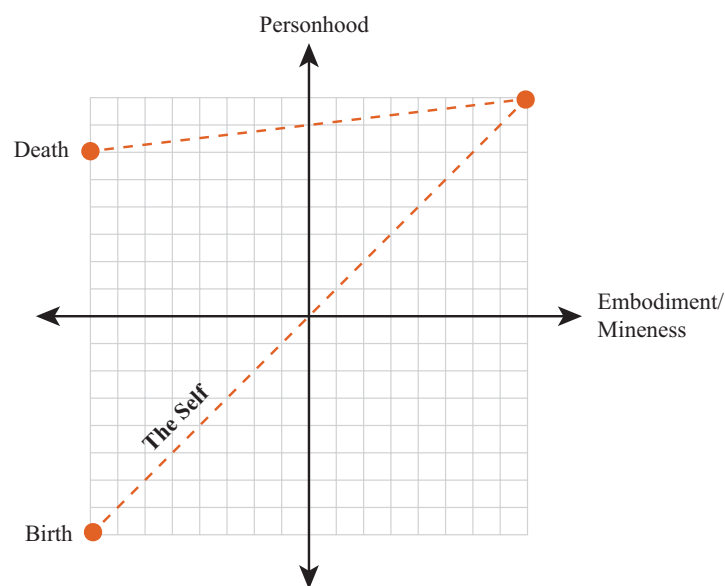


Figure 1: The Self as Interaction Between Personhood and Embodiment

At one’s bodily death, I wish to suggest, the self does not disappear, but is merely ‘detached’ from the body (as it is during sleep, during a coma, and so forth). Similarly, to the extent ‘personhood’ is comprised of actions, as well as memories, intentions, emotions and so forth (all manifestations of one’s personality), a great deal of one’s personhood may be lost in bodily death (as it is during times of mental and physical illness), without eviscerating the self.

³⁶ Meese, J. et al. 'Posthumous Personhood and the Affordances of Digital Media,' 416.

This conception of the self sees embodiment and personhood not as divorced but rather as intimately interconnected. It explains why my ‘mineness’ is different from the reader’s (being tied as it is to my personhood as well as my embodiment), while importantly suggesting that the self is as ontologically real as joy, as a plan, as a toothache; it exists through time, has first- and third-person implications, comes into and goes out of existence, *feels* a certain but also *looks* a certain way. Just as a toothache exists (as anyone experiencing one will attest) as a confluence of physical and phenomenal forces, so the self exists at the intersection of embodiment and phenomenology.

This is not to say the self is an abstraction, as Dennett supposes, but rather to say that its existence and continuation is mediated and constituted by real and abstract planes, of which both are necessary for its generation. Once a self exists, however, I will argue that neither the evisceration of its personhood nor the death of its body (its mineness) are sufficient for evaporating that self (as to argue otherwise seems to mean reducing the self to either personhood or embodiment). What we need, I suggest, is to see the self as this interaction between personhood and embodiment. It is thus only when one is both physically and personally dead (all vestiges of their existence permanently erased) that we should say that the self is no longer detached, but ontologically unreal.

Having spent some time outlining the most salient arguments in the field of selfhood and presenting briefly my own approach, I now wish to turn to the work of Charles Bukowski in order to make this all a bit clearer. Bukowski makes a particularly interesting case study for several reasons. Firstly, his poetry is distinctively autobiographical in nature. Secondly, there seems to be, at least at times, an evident disconnect between the speaker of the poems at face value and the poet that lies beneath.³⁷ Lastly, throughout his life Bukowski seemed intent on defining himself as a writer, and (despite occasional comments to the contrary)³⁸ considered writing a defining aspect of what made him who he was (or is).³⁹ Consequently, an interrogation of the self that may come together in his work is also an interrogation of that work’s success on his own terms.

What I wish to argue for is truth in a cliché: that writers, in part, survive through their written works, not in a metaphorical sense, but in a real way that has real implications in ethics, metaphysics and literary theory. To do so, I present three of Bukowski’s ostensibly autobiographical poems and

³⁷ As Howard Sounes writes, ‘a close examination of the facts of Bukowski’s life leads one to question whether [...] he didn’t ‘improve upon’ a great deal more of his life story than he said.’ See Sounes, H. *Charles Bukowski: Locked in the Arms of a Crazy Life*.

³⁸ For instance, ‘it wasn’t so much that I was TRYING to be a writer, it was more like doing something that felt good to do’ (1985). See Bukowski, C. and DeBritto, A. *On Writing* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2015), 255.

³⁹ ‘I lick my god damn soul out with my typewriter tongue’ (1972). *Ibid.*, 192.

attempt to excavate a self from the language (what Adorno calls the ‘language character’ of the work),⁴⁰ alongside important points raised by several of Bukowski’s most well-known biographies. I then return to the outlined theories on selfhood, as well as my own, in order to examine whether the self glimpsed in Bukowski’s work is a fiction of my own creation, a fragment of a now-selfless personhood, a fragment of Bukowski’s personhood, or a fragment of Bukowski *himself*.

5.4 Bukowski’s Poetry of the Self

5.4.1 *My Telephone*

One of at least five poems Bukowski wrote centring around the telephone, ‘My Telephone’ (originally ‘Telephone’, 1983) is a characteristically sardonic work that interrogates Bukowski’s reputation as a reclusive writer and misanthrope. By the early 1980s Bukowski had attained notoriety, which often became the subject of his poetry and novels. Gundolf Freyermuth even writes of him having ‘his own legend, the Bukowski-Myth.’⁴¹ The Bukowski-myth is one of the mysterious poet, alcohol-fuelled, womanising, gambling, the dark writer of the streets, the bars, the racetrack. This is a myth Bukowski embraced, often exacerbating such characteristics in his first-person and quasi-first person personas (such as in the semi-autobiographical character of Henry Chinaski).⁴² As Andrew J. Madigan puts it, ‘Bukowski’s lives of rancorous desperation often condone — perhaps glorify — drug abuse, alcoholism, misanthropy, and anti-materialism [...]’⁴³ In ‘My Telephone,’ the phone becomes the symbolic interface between this literary shut-in and the outside world. The poem opens:

the telephone has not been kind of late,
of late there have been more and more calls
from people who want to come over and talk
from people who are depressed
from people who are lonely
from people who just don’t know what to do
with their time;
I’m no snob, I try to help, try to suggest something that
might be of assistance
but there have been more calls
more and more calls⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Jarvis, S. *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 102.

⁴¹ Quoted in Kane, T.H. ‘The Deaths of the Authors: Literary Celebrity and Automortography in Acker, Barthelme, Bukowski, and Carver’s Last Acts,’ *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory* 15:4 (2004), pp. 409-443, 414.

⁴² See Miles, B. *Charles Bukowski* (London: Ebury Publishing, 2009), 278.

⁴³ Madigan, A.J. ‘What Fame Is: Bukowski’s Exploration of Self,’ *Journal of American Studies* 30:3 (1996), pp. 447-461, 449.

⁴⁴ Bukowski, C. *The Pleasures of the Damned: Selected Poems 1951-1993* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2012), 81. For subsequent quotations, reference is omitted.

The first eleven lines contain eleven instances of repetition, not counting the various instance of slant rhyme (more/calls/talk, kind/time/try/might), syntactically enacting the repetitive monotony of the incoming calls. The interjection of ‘I’m no snob, I try to help’ serves to parody Bukowski’s own writer-myth, assuming the reader’s response, denying it, then continuing with a complaint that tacitly implies the opposite: ‘but there have been more calls / more and more calls.’ The hyperbolised insistence of endless calls is not without truth. By this stage of Bukowski’s career, he was becoming overrun with fans. Despite this, however, he did not remove his number from public listings. As biographer Barry Miles describes,

Since Hank was still listed in the phonebook, he was plagued by admirers and poets; the admirers were the worst, giving him no time to write [...] No matter how rude or vile he was to them, they laughed, insults washed right over them because this was what they came for and they hung on every word. Hank had become a cult figure.⁴⁵

The figure in ‘My Telephone’ thus lies at the intersection of the real Bukowski (insofar as the poem details his lived experience) and the Bukowski-myth that he perpetuated (by hyperbolising the shut-in persona and downplaying the actual inconveniences to his work). To avoid confusion, I will refer to this created persona as Bukowski* and the author simply as Bukowski, returning to these terms after considering each of the poems. As ‘My Telephone’ continues, the phone interruptions are not presented as impediments to Bukowski*’s work, but as distractions from quiet stasis:

and what the callers don’t realise is that I too have
problems
and even when I don’t
it’s
necessary for me
sometimes
just to be alone and quiet and
doing nothing.
so the other day
after many days of listening to depressed and lonely people
wanting me to assuage their grief,
I was lying there
enjoying looking at the ceiling
when the phone rang
and I picked it up and said,
“listen, what ever your problem is or whatever it is you want,
I can’t help you.”
after a moment of silence
whoever it was hung up
and I felt like a man who had escaped.

⁴⁵ Miles, B. *Charles Bukowski*, 270.

The sharp enjambments that position ‘problems’, ‘it’s’ and ‘sometimes’ on individual lines clearly stagger the metrical patterning (and in the case of ‘it’s’, shift an unweighted to a weighted syllable), forcing brief caesuras that reinforce the deliberative, stoic tone of Bukowski’s complaints. Yet the image is self-deprecating; rather than presenting the real image of a Bukowski whose writing is interrupted, Bukowski* is presented as ‘doing nothing’ and ‘enjoying looking at the ceiling.’ Isolation becomes a refuge that is foregrounded in metaphorical distance: the use of ‘escaped’ implies physical distance symbolic of a need to partition the life of the writer from the outside world. This distance, however, collapses in the final lines, where wit illuminates acute self-awareness:

I napped then, perhaps an hour, when the phone rang
again and I picked it up:
“whatever your problem is
I can’t help you!”

“is this Mr. Chinaski?”

“yes.”

“this is Helen at your dentist’s
office to remind you
that you have an appointment at
3:30 tomorrow
afternoon.”

I told her I’d be
there for her.

It is interesting that the caller asks for ‘Mr Chinaski’; a reference to Bukowski’s literary alter ego, and the protagonist of a number of his novels and short stories. The poem leaves open two possibilities: one, that Bukowski* has himself listed with his dentist under his alter ego (and this reading may fit with the sardonically comical tone of the rest of the poem) or, two, the narrator of the poem is Mr Chinaski, rather than Bukowski*. This indeterminacy further removes the poem’s speaker from the reader’s gaze, creating the distance that is a necessary precursor for artistic creation. As Miles writes of the creation of Henry Chinaski:

Bukowski creates a distance between himself and the narrator by naming the protagonist Henry Chinaski, giving himself a margin of freedom where his imagination can run wild and real events can be distorted and changed for literary or personal reasons. Bukowski: ‘Bukowski would be too holy, anyway. You know, “I did this.” Especially if you do something good or great or seemingly great, and your own name is there. It makes it

too holy. Now if Chinaski does it, maybe I didn't do it,
see, that could be fiction.'⁴⁶

This 'margin of freedom' — what Doren Robbins describes as a kind of 'reckless liberty' in Bukowski⁴⁷ — is precisely the distance 'My Telephone' interrogates and enacts, using the telephone as a symbol of social relations Bukowski often avoided in order to write. The tragic irony of the poem is that, despite the calls supposedly coming from 'depressed and lonely' people while Bukowski* was ostensibly enjoying his time alone, Miles writes of a time earlier in Bukowski's life when he locked the telephone away during bouts of his own illness and depression:

Sometimes, when his four-day weekend finally
came round, he would pull down the shades, stuff
the doorbell with rags, put the telephone in the
refrigerator (when it was not blocked with ice) and
go to bed for three or four days, depressed,
exhausted, almost at the end of his tether.⁴⁸

The poem thus purchases the brooding writer persona through the inversion of emotional attribution, exteriorising emotional turmoil and interiorising the solace of (emotional) 'silence.' The final, punning lines of the poem — 'I told her I'd be / there for her' — seem to offer the reading that Bukowski* will only erase social distance out of self-interest. In light of the inversions above, however, the poem can be re-read as a repressed desire for connection, and the final lines a redemptive movement from isolation to sociality, from self-interest to compassion.

Taking stock, we have already in 'My Telephone' a rather complicated writer persona. This autobiographical self — Bukowski* — presents himself as a jaded misanthrope, content with isolation, frustrated with interruptions of the sad and the lonely. Yet, looking further into the context and content of the work we begin to form a sense of a writer himself suffering, and self-banishment as a guise for unhappiness or depression. As Andrew J. Madigan points out, '[Bukowski's] gritty writings seemed to speak the small truths of the poor, lonely, wretched, and angry.'⁴⁹ For Giovanni Di Stefano, this poetics of distance is central to the creation of Bukowski's identity. He writes:

In a nutshell, we could say that Bukowski intends to
establish his identity by showing a resistance taken to its
limits, letting him barely see a legitimate "way out,"
placing himself outside (and in opposition with) the

⁴⁶ Ibid., 278.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Kane, T.H. 'The Deaths of the Authors,' 415.

⁴⁸ Miles, B. *Charles Bukowski*, 252.

⁴⁹ Madigan, A.J. 'What Fame Is: Bukowski's Exploration of Self,' 449.

mental acts of intentionality belonging to a sociocultural context characterised by consumption and exploitation.⁵⁰

This ‘resistance taken to its limits’ is clearly evident in ‘My Telephone,’ yet here through humour and an acute self-awareness that resistance begins to fade, and perhaps betray a desire for connection. Certainly, Bukowski* is quite deliberately elusive, but the voice evident in ‘My Telephone’ betrays a self that isn’t as superficial, nor as misanthropic as it claims to be.

5.4.2 *Eulogy to a Hell of a Dame*

‘Misanthropy. Despair. Women with big, swaying bottoms and very high heels. A touch of misogyny. Barflies, bums, floozies...’⁵¹ This is the way one critic described Bukowski’s work. Aside from misanthropy, misogyny is a common charge laid against both Bukowski and his creative works. Not unfounded, Bukowski’s interviews and literature are peppered liberally with derogatory remarks about women, while Bukowski himself was, at least in one interview, verbally and physically abusive with his then-wife Linda King.⁵² In an article for *Vice* (2014), Danny McDonald recalls Linda denying the attribution:

He has been labeled a misogynist. There are instances where Henry Chinaski, the protagonist in several of his books and a sort of literary surrogate for Bukowski, rapes women with no repercussions. But when you bring up the misogyny tag with his defenders, things get weird. Linda rejects the idea that Bukowski was a misogynist, moments after recalling the time he hit her in the face, giving her a black eye.⁵³

Clearly both Bukowski and his characters acted abhorrently toward the women in their lives. Despite this, however, the poetry is nonetheless filled with passionate dedications and mournful eulogies that suggest much as Bukowski failed, he did possess extreme affection for the numerous girlfriends and wives he partnered with throughout his life. One such example, written in 1983, is Bukowski’s eulogy to his first serious girlfriend, Jane Cooney Baker, titled ‘Eulogy to a Hell of a Dame.’ It begins:

⁵⁰ Di Stefano, G. ‘Meaningfulness and Meaninglessness of Work in Charles Bukowski,’ *World Futures* 73:4 (2017), pp. 271-284, 280.

⁵¹ Quoted in Madigan, A.J. ‘What Fame Is: Bukowski’s Exploration of Self,’ 447.

⁵² See Dullahan, J. (Director), *Bukowski: Born Into This* (Magnolia Pictures: 2003). Online. Accessed August 14, 2018. URL = <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h32g3g7r4Q8>. It is perhaps worth noting that Linda claims this is the only time Bukowski physically attacked her. See Miles, B. *Charles Bukowski*, 377.

⁵³ McDonald, D. ‘Remembering Charles Bukowski Through One of His Lovers,’ *Vice* 2014. Online. Accessed August 14, 2018. URL = https://www.vice.com/en_au/article/vdpbgg/meeting-bukowskis-lover.

some dogs who sleep at night
 must dream of bones
 and I remember your bones
 in flesh
 and best
 in that dark green dress
 and those high-heeled bright
 black shoes,
 you always cursed when you
 drank,
 your hair coming down you
 wanted to explode out of
 what was holding you:
 rotten memories of a
 rotten
 past, and
 you finally got
 out
 by dying,
 leaving me with the
 rotten
 present,⁵⁴

The poem immediately establishes an extended metaphor of the animalistic set against the human: flesh against bones, internalisation against externalisation. The metaphor hinges around lexical choices that alternate between oppositions — bones/flesh, best/dark, bright/black. The use of ‘cursed’ (instead of ‘swore’) similarly connotes both externalisation (to curse) as well as internalisation (to *be* cursed), while ‘drank’ (internalisation as consumption) is followed by ‘you / wanted to explode out’ and later ‘you finally got / out’ (externalisation). This interior/exterior dichotomy is both somatic (bones and flesh) and temporal (past memories and present reality), fused via imagery of decay (in dogs dreaming of bones, then later ‘rotten memories’, ‘rotten / past’, ‘rotten / present’). The language is melancholy, yet at three points of the narrator’s recollection of Jane the meter begins to dance — ‘in flesh / and best / in that dark green dress’ entails two spondees, an anapaest and another spondee, underscored with rhyme; this is followed by two alliterative spondees (‘high-heeled bright / black’), followed by what almost becomes two anapaests (‘always cursed when you / drank’). That this chain of metrical patterning is suddenly broken with the enjambment on ‘drank’ is fitting — as ‘drank’ in the poem enacts the change in mood Jane’s drinking often effected in the real world (Sounes writes that Jane is said to have ‘hit the bottle harder than [Bukowski] did’).⁵⁵ The semicolon after ‘rotten / present’ — the first

⁵⁴ Bukowski, C. *The Pleasures of the Damned*, 158. For subsequent quotations, reference is omitted.

⁵⁵ Sounes, H. *Charles Bukowski: Locked in the Arms of a Crazy Life*, 91.

semicolon of the poem — marks a temporal shift, a snapping back to the present for three lines before the poem continues:

you've been dead
28 years
yet I remember you
better than any of
the rest;
you were the only one
who understood
the futility of the
arrangement of
life;
all the others were only
displeased with
trivial segments,
carped
nonsensically about
nonsense;

The speaker is self-aware about his own distance from Jane, created not only by time and her death, but by the large number of women — ‘the rest’ — in the intervening years. It was no secret that Bukowski held multiple relationships. Miles, for instance, recalls a mailman arriving at Bukowski’s house to find three women waiting on the porch. He writes of the mailman asking “‘Hank, how do you do it, how do you get it?’ Bukowski replied that the problem was how to get rid of them.”⁵⁶ In spite of this, Bukowski* insists ‘I remember you / better than any of / the rest,’ the line breaks here insinuating that he both *remembers her better* and that he remembers her *as being better* than the rest, due to her being ‘the only one / who understood / the futility of the / arrangement of / life.’ The uneven breaks here and the drawing out of the lines (where it could have been simply ‘the futility of / life’) enacts both the ‘futile arrangement’ and the laboriousness of the life, of which Jane was acutely aware. This knowledge was rooted, at least in Bukowski’s memory, more in misanthropy than nihilism. He recalls that

she [Jane] had a strange mad kind of sensibility
which knew something, which was this: most
human beings just aren’t worth a shit, and I felt that,
and she felt it.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Ibid., 398.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Ibid., 90.

While others ‘carped / nonsensically about / nonsense’ (the tautology here hyperbolising the triviality of their complaints), Jane is represented as knowing ‘too much’ about the meaninglessness of life, which ultimately kills her:

Jane, you were
killed by
knowing too much.
here's a drink
to your bones
that
this dog
still
dreams about.

The self-reflexive irony of the poem is that, firstly, Jane’s meaningfulness is grounded in the meaninglessness she understands while, secondly, her and Bukowski’s* love is grounded in the supposed hatred of others. The poem winds back on itself in this way many times: Bukowski* invokes misanthropy only to reveal love; attests to meaninglessness only to find meaning; attests to being a ‘dog’ (slang for an untrustworthy man) only to find himself at his most ‘human’ (if, conversely, that means his most connected, putting aside ‘the rest’ for one he ‘still / dreams about’). The internalisation/externalisation dichotomy of the opening lines thus comes full circle and becomes most salient in the poem’s close. Where in the opening lines Bukowski* presents himself remembering Jane’s exterior qualities (‘in flesh / and best / in that dark green dress) and her drinking, the poem’s close inverts, with Bukowski* drinking, and to something ‘deeper’ (‘your bones / that / this dog / still / dreams about’).

Where in ‘My Telephone’ Bukowski* embraces the writer-myth and caricatures himself as misanthropic only to hint at a desire for connection, here nihilism becomes a bridge to meaning, lovelessness a bridge to love, and being a ‘dog’ the bridge to becoming most fully connected to another human. Though the subject matter and the tone of the two poems is entirely different, the Bukowski* evident within (or behind) each poem seems coextensive: it is a self that often conceals empathy behind misanthropy, warmth behind coldness. As Miles writes of Bukowski:

Despite the diatribes about being a misanthrope,
about hating humanity, Bukowski had a tremendous
empathy for the plight of working people. He
sympathised with and cherished them [...]⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Miles, B. *Charles Bukowski*, 149.

Leaving open whether Bukowski was a misanthropist and/or misogynist, the poetry betrays a voice that, if these charges are fair for it too, are so in spite of much that suggests the opposite: namely a deep self-awareness, a desire for social connection and a love for — if only certain — women. At the very least, the poetry creates (or reflects) a persona that hides behind its own myth, and cannot easily be reduced to labels.

5.4.3 *In Other Words*

There is one final poem worth considering before returning to consider more carefully what this all has to do with self-detachment. Not all of Bukowski's poems are — and even those that seem to be, are often not — grim. 'In Other Words' is one of his more joyous works, although it contains a characteristic thread of grief beneath the surface. Written in 1981, the poem stems from Bukowski's love of cats (at this point he and Linda King, his long-term if frequently on-off partner, had two cats living with them: Butch and Piranha⁵⁹). 'In Other Words' blends mythology and the divine with the domestic, the banal arguments he and Linda had by this point become accustomed to.⁶⁰ It opens:

the Egyptians loved the cat
were often entombed with it
instead of with the women
and never with the dog

but now
here
good people with
good eyes
are very few

yet fine cats
with great style
loungue about
in the alleys of
the universe.⁶¹

Given that Bukowski often made reference to himself as a dog (as already seen),⁶² it is noteworthy that the opening stanza elevates the status of cats above that of women and dogs, as if the cats of their home were more divine for avoiding conflict. Bukowski's alignment of dogs with the troubles

⁵⁹ Ibid., 378.

⁶⁰ See Sounes, H. *Charles Bukowski: Locked in the Arms of a Crazy Life*, 299.

⁶¹ Bukowski, C. *The Pleasures of the Damned*, 316. For subsequent quotations, reference is omitted.

⁶² He is also quoted as saying to his friend Harold Norse, 'We're two old dogs, hooked on life.' See Miles, B. *Charles Bukowski*, 267.

of love was common; his collection *Love Is A Dog from Hell* (1977) was published several years earlier, while he often presented cats as sages or guides (as he later wrote in ‘My Cats’ (1989), ‘I study these / creatures. they are my / teachers.’).⁶³ In ‘In Other Words,’ the dramatic deictic shift in ‘now / here’ rattles the poem back to the present, the domestic home, where ‘good people with / good eyes / are very few.’ The ‘goodness’ here sets aesthetic beauty (the cats’ good eyes and ‘great style’) against the moral faults and poor vision of Bukowski* and Linda, blinded by domestic disputes to the ‘magic’ of ‘the universe.’ The domestic is seemingly set against the universal, yet the poem intertwines the macro and the micro, such that what seems like a call to looking at the ‘bigger picture’ (the universe) is actually a call to look at the ‘now / here.’ The poem becomes a call for simplicity, a negation of forced meaning in favour of just being.

Note, for instance, the repetition of ‘about’ (‘lounge about’; ‘about / our argument’; ‘whatever it was / about’) that intertwines space with causation, as the poem continues:

about
our argument tonight
whatever it was
about
and
no matter
how unhappy
it made us
feel

There is a trivialising of the argument’s cause (and Bukowski*’s knowledge of its cause) that downplays the imperative for meaning against the relative ‘style’ and ‘grace’ of just *being*; of a cat ‘adjusting to the / space of itself.’ The language of the fourth, human-centric stanza is heavy with connotations of meaning, reason and causation (‘about’, ‘about’, ‘matter’, ‘how’, ‘made us’), compared with the fifth stanza, which requests:

remember that
there is a
cat
somewhere
adjusting to the
space of itself
with a delightful
grace

To the extent that knowledge (of what the argument was about), meaning (in spite of whatever the argument meant) and emotion (‘no matter / how unhappy / it made us / feel’) are contrasted

⁶³ Bukowski, C. *The Pleasures of the Damned*, 421

with a cat ‘adjusting to the / space of itself / with a delightful / grace’, the epistemic and the phenomenal are hierarchised beneath the ontological: the urge to understand and to mean are presented as impediments to a graceful existence. The final lines point to ‘magic’ persisting ‘in other words’ (not only in the sense of ‘another way of saying’, but perhaps in other writers, in other conversations), despite any attempts to spoil it:

in other words
magic persists
without us
no matter what
we may try to do
to spoil it.

There is a self-deprecating humour in ‘no matter what / we may try to do / to spoil it’, as if the sabotage of ‘magic’ were a deliberate act. The tone is no doubt cynical — it is ‘us’ that attempt to ruin magic and ‘good people’ with ‘good eyes’ are few, but there is nonetheless magic in the universe, even if it is decisively non-human. This magic is not the hoped-for immortality of the entombed Egyptians, but that simple magic of graceful existence exemplified by cats, by comparison with which reason, meaning and emotion are — like the argument — mere human foolishness.

The Bukowski* of ‘In Other Words’ is enigmatic, eluding any clear characterisation in emotion or ethos. The tone is certainly at least more positive than many of his works, yet it hovers between characteristics: it is conciliatory without quite being apologetic, cynical without quite being misanthropic, hopeful without quite being joyous. This may be yet another deliberate embracing of the Bukowski-myth, but it also betrays a degree of emotional ambivalence; it suggests a certain tenacity in the face of a tumultuous relationship, a desire to look for glimmers of positivity among the negative (if also the reverse). This Bukowski* might thus be characterised as a decisively guarded optimist, a non-believer in salvation, but nonetheless a believer in magic, however small, however fragile.

Taking stock, I would like to suggest that the Bukowski* that has been uncovered throughout ‘My Telephone’, ‘Eulogy to a Hell of a Dame’ and ‘In Other Words’ does form a cohesive voice. It is a voice built on a poetics of concealment: it presents itself as misanthropic, yet exhibits empathy and desire for connection; it presents itself as self-interested, yet exhibits compassion. It is a voice that consistently conceals warmth behind coldness, and under scrutiny reveals itself as neither as superficial nor as misanthropic as it claims to be. These poems, it is worth noting explicitly, were all written within a two year span. I suspect if one sampled poems

from Bukowski's earliest to his latest works, they would find similar overlaps as outlined here, but the point is the same: to the extent these overlaps reflect aspects of their author, we may come to see them not as mere reflections but to *be* a part of that author himself. This is a manifestation of the author's narrative self, created through the layering of multiple works that not only attest to but create the author (not only the Bukowski-myth, but the real Bukowski).

5.5 The Detached Self

For the sake of argument, let us suppose that the Bukowski* that has come to light in the above readings is accurate, by which I mean that the meanings and emotions discussed above correlate correctly with the experiences, emotions and intentions of the real Charles Bukowski. If this is the case, I suggest that there are four possibilities for this Bukowski* that has been glimpsed throughout the poems above. Either that Bukowski* is:

1. (a fragment of) a fiction of my own construction (which is to say, not a *self* at all);
2. (a fragment of) a now-selfless person (though not 'Bukowski,' as he is dead, and so it makes no sense to reference *him*);
3. (a fragment of) Bukowski's personhood (Bukowski is still 'real', but Bukowski* is only a fragment of his person, not his self);
4. (a fragment of) Bukowski *himself*.

Returning to our theorists examined at the outset, it seems that those bottom-up theorists of the self are committed to either 1 or 2 (Dennett notwithstanding, who might opt for 4, despite the problems of transfer already observed). If we consider Bukowski* (1) a fiction of my own construction (which is to say, not a self) then we run into difficulty explaining how it is that my idea of Bukowski* can be either true or false. This would entail saying that upon death all stories by (or about) someone are just that, and have no epistemic weight in getting to who someone actually is (or was). We run into the same problem if we see Bukowski* as (2) a fragment of a now-selfless person (not Bukowski), which has the additional problem of seemingly reducing the self to embodiment. Bottom-up theorists might claim here that embodiment is a necessary condition for the self: the self is built from the ground up — from embodiment, to person, to self — but then if the eradication of embodiment alone is enough to eviscerate the self, it is difficult to see how the movement from embodiment to self is a movement at all. Top-down theorists such as Stokes and Meese are committed to (as high as) 3, since the first-person embodiment that constitutes selfhood no longer holds. Strangely, Stokes and Meese seemingly must contend that in writing autobiographical poetry, Bukowski's 'self' has been writing about his 'person', which

unnecessarily (and counterintuitively) doubles the subject of the writing. The neatest and most defensible answer, I wish to suggest, is that Bukowski* is ontologically a fragment of Bukowski himself, and that it thus makes sense to speak of Bukowski's self being *detached*; still real, present (we might even say 'alive'), in spite of Bukowski's bodily death.

In order to conceive of the detached self, a brief return to the idea of the extended self is necessary. This concept largely originates in anthropology, such as the work of Alfred Gell, whose *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (1998)⁶⁴ explores, among other things, volt sorcery that relies for its effects on the use of exuviae (such as 'hair, nail-clippings, food leftovers, excreta, and the like').⁶⁵ Broadening this historically common practice to the concept of personhood, Gell argues that

[...] exuviae do not stand metonymically for the victim; they are physically detached fragments of the victim's 'distributed personhood' — that is, personhood distributed in the milieu, beyond the body-boundary

[...] We are not accustomed to think of images (such as portraits, etc.) as parts of persons, limbs, as it were. In terms of the semiotic theory of representation, nothing would be more erroneous than to imagine that the substance of a sign (the visible or audible sign 'dog') were part of any dog, or dogs in general. But with indexes it is not the same as with proper signs. Abduction from an index does characteristically involve positing a substantive part-whole (or part-part) relation. Smoke is a kind of 'part' of fire, for instance. A person's smile (the cheshire cat excepted) is a part of the friendly person it betokens.⁶⁶

It is this conception of a distributed person that allows Meese [et al.] to make the claim that personhood can extend beyond bodily death through social media; that if the 'persona' of the dead can persist through the same 'technical mediation' that 'maintain[s] the social life of the living, they may be considered as a kind of 'person.'⁶⁷ To the contrary, it is via this framework that I think we must see the Bukowski* I have sketched in the preceding poems as (4) a fragment of Bukowski *himself*. If we consider the self as a construct that is both a) the interrelation of embodiment, a first-person perspective (mineness) and personhood, and b) distributed beyond the body-boundary, then we can make sense of Bukowski* in a way that avoids the unnecessary

⁶⁴ Gell, A. et al. *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 103.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 104.

⁶⁷ Meese, J. et al. 'Posthumous Personhood and the Affordances of Digital Media,' 418.

doubling of subjects, avoids reducing the self to embodiment, and allows us epistemic weight when learning about someone from the stories/poems they leave behind. Bukowski no longer has a body, but the self nonetheless persists as personhood and in the form of poetry (among other fragments). Just as smoke for Gell is a part of fire, Bukowski* is a part of Bukowski.

Though this line of thought breaks from Menary in his article on embodiment, it may nonetheless be in line with Menary's position in *The Extended Mind* (2006), where he asks:

Does the extended mind imply an extended self? It seems so. Most of us already accept that the self outstrips the boundaries of consciousness; my dispositional beliefs, for example, constitute in some deep sense part of who I am. If so, then these boundaries may also fall beyond the skin.⁶⁸

Though Menary does not elaborate on how an extended mind implies an extended self, at the very least extension seems to draw the self further from embodiment than he and other bottom-up theorists have often supposed. Recalling the example of the cricket ball, the assertion is that the cricket ball hits *him* and thus *he* feels pain (rather than, on narrative accounts, a narrative being hit and feeling pain). On my view, however, and taking extension and detachment into account, it may be more accurate to say that it is his body that is hit and feels pain. Menary himself is constituted in part by this event (indeed, his body feels pain), but he is not *only* that body; rather, he is that body, that pain, that memory, that person who is now wary of stray cricket balls — the present experience and future memories can thus be attributed to Menary, rather than the former to *him* and the latter to his narrative self.

Embodiment *is*, as most bottom-up theorists suppose, a necessary precondition for the self (and this is why fictional characters cannot be detached selves). Moreover, this is why autobiographical poetry differs from non-autobiographical poetry; or, rather, this is what defines autobiographical poetry *as* such: the extent to which the self is a portion of that self of the author. If the self is, as I am suggesting, extended (or 'distributed') and exists at the intersections of embodiment and personhood, it follows that neither the evisceration of the body nor the loss of personhood is enough in itself to eviscerate the self. The self, we might say, is more a sandcastle than a house of cards.

⁶⁸ Menary, R. *The Extended Mind* (Cambridge: Bradford Books, 2010), 39.

5.6 Political Implications

The romantic idea that artistic works immortalise their creators is, of course, not new. Ernest Becker argued at length in the Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Denial of Death* (1973) against this ‘fantasy of immortality’ and the ‘heroism’ that it breeds, seeing projects of immortality as inevitable sources of personal and global conflicts. In spite of this view, Becker remains sympathetic to the ‘natural’ yearning for immortality. He writes:

[...] man is not just a blind glob of idling protoplasm, but a creature with a name who lives in a world of symbols and dreams and not merely matter. His sense of self-worth is constituted symbolically, his cherished narcissism feeds on symbols, on an abstract idea of his own worth, an idea composed of sounds, words, and images, in the air, in the mind, on paper. And this means that man's natural yearning for organismic activity, the pleasures of incorporation and expansion, can be fed limitlessly in the domain of symbols and so into immortality.⁶⁹

For Becker, seductive as the project of immortality through symbols is, it comes at the price of inevitable conflict, and should be avoided (or at least suppressed). Yet Becker is realistic about our inability to transcend spirituality, religion, the incessant drive to create to achieve some semblance of continuance. ‘The most that any one of us can seem to do,’ he writes in closing, ‘is to fashion something — an object or ourselves — and drop it into the confusion, make an offering of it, so to speak, to the life force.’⁷⁰

Perhaps the most ardent critic of the view I’m espousing, however, has been Aaron Kunin. In ‘Shakespeare’s Preservation Fantasy’ (2009), Kunin argues that the ‘humanist imperative’ to ‘preserve cultural artefacts’ is bound up with a fantasy of immortality; the idea that literature can preserve the most salient characteristics of any individual — their name, for example, their beauty. Kunin diagnoses this ‘preservation fantasy’ in a number of works by Horace, Spenser, Shakespeare (who he takes as significantly originating it) and Milton, critiquing the tendency as a deeply problematic poetics; what Ramie Targoff describes as ‘a non-consensual use of the subject.’⁷¹ The problem with the fantasy, according to Kunin, is two-fold: descriptive and normative. Firstly, the goal is always unachievable — as Kunin asks rhetorically,

⁶⁹ Becker, E. *The Denial of Death* (New York: Free Press, 2007), 49.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 650.

⁷¹ See Targoff, R. *Posthumous Love: Eros and the Afterlife in Renaissance England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 232.

What if these poems could do what they say they can do? Then poetry would be a form of research on human subjects, and poets and critics would need to start asking the questions that scientists ask about their research.⁷²

In this vein Kunin concludes that the fantasy is ‘a violent intervention in the given world that would suspend two of the limiting conditions on human life, mortality and temporality.’⁷³ The second and more serious charge Kunin levels against the preservation fantasy is that it entails a darker impulse, with holocaust at its core. As he writes, ‘the fantasy of culture as preservation of human values is not only compatible with but can also encourage a holocaust fantasy.’⁷⁴ For Kunin, immortality for the subject is purchased only through the death of all other subjects — ‘successful preservation,’ he writes, ‘entails the deaths not only of Shakespeare and his addressee but also of Shakespeare’s readers.’ This poetics, in other words, not only glorifies an impossibility but does so at the expense of placing value in its rightful place (the present). Accordingly, Kunin argues that

[w]hen texts such as sonnets [...] become repositories of life energy — in fact, of the most valuable part of a person — then more conventional carriers of value, such as human bodies and graves, become insignificant and equivalent.⁷⁵

This line of argument is reminiscent of common arguments against religion, to the effect that not believing in an afterlife gives greater meaning to life in the present. Yet an argument against practical implications is not an argument against the ontological claim that the self can transcend death *per se*. It may be the case that claims to immortality are unhelpful, but that is an entirely separate matter as to whether such claims are untrue. A full defence of the claim on normative grounds lies outside the scope of this paper, but it could be made at least to some degree on the same grounds as religious afterlives: in solace, in the promise to maintain some degree of (one-way) contact with a self whose body has now passed. This defence of the detached self may fall into Kunin’s charge that the preservation fantasy necessarily fails because ‘[...] you do not preserve the object of value, or you preserve it in a form that will not allow you to experience it fully [...]’⁷⁶ However, if the self is scalar rather than binary, as I take it to be, then by definition the ‘object of value’ here must at times be preserved in ways that do not allow us to ‘experience it fully.’ It is also worth stressing here that I am not arguing for immortality. Rather, I am arguing

⁷² Kunin, A. ‘Shakespeare’s Preservation Fantasy,’ *PMLA* 124:1 (2009), pp. 92-106, 103.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 100.

for the self persisting in the form of poetry (among other forms). Once those forms decay, however, so goes the self (as Kunin rightly points out, '[...] like the human body, the poems material embodiment is subject to time).⁷⁷

Putting the preservation fantasy aside, there are other theorists that have been substantially more positive on the role of art in having implications that are ontological and political, and deeply connected to the self. In *Aesthetic Theory* (1970), for instance, Adorno sees art as the antidote to reification, the social pathology by which the human subject is increasingly objectified (while the object is increasingly subjectified). As Thijs Lister explains in *The Spell of Capital* (2017):

Adorno writes: 'Art stands as plenipotentiary for the in-itself that does not yet exist.' In other words, the aesthetic experience is exemplary for what a full experience might be in a society that is not dominated by functional relationships.⁷⁸

For Adorno, art and the aesthetic experience it provides are central to avoiding alienation; if not for self-formation at least for experiencing what it means to be a subject. Even further, in Marx labour production is not only a force for social revolution, but also critical to the formation of our selves, which is stifled under capitalism. As Joshua Lubin-Levy and Aliza Shvarts (2016) point out,

[t]he capitalist mode of production goes beyond the organisation of social life reaching into the very structure and regulation of the subject itself.⁷⁹

For Marx, this is why the creation of commodities of strict exchange value is an alienating process. Creative labour is a means for self-definition, and through purposive action (creating use value from nature), one can come to define themselves as human. As he writes in Chapter 7 of *Capital* (1867):

Labour is, first of all, a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature [...] Through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way changes his own nature.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Ibid., 98.

⁷⁸ Lister, T. *The Spell of Capital: Reification and Spectacle* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 63.

⁷⁹ Lubin-Levy, J. and Shvarts, A. 'Living Labor: Marxism and Performance Studies,' *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 26:2 (2016), pp. 115-121, 115.

⁸⁰ Marx, K. et al. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 450.

Marx and Adorno (and indeed other critical theorists) were not, of course, arguing for the persistence of selfhood through art (or through labour). For such thinkers, however, creation is nonetheless central to both personal and social change, and at various points both Adorno and Marx seem receptive to the idea that the self is scalar, and is comprised at least in part by the creation of art and use value. In some ways the distributed and detached self should be seen a continuation of this line of thought. Certainly, as we develop capacities, communicate, create cultural artefacts, develop relationships, projects and becoming fully integrated in the world, we develop our selves. But the offshoot of this constructed self is that it cannot be deconstructed in one fell swoop. To the extent that it is blurred at the edges and extends the body boundary — on death it necessarily detaches (which is to say, survives) in the above manifestations. The pivotal point in all of this, as several of the top-down theorists have pointed out, is that the self is not binary, but scalar. As Meese writes:

every human child enters the world open to the socialising forces of its cultural milieu', in a 'porous' state vis-à-vis the influence of others. It would therefore follow that every human being leaves the world also in such a 'porous' relational state of personhood.⁸¹

By conceiving of the self as porous in this way we will no doubt run into thorny philosophical territory. If selves are the locus of morality (perhaps they are not), do we have moral obligations for detached selves? If selfhood is scalar, is there some metric by which it can be studied? At what point can (or should) we say that embodiment and personhood have interacted sufficiently to speak of a self being present? Is the notion of a detached self a help or a hinderance to the grieving process that follows the death of a loved one? These are complex and controversial questions, but they must be asked if we are to take the notion of scalar and distributed selves to their natural conclusion (which I believe to be detachment).

The argument for a 'real' *self* embedded in literature is no doubt controversial from a philosophical point of view, since for decades philosophers have wrestled the self back from the transcendent, ethereal grips of mysticism. Yet it is perhaps even more so from the angle of literary theory: it may just be a two-fold committing of the intentional fallacy, not only unfairly judging the work by the yardstick of the artist, but unfairly judging the artist by the yardstick of the work. The legacy of postmodernism has left authorship (in the sense of biography and intentionality) at best unpopular, at worst indefensible as any means to get at narrative meaning (which is fluid,

⁸¹ Meese, J. et al. 'Posthumous Personhood and the Affordances of Digital Media,' 410.

constructed, contingent). Just as philosophers wrestled the self back from the transcendence it enjoyed in the hands of religion, literary theorists simultaneously wrestled narrative back from the concreteness it enjoyed in the hands of romanticism — in admittedly reductive terms, the self which was once transcendent became real, while the narrative which was once real became transcendent. This is why the relationship between selves and works is still such difficult ground to traverse. It is perhaps by finding some middle ground between the transcendent and the real that we can better understand not just the stories we write, but our selves.

The Detached Self (Discussion)

In the final chapter I have argued at length for truth in the cliché that writers, in part, survive through their written works. Through a handful of Bukowski's ostensibly autobiographical poems in reference to a number of popular theories on selfhood, I have suggested that the self glimpsed in Bukowski's work is not a fiction, but rather a part of Bukowski *himself*. The self in this view is a construct that is both a) the interrelation of embodiment, a first-person perspective (mineness) and personhood, and b) distributed beyond the body-boundary. This allows us to make sense of Bukowski* in a way that avoids the unnecessary doubling of subjects, avoids reducing the self to embodiment, and allows us epistemic weight when learning about someone from the stories/poems they leave behind.

The view of self I have proposed, however, raises some further concerns which have not yet been addressed. It remains to be shown, for instance, how this all ties back into dialectics, and my broader claim that poetic thought entails the navigation of tensions that underpin the human condition. In the final discussion that comprises this section, and before moving to concluding remarks, I wish to briefly explore this relationship of detached selfhood with dialectics. Here I suggest that poetic thought on the part of the reader entails a navigation of tensions not only between the poetic subject and the other of the text itself, but the poetic subject and the reader. I then close this section with some final thoughts on how the notion of a detached self might relate to the unreifying poetics of atten(s)ion discussed in the fourth chapter.

Dasein and Selfhood

In the third chapter it was argued that the poetry of Sharon Olds, through the promotion of dialectical meta-emotion, is able to make one more morally attuned, specifically through an increase in emotional granularity. Further, to the extent that our mode of being-in-the-world is as inherently engaged meaning-makers, I argued that such a poetics can make us more attuned to our own nature of being. It should be noted, however, that Dasein might be considered in an important sense a *shared* mode of being — we each take part in it, and as such it is not reducible to any self. Like language, Dasein is paradoxically both individual and collective. John Haugeland (1990), for example, raises this possibility explicitly:

[...] the possibility that Heidegger did not intend Dasein to have the plurality of persons, but rather meant it as singular and common. Such commonality need not (indeed could not) be that of a genus (personhood, *Homo*

sapiens), but would instead have to be that of a distinctive particular in which we all somehow ‘participate.’¹

This is important for two reasons. Firstly, it avoids the implication, which may have resulted from my previous claims otherwise, that one can become more ‘fully human’ by virtue of developing a reflexivity of Dasein. Clearly this would raise significant ethical dilemmas. However, if the relation of Dasein to individuals is one-to-many, then the concern of it becoming value-laden does not arise, nor does the question of how one attains, embraces or develops it. As Tucker McKinney (2017) writes:

If we begin by identifying Dasein as a shared activity, we do not have to ask how individuals come to consensus about ‘what one does’—for there is Dasein only insofar as some such consensus prevails.²

Secondly, this raises the important point, which underpinned many of the considerations in the fourth chapter, that our way of being-in-the-world is fluid; as technology develops (a considerable concern for Heidegger) and our relationships to each other and the world around us evolve (or reify), so too does the nature of Dasein (as the shared activity that defines the human mode of being; as Heidegger puts it early in *Being and Time* (1927), that ‘entity which each of us is himself’).³ This allows us to separate out the question of selfhood, of developing oneself, from that of Dasein as a collective end. When I make the claim, then, that selfhood is scalar, it need not entail that one can be more or less fully human, only that they can be more or less fully themselves.

Selfhood as Dialectic

Returning to the issue of selfhood, in what way might we see selfhood as a dialectical phenomenon? In *The Intimate Strangeness of Being: Metaphysics after Dialectic* (2012),⁴ William Desmond explores what he sees as Hegel’s process of self-determination, how ‘beings come to be themselves by becoming other to themselves.’⁵ While the full details of the process need not be of concern here, there is an aspect of selfhood that comes to light — what Desmond calls *inclusive self-determination* — which helps to shed light on the way in which the selfhood analysed in the previous chapter comes about. Inclusive self-determination refers to the process

¹ Haugeland, J. ‘Heidegger and the Philosophy of Mind (Review)’ *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 50:3 (1990), pp. 633-635, 635.

² McKinney, T. ‘As One Does: Understanding Heidegger’s Account of Das Man,’ *European Journal of Philosophy* 26:1 (2018), pp. 430-448, 436.

³ Heidegger, M. *Being and Time* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), 8.

⁴ Desmond, W. *The Intimate Strangeness of Being: Metaphysics After Dialectic* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2012).

⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

by which the self determines itself against the other as opposite, while the other is in turn determined by the self in a process of dialectical, mutual self-determination. As Desmond writes:

By 'inclusive self-determining,' I mean the claim that the doubleness of self and other in what looks like mutual determination is held by Hegel to reveal that both self and other are included in a more embracing process of dialectical self-determining. It suggests a dialectical inclusion of self and other in a more comprehensive self-determining process.⁶

This process can be seen clearly in the poetics of Bukowski. As I have argued, in 'My Telephone' Bukowski* embraces his own writer-myth, caricaturing himself as misanthropic only to hint at a desire for connection. Similarly, in 'Eulogy to a Hell of a Dame', nihilism becomes a bridge to meaning, lovelessness a bridge to love, and being a 'dog' the bridge to becoming most fully connected to another human. Finally, throughout 'In Other Words' I have argued for the presence of a certain tenacity in the face of a tumultuous relationship, a desire to look for glimmers of positivity among the negative. In Bukowski's poetry, then, we have a writer persona that always defines itself in reference to the other, which reveals itself only through its own concealment. To the extent the poems' overlaps reflect aspects of the real Bukowski, they are not mere reflections but become a part of the author himself. Bringing this together with Hegel's view that 'both self and other are included in [an] embracing process of dialectical self-determining,' the process of poetic self-generation we have seen in Bukowski's poetry can be seen as just such a dialectical self-determination. If selfhood exists at the nexus of personhood and embodiment, such self-determination involves processes of defining oneself through negation. In terms of embodiment this may take place through the physiological and neurological establishment of bodily limitations (the body's periphery, acts of willing, cause and effect, personal space).⁷ For personhood, this may involve the formation of interests, habits, plans, relationships and so forth, while for the poetic self (Bukowski*) this occurs through consistent rejection and embrace of the other. In all instances, such self-determination occurs through negation: by physiologically, psychologically and poetically othering the world, the self defines itself as itself; both self and other are thus embraced in dialectical self-determination.

⁶ Ibid., 19.

⁷ Though a full consideration of these would derail the current discussion unnecessarily, it is worth pointing out that Julia Kristeva situates such negations in terms of *abjection*. As Sara Beardsworth writes, for Kristeva 'abjection is the most unstable moment in the maturation of the subject because it is a struggle with the instability of the inside/outside border [...]' See Beardsworth, S. *Julia Kristeva: Psychoanalysis and Modernity* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2012), 81. See also Kristeva, J. and Roudiez, L.S. *Pouvoirs De L'horreur*. English Edition. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

What Desmond calls ‘the doubleness of self and other’ has clear affinities with the concept of twofoldness already examined. In Simic (possible) meaning is always dialectical, not only drawing out the tensions inherent in a phenomenological apprehension of world (subject/object), but of Being itself (Being and non-Being). Poetic thought in Simic is, as with O’Hara, ontological tension, which comes to enact sociopolitical tensions in the form of (un)reification. In Bukowski, on the other hand, poetic thought comes in the form of an intersubjective tension between self and other; a process of inclusive self-determination in which Bukowski* is written into existence through negation and embrace of otherness. Here a twofoldness or doubleness of self and other becomes the means for not only creating (possible) meaning, but for the ontological construction of self; not only biography, but identity.

Selfhood as Poetic Thought

While a focus on the reader constituted the focus of the third and fourth chapters, in the previous chapter I have largely focused on how identity is constructed by Bukowski, without yet examining the reader as a co-creator of (possible) meaning and a locus of poetic thought. Accordingly, I now wish to shift attention to the points of interaction between Bukowski and the reader of his work. If Bukowski* is, as I have argued, a part of Bukowski himself, it follows that to the extent one can read Bukowski* out of the work we can consider the act of reading an act of social relation, of learning about (if not interacting with) an ontologically real self. To return to the theory of James Meese [et al.] (2015), this entails a ‘pragmatic view’ of narrative in which the extended self we encounter in the text is not a mere simulation or projection, but a locus of being. As Meese [et al.] writes in ‘Posthumous Personhood and the Affordances of Digital Media’ (2015):

This narration of a world is a kind of action that ‘makes it so.’ In this ‘pragmatic’ view of textual narrative, what appears on social media is not a simulacra or a metaphor for embodied relations, it is the locus of agency and being in the (online) world. In the digital afterlife, the text or the video on the screen is not a simulacrum for ongoing relations, it is not representative, the text or the video is an ongoing form of relation.⁸

In light of the readings that have been offered, Bukowski’s poems can be seen as just such an example of a detached self that ‘makes it so’; that create Bukowski* as a detached self.

⁸ Meese, J. et al. ‘Posthumous Personhood and the Affordances of Digital Media,’ *Mortality* 20:4 (2015), pp. 408-420, 416.

Accordingly, the reading of Bukowski* out of the text can be considered ‘an ongoing form of relation’, a way of encountering Bukowski’s personhood despite an absence of embodiment.

This line of argument, of course, runs counter to postmodern conceptions of the self as fractured, incomplete, and incohesive. In particular, it runs against what Fredric Jameson diagnoses as a certain ‘schizophrenia’ that is characteristic of the postmodern. As Catherine Constable (2004) neatly summarises:

Jameson defines schizophrenia as an experience of isolated, disconnected, discontinuous material signifiers which fail to link up into a coherent sequence. As a result, the schizophrenic does not have a chronological sense of past, present, and future, and consequently lacks any sense of the self as a coherent identity that persists across time. It is this sense of being condemned to the perpetual present that Jameson takes to be emblematic of the postmodern condition.⁹

I have suggested that to consider Bukowski* a fiction, or a separate self (or non-self) from Bukowski is problematic for a number of reasons. It entails, for instance, an unnecessary doubling of subjects; it may effectively reduce the self to embodiment (at least in some formulations); and it denies readers any epistemic weight when attempting to learn about Bukowski from the writings he left behind. But this need not mean insisting on the complete coherency of the lyric *I* in Bukowski’s work. To argue that an aspect of the self is latent does not imply that it is entirely *accessible*, nor that it is unfiltered through the process of writing itself. Jameson’s emphasis on temporality is thus important to keep in mind since the self, if there is indeed a self present in the work, can only be reached through the necessarily contingent language-character of the work itself. Moreover, and particularly given Bukowski’s self-professed intentions to make himself into a writer, it is worth stressing that the process of writing itself is not mere reproduction of a pre-packaged self, but is involved in the very process of self-formation. As Maria Takolander (2017)¹⁰ explores in an article on confessional poetry, and in reference to the work of Timothy Clark and Paul De Man, the writing process itself is one of continual change. Takolander writes:

Key to this phenomenon is Timothy Clark’s conceptualisation of composition as ‘mediated by self-reading’, which highlights how creative *reading* is an integral and underestimated component of creative *writing*. As Clark explains, the writing ‘is no sooner written than read,’ so that the words on the page

⁹ Constable, C. ‘Postmodernism and Film,’ in Connor, S., ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 49.

¹⁰ Takolander, M. ‘Confessional Poetry and the Materialisation of an Autobiographical Self,’ *Life Writing* 14:3 (2017), pp. 371-383.

immediately begin suggesting ‘unexpected directions for the text.’ Like Paul de Man before him, Clark is aware of the implications for autobiography: ‘Insofar as the space of composition embraces the ventriloquial effects of received literary codes and their constraints ... *then the agent or subject of composition cannot be simply identified with the empirical subject*’ (original emphasis).¹¹

While I have argued that the subject of composition can and should be identified, at least in part, as the empirical subject (Bukowski himself), we can nonetheless see this detached self as created through a filter of ‘received literary codes and their constraints.’ Since the reader is also subject to a particular standpoint — received codes of *reading* and their constraints — the ongoing relation of encountering Bukowski’s personhood through the text is problematised; in a sense subjecting each individual reading to what Jameson diagnoses as the perpetual present. Where Takolander, Clark and De Man might argue that the contingency of language-character simply precludes the excavation of a detached self, I suggest rather that it problematises such an excavation, and so necessitates a reading sensitive to the historical, autobiographical and sociocultural contexts of Bukowski’s writing. Such a reading attempts to run against received codes in order to read the self out from the work. It is necessarily flawed, but entails a poetic thinking on the part of the reader that navigates tensions not only between the poetic subject and the other of the text itself, but the poetic subject and the reader *as* other. As has been seen through the analyses of the previous chapter, this involves recognising that the identity Bukowski establishes is one deliberately constructed through resistance. As Giovanni Di Stefano (2017) puts it:

In a nutshell, we could say that Bukowski intends to establish his identity by showing a *resistance* taken to its limits, letting him barely see a legitimate ‘way out,’ placing himself outside (and in opposition with) the mental acts of intentionality belonging to a sociocultural context characterised by consumption and exploitation (original emphasis).¹²

Though Di Stefano is largely concerned with Bukowski’s identity as a resistance to the status quo, the same basic resistance applies to Bukowski’s identity as an ostensible resistance from the social world. As has been shown, Bukowski’s is a voice built on a poetics of concealment: it presents itself as misanthropic, yet exhibits empathy and desire for connection; it presents itself as self-interested, yet exhibits compassion. It is a voice that consistently conceals warmth behind coldness, and under scrutiny reveals itself as neither as superficial nor as misanthropic as it claims to be. It may be too

¹¹ Ibid., 378.

¹² Di Stefano, G. ‘Meaningfulness and Meaninglessness of Work in Charles Bukowski,’ *World Futures* 73:4 (2017), pp. 271-284, 280.

much to claim that this is a resistance which ultimately *welcomes*, or even yields, but it is nonetheless an identity built on a dialectic of (un)concealment.

Unreifying Detachment

In what way might we conceive, if at all, of the detachment I have argued for as a possibility toward unreification? As we have seen, processes of reification are those that are decisively unsubjectifying. In the words of Wade Bell (2014), under reification ‘people are seen as social assets and/or liabilities, exploiters and exploited, producers and consumers [...]’¹³ While Simic’s poetics works toward unreification through a poetics of atten(s)ion, the detached self as illustrated in the poetics of Bukowski might work toward unreification precisely through its tendency toward resistance of the social world, work, and death. Indeed, this is what Di Stefano seems to suggest, specifically in reference to work. Here it is worth quoting Di Stefano at length, who concludes that:

In an advanced industrial society, trying or even at least only imagining to do without a job to devote ourselves to an autonomous and useful activity becomes almost impossible [...] The alternative Bukowski offers to all this is not to recover work as a central factor of a person’s identity construction, but to completely avoid this conception. Backing out of it and resisting is somehow his strategy to establish and define his identity. His radical reject of the ‘American dream’ is, we could say, a *positive* and not merely *opposing* action, in so far as, when he explicitly expresses his neat aversion against the capitalistic perspective and the push to accumulate consumption goods, he endorses an ethos (meant as living theory) connoted by an extreme authenticity and, to sum up, the freedom to be able to *autopoietically define himself*, showing how he can do without identity organisers [...] that claim to give the individual a meaning being irreducibly unrelated to him or her. [Original emphasis]¹⁴

There are at least three ways in which resistances such as these might work toward unreification in Bukowski’s poetics. Firstly, in enacting a poetics of resistance toward work and the ‘American dream’ — and in so doing creating a further aspect of the self — Bukowski is able to ‘autopoietically define himself’ in ways that transcend the instrumentalising tendencies of a reification that increasingly defines people as social assets and/or liabilities. Secondly, by enacting a process of inclusive self-determination in which Bukowski* is written into existence through negation and embrace of otherness, identity is exclusively defined in terms of the social

¹³ Bell, W. ‘A Phenomenological Take on the Problem of Reification’, *Moderna Språk* 108:2 (2014), pp. 1-16, 6.

¹⁴ Di Stefano, G. ‘Meaningfulness and Meaninglessness of Work in Charles Bukowski,’ 282.

sphere. Finally, and most importantly for my purposes here, insofar as the detached self is able to transcend death it is able to transcend the very process of reification itself. In this respect the notion of a detached self is inherently antithetical to processes of reification — it is the creation of that which cannot be reified. While in this third sense Bukowski's poetics does not counter or work against processes of reification *within the world*, as does Simic's, it is nonetheless importantly unreifying in the sense of being able to detach the self from its historical moment and as such work toward transcending reification. In this light, it can once again be seen as a redemptive poetics built on dialectics of self and other, author and reader, life and death. That thinking on both the part of Bukowski and the reader which navigates such dialectics in order to create (possible) meaning is distinctively poetic, because it entails the navigation of tensions that underpin the human condition.

In this section I have attempted to pull together some of the most significant ways in which Bukowski's detached self can be seen as a manifestation of dialectics, as well as how this relates back to the issue of poetic thought and unreification. Clearly there are phenomenological aspects of Bukowski's work that could be further explored, while the construction of emotion and the functions of rhythm would be interesting avenues for consideration. Since all of the conceptual intersections of each chapter cannot be adequately traversed in this thesis, my intention has been to highlight the most fruitful areas of overlap, and in so doing clearly outline five distinct (if porous) categories of poetic thought as the navigation of dialectics. Having now considered all of the poets and artists I set out to examine, the discussion can now move to the final section, in which I briefly summarise the findings of each chapter, provide a set of conclusions that can be drawn out from the evidence garnered throughout, and suggest avenues for further research in the various fields with which I have engaged.

Conclusion

I began this thesis by setting on the table a number of seemingly vague questions that relate to poetry, phenomenology and poetic thought. These difficult and somewhat controversial questions are: *What is poetry? What is thinking? What does it mean to think poetically? What can poetic thought achieve? What does it mean to be human?* Having borrowed a number of conceptual frameworks, analysed closely a variety of contemporary American authors and artists, and from various angles defended the claim that poetic thought should be understood as the navigation of dialectics, I now wish to return to these questions, and to see if tentative answers can be provided in light of everything that has been considered thus far. Accordingly, in this final section I take each of these questions in turn and examine them in reference to the concepts and creators raised throughout.

What is Poetry?

It might seem that the question *what is poetic thought?* is intricately related to (one might say relies upon) the question *what is poetry?*, a question on which I have been conspicuously quiet throughout the preceding chapters. Aside from the time it would take to address this question adequately, I have been quiet on this question largely because, firstly, a great many answers to it have already been provided by various scholars and, secondly, because I do not think an adequate definition of poetry goes very far to aiding an understanding of poetic thought. Nonetheless, it is worth briefly exploring the different ways poetry has been defined, before explaining how these might affect our views on poetic thought.

Roughly speaking, there are perhaps three broad categories into which definitions of poetry fall: definitions by effect; by form; and by consensus. In the first instance, many definitions of poetry that have been offered define poetry by what it most often tends to achieve. By far the most popular sort of definition within this category defines poetry by its propensity to generate emotion. Wordsworth, for instance, defined poetry as ‘the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings... emotion recollected in tranquillity.’¹ Similarly, Robert Frost claimed that ‘poetry is when an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found words.’² More recently still, Rita Dove has offered the attractively eloquent claim that ‘poetry is language at its most distilled

¹ Wordsworth, W. and Owen, W.J.B., ed., *Wordsworth's Preface To Lyrical Ballads* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1957), 44.

² Frost, R. and Untermeyer, L., ed., *Robert Frost's Poems* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002), 220.

and most powerful.’³ As attractive and as intuitively plausible as such definitions are, they do little to separate poetry from the novel, from memoir, or indeed from song.

Other definitions examine a formal feature common to all poetry, and use that as the yardstick by which poetry is defined. In *Blue Studios* (2006), for instance, Rachel Blau DuPlessis makes the distinction between drama, narrative and poetry, suggesting that the core of drama is performativity (which she takes to be comprised of ‘coded and decodable gestures in special space and time’); the core of narrative is narrativity (which focuses on ‘sequenced events in represented time’)⁴; while the core of poetry is segmentivity (the way in which poems are fundamentally fragmented into distinct segments. As DuPlessis phrases it, poetry is

the kind of writing that is articulated in sequenced,
gapped lines and whose meanings are created by
occurring in bounded units, units operating in
relation to chosen pause or silence.⁵

‘Segmentivity,’ DuPlessis contends, ‘is the ability to articulate and make meaning by selecting, deploying, and combining segments, and is the underlying characteristic of poetry as a genre.’⁶ Largely focusing on form and structure, this definition places emphasis on line breaks, stanza breaks, choices in syntax and gaps in meaning formed by ambiguity and polysemy. This definition conceives of poetry as an inherently fragmented art form, where its creation involves the deliberate rupture of textual elements. Its consumption, conversely, involves an active, cognitive ‘putting-back-together’ of such elements in order to produce (possible) meaning.

Finally, poetry can be defined broadly by consensus. One such definition, written a few years before DuPlessis suggested segmentivity, was put forward by the self-described Wittgensteinian Robert B. Pierce (2003). Pierce makes the argument for poetry to be understood as a ‘family resemblance’ concept, as opposed to a definitive concept with necessary and sufficient conditions. He suggests that there is something of a list of defining characteristics of poetry, including concepts that are shared with other forms of literature, such as persona, characterisation, genre, intertextuality, irony and ambiguity, as well as ones ‘more distinctive to poetry,’ such as imagery, rhythm and meter.⁷ Drawing on the concept of the language game proposed by Wittgenstein, Pierce suggests that approaching the ‘real’ meaning of poetry is an

³ Kane, D. *What is Poetry: Conversations With the American Avant Garde* (New York: Teachers & Writers Books, 2003), 5.

⁴ DuPlessis, R.B. *Blue Studios: Poetry and Its Cultural Work* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), 199.

⁵ Ibid..

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Pierce, R.B. ‘Defining ‘Poetry.’’ *Philosophy and Literature* 27:1 (2003), pp. 151-163, 152.

imaginary goal, since social use is precisely what constitutes meaning.⁸ Nonetheless, Pierce still proposes that his definition constitutes ‘a vehicle for talking and writing about poetry that should aid the critical enterprise.’⁹

It should be clear that if we make our definition of poetic thought dependent on our definition of poetry, our conception of poetic thought will vary greatly depending on which of these lines of definition we follow. If we are to define poetry by its effects — by emotion, for instance — we will either neglect the political implications raised in a poetics such as Simic’s poetry of atten(s)ion, or attempt to reach such effects through the text’s construction of emotion (which may or may not be possible). Conversely, if we rely on a formal definition of poetry, those phenomenological implications in a poetics such as O’Hara’s will become obscured, unless we can see them coming about through form. Finally, while relying on a family resemblance notion of poetry to elucidate poetic thought may be the least problematic of the three routes, it is also the least helpful. If we define poetry as simply those texts which utilise common techniques, we are left with little clue as to how thinking through those texts might occur — poetic thought simply becomes a tautology; a way of reading those characteristics that define a particular way of reading.

In opposition to the above routes, then, I wish to propose that poetry can be understood as the form, while poetic thought is the *method by which both artists and readers create (possible) meaning*. To be sure, different poems encourage poetic thought to varying degrees, but I do not think they are any more or less a *poem* for doing so. What is most important here is that by separating out our definition of poetry from our conception of poetic thought we are able to expand our consideration of the latter to include the author or artist, the reader, as well as the meanings embedded and encoded within the text (such as at the level of emotionality).

What is Thinking?

Though much of what has been considered thus far concerns Heidegger’s earlier work, most notably *Being and Time*, the notion of creativity as a form of thinking stems in large part from Heidegger’s later work, particularly in *What is Called Thinking?* (1968).¹⁰ The title, *Was heist denken?*, can be translated as either *What is called thinking?* or *What calls for thinking?*, a fact which, as Brent Dean Robbins (2014) points out, demonstrates that

⁸ Ibid., 159.

⁹ Ibid., 152.

¹⁰ Heidegger, M. *What Is Called Thinking?* (New York: Harper Collins, 1976).

to even begin addressing the question of *what thinking is called*, one must also answer at the same time the question of *what calls for thinking*.¹¹

For Heidegger, in an increasingly technological society what most pressingly calls for thinking is thinking itself, and specifically the fact that we are *not thinking*. This lack of thought stems from the withdrawal of Being in a technological society defined by enframing. To recall my point in the first chapter, Heidegger comes to think of objects in the world in this sense as *Bestand* — ‘standing-reserve’¹² — and warns that imposing our use on the environment (enframing; *Gestell*)¹³ is antithetical to authentic artistic creation (that kind of art, as *poiesis*, that he sees as enacting the strife between earth and world). Under such conditions thinking is increasingly reduced to mere instrumental rationality, employed to dominate a world of things. Robbins neatly summarises this process as follows:

If it is Being that most calls for thought, what most calls to be thought about in our age is the forgetting or withdrawal of Being. And it is due to the withdrawal of Being that we are still not thinking. In contrast to Hegel’s notion of history, Heidegger’s is a history wherein we find ourselves increasingly fallen from and more distant from Being. Being withdraws in our technological age as the experience of thinking is reduced to calculative rationality. ‘Thinking’ has become the experience of using rationality as a device to operate on a world of things already reified into a network of ends. In our age, Heidegger (1968) will go on to argue, *ratio* has trumped *legein*. The thoughtfulness of calculative rationality threatens to obliterate the possibility for being-thoughtful.¹⁴

Insofar as *poiesis* enacts the strife between earth and world, it is not only thinking *par excellence*, but is that kind of thinking that returns us to Being itself and so begins to combat the dangers of technology. While the core of the problem of technology and instrumentalisation lies, for Heidegger, in a forgetfulness of Being itself, the implications extend far beyond the individual and begin to manifest in society as a whole. Indeed, this is the starting point for the social pathologies Horkheimer and Adorno diagnose in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944),¹⁵ wherein

¹¹ Robbins, B. ‘Joyful Thinking-Thanking: A Reading of Heidegger’s “What Is Called Thinking?”’ *Janus Head* 13:12 (2013), pp.13-21, 13.

¹² Heidegger, M. and Krell, D.F., ed., *Basic Writings*. Second Edition, Revised and Expanded (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 322.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 325.

¹⁴ Robbins, B. ‘Joyful Thinking-Thanking,’ 14.

¹⁵ Adorno, T. and Horkheimer, M. *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

reification legitimises the domination (and subsequent destruction) of nature. As Horkheimer and Adorno write, under processes of reification:

Myth becomes enlightenment and nature mere objectivity. Human beings purchase the increase in their power with estrangement from that over which it is exerted. Enlightenment stands in the same relationship to things as the dictator to human beings. He knows them to the extent that he can manipulate them. The man of science knows things to the extent that he can make them. Their "in-itself" becomes "for him." In their transformation the essence of things is revealed as always the same, a substrate of domination.¹⁶

It is in this way that enlightenment rationality is inherently dialectical, since it entails a project of setting humanity apart from a nature we are inextricably a part of. Processes of domination thus inevitably come to mean domination of not only nature, but each other, as reification not only subjectifies the objective world but objectifies (or commodifies) subjects. As Horkheimer and Adorno later write:

Not only is domination paid for with the estrangement of human beings from the dominated objects, but the relationships of human beings, including the relationship of individuals to themselves, have themselves been bewitched by the objectification of mind. Individuals shrink to the nodal points of conventional reactions and the modes of operation objectively expected of them. Animism had endowed things with souls; industrialism makes souls into things.¹⁷

I have already argued in some detail how a reversal of such processes can be worked toward through poetics, such as in the atten(s)ion of Charles Simic. But the more crucial point is that, at least for Heidegger, much of the socio-political fallout associated with reification stems directly from a flawed metaphysics; that metaphysics which separates *poeisis* from instrumental rationality, and in so doing begins to forget Being itself. *Poeisis*, then, must be restored as, most fundamentally, thinking. As Krzysztof Ziarek puts it in *Inflected Language: Toward a Hermeneutics of Nearness* (1994):

[...] poetry is not only an infold of thinking into Being, a transappropriation (*Übereignung*), but also an

¹⁶ Ibid., 6.

¹⁷ Ibid., 21.

address, a directing of language, as it comes into words, toward the other.’¹⁸

In this way poetry becomes phenomenologically, ontologically, and ultimately politically significant, as an (un)reifying process of world-disclosure. Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei, whose work I will return to, relates this significance of poetry to *transcendence* or transformation. As she writes in *Heidegger, Hölderlin, and the Subject of Poetic Language* (2004):

For, exceeding the release of drives and the rhythms of the body, a new level of significance comes into being when a work of art, in our case a poem, is composed. This creation, related to transcendence or transformation [...] indicates poetry's phenomenological and ontological relevance.¹⁹

This is all not to defend a particular conception of poetry *per se*, but rather to highlight the reasons a clear-cut distinction between *poesis* and thought is problematic, and increasingly so. With a broader view of thinking now on the table, we are getting closer to what I have argued as being distinctive about *poetic thought*.

What Does It Mean To ‘Think Poetically’?

To the extent that poetic language, at least for the early Heidegger,²⁰ offers access to truth as disclosure (*Aletheia*) rather than truth as correspondence between language and a state of affairs in the world, poetic language has a certain primacy over technological thinking; it is that which brings us back to Being and is accordingly central to phenomenological and ontological conceptions of truth. As Gosetti-Ferencei writes:

[...] poetic language, furthermore, is shown to be an access to truth neither as correctness nor as the correspondence between thought and actuality but as a process of partial, and therefore finite, disclosure. That we are bearers of language and therefore privy to this disclosure — to Being itself — becomes the matter for thinking. What is most erroneous in technological thinking and in the technological domination of beings — namely, the forgetting of Being, or *Seinsvergessenheit* —

¹⁸ Ziarek, K. *Inflected Language: Toward a Hermeneutics of Nearness: Heidegger, Levinas, Stevens, Celan* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), 161.

¹⁹ Gosetti-Ferencei, J.A. *Heidegger, Hölderlin, and the Subject of Poetic Language: Toward a New Poetics of Dasein* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 215.

²⁰ As noted by Daniel O. Dahlstrom, in 1964, over thirty years after the publication of *Being and Time*, Heidegger would write that ‘The question of *Aletheia*, of the unconcealment as such, is not the question of truth. For this reason it was not in accordance with the matter and, consequently, it was misleading to call *Aletheia* in the sense of the clearing ‘truth.’ Nonetheless, for my purposes here I remain with Heidegger’s earlier thought. See Dahlstrom, D.O. and Pippin, R.B. *Heidegger's Concept of Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 403.

is overcome, illuminating the finitude of all disclosure of what is. Since for Heidegger poetic language admits this finitude — that it is a revealing — it becomes the most compelling source for a phenomenological-ontological account of truth.²¹

In this way the poet becomes the archetypal truth-teller, since the poet listens to Being itself, and is thus intimately connected with meaning *per se*. To quote Gosetti-Ferencei a final time:

[...] Heidegger claims further that poetry, which makes this relation of words to earth and to Being apparent, is ‘essential’ language, and that the language of speaking subjects is actually derivative of a prior ‘Saying’ on the part of Being, a Saying in which the poet, who ‘listens’ to Being, engages.²²

[...] Poetic language is distinct from ordinary language in that it is, though socially communicative, not exclusively an attempt at communication, which aims at conveying a meaning; poetic language involves, rather, a heterogeneity to meaning.²³

In light of Heidegger’s conception of poetry and thought, then, the phrase ‘thinking poetically’ comes to seem almost tautological, since poetry is thought *par excellence*. To borrow I.A. Richards’ famous phrase, the book — in this case the book of poetry — is simply ‘a machine to think with.’²⁴ It should hopefully be clear by this point that, while I do consider this connection with Being a fundamental aspect of poetry itself, what I am arguing for is a different, rather broader conception of *poetic thought*. If, as Heidegger suggests, we expand our concept of thinking to include *poesis* and disclosure, and we further acknowledge the dynamic nature of meaning-creation in and through texts (a view which includes the author or artist, the reader, as well as the meanings embedded and encoded within the text), it makes sense, then, to view poetic thought as the process — the necessarily creative act — by which (possible) meaning is constructed in and through art. Iain Thomson provides the most lucid summary of this creative process, which it is worth quoting at length, when he writes in ‘Heideggerian Perfectionism and the Phenomenology of the Pedagogical Truth Event’ (2013):

The guiding hermeneutic principle to follow — pedagogically, phenomenologically, and existentially — is that there is more than one inherent meaning to be found in things. For, if being is conceptually

²¹ Gosetti-Ferencei, J.A. *Heidegger, Hölderlin, and the Subject of Poetic Language*, 5.

²² *Ibid.*, 209.

²³ *Ibid.*, 211.

²⁴ Quoted in Winterowd, W.R. ‘I. A. Richards, Literary Theory, and Romantic Composition,’ *Rhetoric Review* 11:1 (1992), pp. 59-78, 61.

inexhaustible, capable of yielding meaning again and again, then the intrinsic meanings of things must be plural (or essentially polysemic), however paradoxical such a doctrine of ontological pluralism might now seem, given our current obsession with formal systems capable of securing monosemic exactitude. Indeed, to understand the being of the entities we encounter in a *postmodern* way is to no longer preconceive everything we experience either as *modern* objects to be controlled or as *late-modern* resources to be optimised but, instead, to learn phenomenologically to discern and creatively develop the independent meanings, solicitations, and affordances of things, becoming vigilantly open to the multiple suggestions things offer us, to the point of dedicating ourselves — as teachers, as students, and as human beings — to creatively bringing forth such hints responsively and responsibly into the world.²⁵

Throughout the various chapters that comprise this thesis I have attempted to sample a broad spectrum of writers whose work enacts precisely this process — creatively bringing forth, discerning and creatively developing some of the inexhaustible meanings to be found in things, as well as in sound, in emotion and in words. Thomson highlights the seeming paradox of ontological pluralism; the tension between meanings being both real and fixed within a text, while simultaneously fluid and inexhaustible. My suggestion is that, while this may be the most central dialectic of poetic thought, there are many others, and that the process of poetic thought as it occurs through art is always one of navigating dialectics in order to create (possible) meaning.

To briefly recount some of the dialectics that have come to light, I argued in the first chapter, among other things, that a poem is always one and many; it is comprised of both the text itself and the cognitive event of its being read, as well as the infinite possibilities of its reception (its language-character, in Adorno's terms). We can add, further, the conception of flow as navigating a dialectic of ontological and virtual time; the creation of a 'temporal world' that allows for musical cognition. The poetry of Sharon Olds has highlighted the interdependence of aesthetic appraisal and cognitive affect, and how dialectical meta-emotion might promote reader empathy in the real world. In the fourth chapter, Simic's work has exhibited a dialectic of meaning and non-meaning, Being and non-being, which attempts to point toward what an unreified world might look like. Finally, Bukowski's construction of a detached self, built on

²⁵ Thomson, I. 'Heideggerian Perfectionism and the Phenomenology of the Pedagogical Truth Event,' in Hermberg, K. and Gyllenhammer, P., eds., *Phenomenology and Virtue Ethics* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 188.

dialectics of self and other, author and reader, life and death, has shown how poetry might not only construct biography, but identity.

Certainly, this is far from an exhaustive list of how poetic thought operates as the navigation of dialectics. But in highlighting how dialectics function in rap and contemporary American poetry — as ontological, rhythmic, emotional, political, and intersubjective tension — I hope to have made it plausible that, at the very least, the way (possible) meaning is constructed through these artforms is in large part via the navigation of such dialectics. Moreover, if we follow a post-Heideggerian conception of poetic thought as involving, firstly, a certain receptivity to the multiplicity of meanings (we might say, affordances) in the world and, secondly, a creative act of disclosing those worlds, it seems to follow that the various instances of creativity explored throughout this thesis should be seen as acts of poetic thought (as are the acts of reading them). Combining these two points, to the extent that (possible) meaning throughout has been fundamentally contingent on the navigation of dialectics — and across such broad artforms, styles and poetics — I will suggest that poetic thought as a creative act *necessarily* clusters around dialectics; around points where contradictions, inversions — tensions — come to generate (possible) meaning. To the extent that poetic thought necessarily *functions through* the navigation of dialectics, a (re)introduction of dialectics into the field of poetics is necessary not only to better understand poetic thought, but to better understand poetic texts, their authors and the creative act of reading them.

There is a certain school of thought that suggests that whatever can be learnt from a text, this necessarily has to be gleaned through the construction or co-consideration of additional frameworks through which that text is studied. The philosopher Liam Miller for instance, has recently claimed in an interview with *The Philosopher's Zone* (2018) that:

Even a good text [...] requires the almost pedagogical structuring and scaffolding to then have a critical analysis. [...] There's nothing inherently in Shakespeare itself that is educational. It's the structuring that we would then put behind it so that we [can] draw out what's happening in *Hamlet* or *Othello*, and why these characters are important. Critical reflection is something that has to be added to [texts].²⁶

I argued in the third chapter that Sharon Olds' poetry manipulates a relationship between valence and appraisal that is a universal evolutionary adaptation, and that the text's most poignant (possible) meanings are expressed *through* emotional systems that are hardwired into our

²⁶ Miller, L. 'Playing Around', in *The Philosophers Zone* (Podcast). November 11, 2018. Accessed November 12, 2018. URL = <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/philosopherszone/playing-around/10472698>.

biological makeup. Moreover, following Katrin Pahl, I have argued for a presence of emotionality in the text, a term which allows us to locate and speak of emotion *in the language of the text itself*, rather than in the author or in the reader. Finally, insofar as being human entails a ‘need for feeling,’²⁷ in Koopman’s terms, I have suggested that emotional tension established via these systems may be one of the most pervasive manifestations of poetic thought.

Clearly, all of these arguments run counter to the notion that there can be nothing educational in a text itself, and that conceptual frameworks needed to be added onto a work in order to draw out (possible) meaning. This is important because — to the extent this is possible — I wish to distinguish the conception of poetic thought I have argued for from any specific ideological vantage point or philosophical framework. Although the way of understanding poetic thought I have argued for has distinctively Heideggerian underpinnings, it is important to note that poetic thought itself operates in spite of our definition of what poetic thought is. If my *descriptive* argument that poetic thought functions through the navigation of dialectics holds, it follows that ‘pedagogical structuring and scaffolding’ do not need to be added onto a text in order to learn from the text; rather, poetic thought allows (possible) meaning to come through *engagement with the text itself*. In other words, this idea of poetic thought is antithetical to the idea that texts cannot be educational in themselves. The concepts I have employed throughout — the *environment-at-hand*, musical cognition, emotionality and dialectical meta-emotion, atten(s)ion, and the detached self — are not conceptual apparatuses that act as a lens through which to view texts; they are manifestations of poetic thought that suggest meaning itself is primarily a matter of readerly engagement, grounded in our shared physiological, emotional, perceptual and psychological evolution. The further *normative* claim I wish to make, which relies on the plausibility of the above, is that by defining poetic thought in these terms we are able to better understand the way (possible) meaning is constructed in texts, and so improve our literary analyses and critical poetics. Before further exploring this claim, however, I first wish to stay on the topic of poetic thought, and summarise in light of the preceding discussions what it may be able to achieve.

What Can Thinking Poetically Achieve?

The idea that the arts, and particularly literature, can be profoundly revealing of the human condition stretches back to at least Aristotle, whose views on literature and particularly his notion

²⁷ Koopman, E.M. ‘Why Do We Read Sad Books? Eudaimonic Motives and Meta-Emotions,’ *Poetics* 52:1 (2015), pp. 18-31, 18.

of *phronêsis* are worth very briefly repurposing here. As Paul Ricoeur writes in 'Life in Quest of Narrative' (1991):

Aristotle did not hesitate to say that every well-told story teaches us something; moreover, he said that the story reveals universal aspects of the human condition and that, in this respect, poetry was more philosophical than history, which is too dependent on the anecdotal aspect of life. Whatever may be said about this relation between poetry and history, it is certain that tragedy, epic and comedy, to cite only those genres known to Aristotle, develop a sort of understanding that can be termed narrative understanding and which is much closer to the practical wisdom of moral judgment than to science, or more generally, to the theoretical use of reason.²⁸

While I have already argued through specific instances for some potential ethical, political and ontological implications of poetic thinking, Aristotle's notion of a different kind of understanding — practical wisdom; *phronesis*, which in part ties in with the views of Martha Nussbaum and Iain Thomson — opens the potential to suggest a more practical application of poetic thought. For Aristotle, *phronesis* entails the means by which goals are achieved, a propensity to understand what to do in a given situation given particular ends. As Jessica Moss (2011) writes:

Virtue makes the goal right; *phronesis* is responsible only for what contributes to the goal. That is, practical intellect does not tell us what ends to pursue, but only how to pursue them; our ends themselves are set by our ethical characters.²⁹

In two respects, there are important parallels here with the view I am suggesting of poetic thought. Firstly, the fact that poetic thought functions through the navigation of dialectics does not necessitate that such dialectics are aimed toward any *particular* goal or (possible) meaning. Structurally, then, poetic thought mirrors *phronesis* to the extent it is not value-laden; it does not tell us what (possible) meanings to look for in a certain text, but rather *how* they are being constructed and thus how to pursue them.

Secondly, and more importantly, the view of poetic thought I am suggesting should be understood not as isolated events of meaning *but as a propensity or a habit*, and thus one that can

²⁸ Ricoeur, P. 'Life in Quest of Narrative', in Wood, D. et al., eds. *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*. (London: Routledge, 1991), 22.

²⁹ Moss, J. 'Virtue Makes the Goal Right: Virtue and 'Phronesis' in Aristotle's Ethics,' *Phronesis* 56:3 (2011), pp. 204-261, 205.

be nurtured or neglected (in line with the virtue ethics of Aristotle, as well as the line of argument I have suggested in the poetry of Sharon Olds). Since poetic thought is not necessarily tied to the interpretation of, or even the engagement with, poetry *per se*, it can be seen as a means for approaching meaning in any artform, indeed any domain, and in the world itself. If poetic thought is simply a receptivity to the multiplicity of meanings in the world, as well as the creative act of disclosing those meanings (via the navigation of dialectics), then a propensity for poetic thought is akin to practical wisdom — *phronesis* — because it is a practical way of engaging with the world that is responsible for contributing to one's creative goals. Accordingly, it might make less sense to say that a particular artist *has* (or *has a*) poetic thought, or that their work *contains* poetic thought, than to say that their work is *indicative of, or conducive to*, poetic thought.

With this in mind, it becomes clearer now the kinds of things poetic thought can achieve, not simply as a tool or a literary device, but as a way of looking at literature and at the world as endlessly meaningful. To return to Iain Thomson a final time:

[...] the primary phenomenological lesson Heidegger drew from art is that when things are approached with openness and respect, they push back against us, making subtle but undeniable claims on us, and we need to learn to acknowledge and respond creatively to these claims if we do not want to deny the source of genuine meaning in the world. For, only meanings which are at least partly independent of us and so not entirely within our control — not simply up to us to bestow and rescind at will — can provide us with the kind of touchstones around which we can build meaningful lives and loves.³⁰

Many of the manifestations of poetic thought glimpsed throughout the preceding chapters can be seen as instances of the 'openness and respect' to which Thomson alludes — in particular the utilisation of the *environment-at-hand*, flow as musical cognition, and atten(s)ion. But perhaps the most significant implication for *what this all can achieve* was highlighted in the analysis of Simic, a poetics that evokes a dialectic of meaning and non-meaning. The most ambitious potential for poetic thought and the various ways in which it is enacted is as an antidote to nihilism; an insistence on poetically disclosing meaning within a world (an ecological whole of which we are also a part), rather than imposing meaning as subjects onto a world of mere objects. Referring to his book *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity* (2011), which has already been

³⁰ Thomson, I. 'Heideggerian Perfectionism and the Phenomenology of the Pedagogical Truth Event,' 185.

explored in the first chapter, Thomson writes poignantly in ‘Nihilism as the Deepest Problem; Art as the Best Response’ (2016):

One of the central theses of *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity* is that this crucial difference between imposing and disclosing — or between technological imposition and poetic disclosure — is the crucial distinction between the meaninglessness of our technological understanding of being and those meaning-full encounters that a postmodern understanding of ourselves and our worlds help give rise to, nurture, and encourage.³¹

If the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School are right in suggesting that in a hypermodernised, increasingly digital society objects are increasingly viewed solely as ‘things’ one can potentially make a profit on, while subjects become mere ‘objects’ of transaction, and if, further, Heidegger is right in suggesting that our modern conception of being itself encourages meaninglessness as technological imposition, then poetic thought becomes not only an antidote to reification, but to nihilism. It is the insistence of both meaning and our own form of being — Dasein; the fact that we are inherently engaged meaning-makers — in a world that seems increasingly meaningless. It is a form of practical wisdom that promotes ‘meaning-full encounters’ within the world, with ourselves and with each other.

What Does It Mean to Be Human?

At the outset I quoted David Berliner, who has suggested that ‘we humans are structurally made of contradictions, living peacefully, sometimes painfully, with our oxymoronic selves.’³² I very briefly examined the philosophies of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Heidegger, and suggested that at a broad stroke it can be said that each of these philosophers held that a form of tension, if not contradiction, lies at the core of what it means to be human (if not reality itself). Partly in line with these thinkers, I claimed that all of the textual analyses offered throughout the thesis should begin to bear out that what it means to be human is to exist in a state of perpetual tension, and that poetic thought is that kind of thought that underscores, explores and exploits our fundamental contradictions. But how do the dialectics evidenced throughout connect back to what I am suggesting is the core of what makes us human?

³¹ Thomson, I. ‘Nihilism as the Deepest Problem; Art as the Best Response,’ *IIIIXIII: Four By Three Magazine* 5 (2016). Online. Accessed October 4, 2018. URL = <http://www.fourbythreemagazine.com/issue/nihilism/iain-thomson>.

³² Berliner, D. ‘How Our Contradictions Make Us Human and Inspire Creativity,’ *Aeon* December 7, 2016. Online. Accessed November 5, 2017. URL = <https://aeon.co/ideas/how-our-contradictions-make-us-human-and-inspire-creativity>

To return briefly to the notion of dialectic I have in mind, in case it has become obscured through the various forms it has taken, dialectic here is characterised by *tension*; inversions and opposing forces within texts and within the world are manifestations of dialectic. As Michael Ryan (2004) writes,

A critical component of the dialectic is a concern with conflict and contradiction. Dialecticians do not see social phenomena as inevitably weaving nicely together or, as a structural functionalist might, as being different organs of the same social body. Instead, they view various aspects of society in constant conflict with one another. Each aspect of society, as well as the society as a whole, is riddled with contradictions.³³

I have already explored at length the nature of Dasein, which itself rests on a dialectic of disclosing worlds, of opening up spaces of meaning out of meaninglessness. We might add to this a number of ways in which — and core aspects of these have already come to light — to be human means to exist in a state of perpetual tension, emotionally, psychologically, ecologically, and politically.

To recall a point made in the third chapter, though in a slightly different light, the psychologist Paul Bloom writes in *How Pleasure Works* (2010):

Animals need water to survive, and so they are motivated to seek it out. Pleasure is the reward for getting it; pain is the punishment for doing without.³⁴

I have argued that this hardwired relationship between valence and appraisal underpins our emotional lives, including love and empathy, as well as aversion and conflict. The correlation neatly explains the trajectory of primary emotions — interest, joy, distress, anger, fear, anxiety, surprise, and disgust — but it is also useful when we consider what are often called ‘complex’ or ‘mixed’ emotions, a blending of two or more primary emotions.³⁵ Clearly, the experience of mixed emotions is a common aspect of what it means to be a human being, and there is reason to believe that such emotions, like primary emotions, are linked to our evolutionary history. As

³³ See Ryan, M. ‘Dialectic’, in Ritzer, G., ed., *Encyclopedia of Social Theory* (London: SAGE Publications, 2004), pp. 199-200, 200.

³⁴ Quoted in Bloom, P. *How Pleasure Works: The New Science of Why We Like What We Like* (London: Bodley Head, 2010), 33.

³⁵ Heshmat, S. ‘What Does It Mean to Have Mixed Feelings?’ in *Psychology Today* March 25, 2016. Online. Accessed November 18, 2018. URL = <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/science-choice/201603/what-does-it-mean-have-mixed-feelings>

health specialist and author of *Addiction: A Behavioural Economic Perspective* (2015), Shahram Heshmat writes:

Mixed emotions can often be an important strategy in coping with negative life events (dealing with loss). Indeed, research suggests a link between mixed emotions and physical health. The ability to experience negative emotion alongside positive emotion enables individuals to find something positive in stressful situations. For example, when experiencing the loss of a loved one, allowing positive memories to be experienced alongside sadness could potentially lead to a healthier form of grieving. In other words, ‘taking good with the bad’ may be a key to better coping and resilience.³⁶

To the extent that mixed emotions are a ubiquitous aspect of the human experience, combined with the fact that such emotional balancing might promote health (and thus be evolutionarily advantageous), I suggest that one defining aspect of the human experience in emotional terms is tension and contradiction, in other words balancing ‘the good with the bad.’

Perhaps the most prevalent form of tension in human psychology is *cognitive dissonance*. For over sixty years psychologists have been exploring this phenomenon, which entails the holding of two or more cognitive states that are inconsistent, and so cause a state of both psychological and often physiological tension. As one of the pioneers into cognitive dissonance theory, Leon Festinger writes in *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (1957),

The holding of two or more inconsistent cognitions arouses the state of cognitive dissonance, which is experienced as uncomfortable tension. This tension has drive-like properties and must be reduced.³⁷

Summarising a number of findings from dissonance theory research, Joel Cooper (2007) points out that this state takes a large number of forms, from the disconnect felt when the reality of a planned event fails to meet the prior expectation of it; to the dissonance experienced when there is a discordance between current and future happiness; to the theory of self-affirmation — the fact we often rationalise bad actions in order to coincide with our more positive notions of self (as Cooper puts it, ‘people will distort their cognitions about themselves in the service of protecting

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Quoted in Cooper, J. *Cognitive Dissonance: 50 Years of a Classic Theory* (London: SAGE Publications, 2007), 7.

their self-system.’³⁸ While some studies suggest that such experiences are often exacerbated in individuals who suffer from some degree of mental illness,³⁹ it is important to note that such dissonance is a common aspect of our daily lives. As Cooper argues in *Cognitive Dissonance: 50 Years of a Classic Theory*:

Cognitive dissonance is a ubiquitous phenomenon. We make choices all of the time [...] At universities, we choose courses to take, courses to teach, books to buy. At home, we choose television programs to watch, vacations to take, and even automobiles to purchase. Each time we make one of those decisions, we are subjected to the experience of cognitive dissonance and we are likely to take action to reduce it.⁴⁰

To the extent that cognitive dissonance — an experience of tension and conflict between expectation and reality, short- and long-term desires, action and self-conception — is a ubiquitous, cross-cultural aspect of our common, lived experience, it might be seen as a fundamental aspect of what it means to be human.

I have already argued at length for the tensions enacted by ongoing processes of reification, as explored by Horkeimer and Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) and Honneth (2008). One of the core underlying premises of such works, and indeed in Heidegger’s later work, is the paradox that in a technologised society the human world is increasingly viewed in opposition to the natural world of which it is inextricably a part. It is worth noting that other thinkers, including Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1972) have likewise interrogated this dynamic, attempting to resituate the human and social worlds in terms of the natural. Deleuze and Guattari write, for instance, in the early pages of *Anti-Oedipus* (1972):

We make no distinction between man and nature: the human essence of nature and the natural essence of man become one within nature in the form of production or industry, just as they do within the life of man as a species [...] man and nature are not like two opposite terms confronting one another — not even in the sense of bipolar opposites within a relationship of causation, ideation, or expression (cause and effect, subject and object, etc.); rather, they are one and the same essential reality, the producer-product.⁴¹

³⁸ Ibid., 91.

³⁹ Ibid., 102.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 14.

⁴¹ Deleuze, G. et al. *Anti-Oedipus* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2004), 4.

Deleuze and Guattari's project in this and later works is thus, at least in part, a reconceptualisation of the place of human beings within a larger ecological whole, and as such can be seen as a project against reification. As Paul Sheehan (2004) suggests in 'Postmodernism and Philosophy':

[...] one of the things this transformative text gestures towards is a new ecological understanding, a dynamic, nonhierarchical relationship between human beings and the natural environmental (plants and animals) that curbs human dominion and narcissism [...]⁴²

Since reification increasingly sets the human against the natural world, such a reconceptualisation of humanity existing within a larger ecological whole — and it has been shown how this occurs in the poetics of Simic — might begin to remedy a view of the natural world as simply a resource to be dominated, optimised and exploited. This is, of course, something of an uphill battle, given the historical rootedness of not only Cartesian dualism (and the subsequent view of subjects existing over and above objects), but also the increasing entrenchment of process of reification and commodification. As Fredric Jameson writes in *Geopolitical Aesthetic* (1995):

today as never before we must focus on a reification and a commodification that have become so universalised as to seem well-nigh natural and organic entities and forms.⁴³

Although this process is, as I have argued, at least partly reversible (and of course in the political arena even more so than through the modest powers of literature), what it means to be human in modernity has increasingly meant existing in a state of ecological and political tension, against a world of which we are inextricably a part.

The aspects of tension and dialectic crudely outlined above are of course matters of much scholarly debate, and it is not my intention to caricature such premises as conclusions. Instead, I present them here as avenues that may support my broad claim — which is too broad to be defended adequately here — that to be human is to exist in a state of perpetual tension. If that claim has merit, along with my core argument that poetic thought entails the navigation of dialectics in order to produce (possible) meaning, it follows that poetic thought is the most human(e) way of thinking: it not only underscores a fundamental nature of what it means to be human, but it promotes and encourages a creative embrace of that nature toward creative ends.

⁴² Sheehan, P. 'Postmodernism and Philosophy,' in Connor, S., ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 27.

⁴³ Jameson, F. *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 212.

A Note on Deconstruction

The arguments I have been advancing, particularly regarding dialectics and being human (entailing being in a state of perpetual tension) may seem somewhat anachronistic, particularly coming after the momentous shift in literary studies in the wake of deconstruction. Derrida's project, in large part aimed at the dismantling of texts in order to diagnose underlying ideological structures, was of course deeply critical of dichotomies. As Barry Stocker (2006) points out, 'Derrida defines metaphysics, and criticises it, to a large degree on the basis that it is a reduction to oppositions.'⁴⁴ Derrida's approach then becomes one of dismantling such dualities. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2016) explains, in one of the rare astute summaries of deconstruction as it applies to literature:

To locate the promising marginal text, to disclose the undecidable moment, to pry it loose with the positive lever of the signifier; to reverse the resident hierarchy, only to displace it; to dismantle in order to reconstitute what is always already inscribed. Deconstruction in a nutshell.⁴⁵

To the extent that I have invoked dialectic as a defining aspect of poetic thought — that through which it functions and, further, that I have suggested that to be human is to be in a perpetual state of tension, it might seem that the arguments presented here are decisively logocentric, and so prey to deconstruction; a legitimisation of dualities that should be attacked rather than defended. Particularly so because, as Stocker suggests, such dualities for Derrida are inherently hierarchical. Stocker writes:

For Derrida, the metaphysical tradition has always included a moral view of Good and Evil as absolute opposites, which belongs to a series of oppositions. These are the oppositions of truth and falsity, being and seeming, the inside and the outside, the natural and the social. [...] according to Derrida [...] the point is to avoid the hierarchy rather than invert it. Nevertheless, for Derrida inverting the hierarchy can be the first stage of deconstructive strategy since it shakes the hold of metaphysical assumptions and can lead us to find ways that resist the formation of these hierarchies.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Stocker, B. *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Derrida on Deconstruction* (New York and London: Taylor & Francis, 2006), 43.

⁴⁵ Spivak, G.C. 'Translator's Preface,' in Derrida, J. et al. *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), c.

⁴⁶ Cadieux, R. 'Dialectics and the Economy of Différance,' *An Independent International Journal in the Critical Tradition Committed to the Transformation of our Society and the Humane Union of Theory and Practice* 20:3 (1995), pp. 319-340, 329.

Yet, as this quote suggests, deconstruction is less a process of rejecting dichotomies than systematically interrogating them; it is a process of seeking those textual and social realities that resist neat categorisation and so ‘shake the hold of [our] metaphysical assumptions.’ In this way the arguments made throughout this thesis might be seen not as prey to deconstruction, but rather entirely *consistent* with a deconstructive approach. After all, the *environment-at-hand* in the poetry of Frank O’Hara, the dialectical meta-emotion in Sharon Olds, atten(s)ion in the poetry of Simic and the detached self of Charles Bukowski are all manifestations of dialectic that *destabilise* rather than legitimise oppositions between earth and world, valence and appraisal, subject and object, life and death. Insofar as the approach here has been one of foregrounding tension, it should be seen, like deconstruction, as a way of critically engaging with the dialectics it examines. With that to one side, it is worth briefly returning to highlight some of the most significant gaps the research here has left us with, and what might be required to more fully elucidate the nature of poetic thought.

Implications for Further Research

I have suggested in the first chapter that, in spite of Heidegger’s ‘turn’ and subsequent rejection of much of his earlier ontology, there is nonetheless much to be gained from a return to his work in *Being and Time*, in particular his tripartite ontology between substances, equipment and Dasein. Despite the enormous attention *Being and Time* has received, the arguments I have made here suggest that there is much further to be explored in how the *environment-at-hand* not only might fit within an ontological structure, but how it might aid an understanding of our creative processes. Accordingly, this line of argument would gain a great deal from a further consideration of the neurological aspects of creativity, in order to examine whether there are empirical grounds for the claim that there is something unique about the way artists utilise the environment for creative ends.

The second chapter, which entailed a lengthy digression into musicology in order to develop the flowprint system, clearly requires a great deal of further work if the approach is to be of use as an analytical tool. Aside from further automation, the flowprint system requires further refinement in order to visualise not only the onset of phones, but their duration (although some difficulties with this have already been explored). Further, though the flowprint system was designed with the specific intention of visualising flow in rap, it has clear potentials for the tracking of sound within not only other music genres, but within speech prosody. The colourisation and tracking of phones may then be useful in order to recognise speech patterns,

and so aspects of it — particularly if it can be further automated — may be of potential use within linguistics and grammarology.

The controversial claim that reading poetry can make one a better person, which I have only been able to briefly defend here, deserves a far more thorough explanation. It remains to be seen, for instance, whether dialectical meta-emotion is characteristic of Sharon Olds' various other works, or lyric poetry as a whole, or indeed poetry in general. Moreover, and as previously mentioned, the framework of core affect could equally be applied to other artforms, and little evidence has been presented to suggest that dialectical meta-emotion is a distinctive aspect of poetry. Accordingly, the concept of dialectical meta-emotion requires an expansion in both breadth and depth; a more expansive consideration of whether and how it functions across various artforms and, more importantly, whether there is physiological evidence to support the claim that dialectical meta-emotion entails an inversion of our appraisal and valence systems.

If there is some truth to the arguments I have presented for both the poetry of Sharon Olds and that of Charles Simic, it might seem to suggest significant practical implications for poetry. The claim, for instance, that certain poetry can 'point to what an unreified world might look like' seems to position such work as something of a political guidebook, rather than as a work of art. There are no doubt significant limitations to what poetry can achieve, and I do not wish to overstate the claims to its political import. Nonetheless, to the extent that Simic's poetry remembers things and engages dialectically with a phenomenological apprehension of world, its reading (like the viewing of Van Gogh's *A Pair of Shoes*) becomes a self-reflexive process of engagement with our own situatedness within and against a world. If it is true, as I think it is, that such works are a lens — if an imperfect one — into unreification, then Simic's poetry is inherently political. Of course, having only examined a small sample of Simic's work, these claims as they pertain to Simic would require further justification. And it would be worth examining more broadly the potentials for unreification through other artforms. If such processes are possible, poetic thought here conceived may become useful as a pedagogical tool, or even a form of protest.

In the final chapter I argued the possibility for (and indeed ultimate necessity of) self-detachment; the point at which the self loses its centre of gravity, its embodiment and its 'mineness,' without itself evaporating. As I have suggested, by conceiving of the self as porous in this way we will no doubt run into thorny philosophical territory, and a great number of difficult questions arise. If selves are the locus of morality, for instance, do we have moral obligations for detached selves? If selfhood is scalar, as I have suggested, is there some metric by which it can be

studied? At what point can we say that embodiment and personhood have interacted sufficiently to speak of a self being present? Is the notion of a detached self a help or a hinderance to the grieving process that follows the death of a loved one? If we take the notion of scalar and distributed selves to their natural conclusion — which I have argued is self-detachment — these are some of the difficult yet necessary questions which must be asked. Their answers, which lie beyond the scope of this thesis, would go a long way to clarifying the intricacies of a notion of selfhood that I have only been able to sketch in broad strokes here.

Throughout each of the preceding chapters I have engaged with a number of domains that are outside the usual field of literary studies, with the hope that such an interdisciplinary approach might raise a number of avenues for further research. Such cross-pollination should of course be met with some scepticism, and given the rate of advancement in the various fields the arguments presented here are necessarily always on shifting grounds. As Chloe Harrison and Peter Stockwell write in ‘Cognitive Poetics’ (2014):

It is not good enough to arrive with an outdated understanding of language (such as Saussurean linguistics), or an incoherent pseudo-science (psychoanalysis), or a metaphorically poetic but vacuous set of gestures (deconstruction), or any briefly fashionable paradigm imported from other fields without genuine understanding (whether from evolution, quantum physics, neuroscience, sociology, anthropology or any of the other ill-fitting frames into which literary scholarship has tried to fit itself).⁴⁷

Accordingly, if an understanding of poetic thought is to benefit from research within various fields, it will be necessary that as such fields evolve so too does our conception of poetic thought.

Throughout the course of this thesis I have attempted to provide tentative answers to the questions posed at the outset. These answers, of course, may be wrong. But even if they are wrong, the correct or, more probably, the more useful answers may begin to come into focus if the fields of poetics and literary studies pay increasing attention to the ways in which (possible) meaning comes about through dynamic processes of readerly engagement, grounded in our shared physiological, emotional, perceptual and psychological evolution. By considering poetic thought on these grounds, we are able to better understand the way (possible) meaning is constructed in texts, and so improve our literary analyses and critical poetics. Vague questions often elicit vague answers, but it is precisely this vagueness that characterises not only truth, but

⁴⁷ Harrison, C. and Stockwell, S. ‘Cognitive Poetics’, in Littlemore, J. and Taylor, J.R., eds., *The Bloomsbury Companion to Cognitive Linguistics* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 219.

the human condition. Poetic thought is an embracement of this indeterminacy; a receptivity to the multiplicity of meanings in the world, and a creative act of disclosing those worlds, which functions through ontological, rhythmic, emotional, political, and intersubjective tension. Poetic thought is the most human(e) way of thinking not only because it underscores a fundamental aspect of what it means to be human, but because it promotes and encourages a creative embrace of that nature toward creative ends. By viewing poetic thought in these ways, we may open new avenues for literary analysis, and rightly reposition dialectics no longer as antiquated binaries or ideologically fixed hierarchies, but as the antitheses of stasis, the mechanisms of change.

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Appendix

A collection of poems on pages 233-250 of this thesis, with poem details listed on page 5 in the table of contents, have been suppressed for copyright reasons.