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**Radical Matter: Materiality in Postwar and Contemporary American
Mixed Mode Poetry**

By

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Abstract

Radical Matter: Materiality in Postwar and Contemporary American
Mixed Mode Poetry

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"Radical Matter" argues that expansive and experimental mixed mode poetic works since the American mid-century embody a language-based materiality that motivates the valuations of their symbolic economies. I focus on three works— William Carlos Williams's *Paterson*, Bernadette Mayer's *Studying Hunger Journals*, and Juliana Spahr's *Well Then There Now*—that each engage prose alongside verse, material from other texts and authors, or multiple discursive modes: all ways, I argue, of substantiating the desires and rhetorical strategies that orient these speakers in language and in relation to their imagined addressees. These substantiations bring forward features and consequences of language's articulations as discourse—whether lyric, narrative, epistolary, diaristic, or other—that carry out metaphoric interventions in the crises of value that drive these poetic works towards their substantial lengths, their material and modal inclusivity, and the speakers that they voice.

I read *Paterson*'s larger strategy of textual bricolage and its local junctures between prose and verse as expressions of the portability of lyric discourse's sensory and semantic functions. The circulations and evolutions of lyric figures and phrasal units throughout the work act in opposition to the expressive and libidinal paralyses of the stagnant American economic and social body that the poem's matter documents. Against the reifications of established forms—aesthetic forms as well as the institutions and conventions that organize social life—Williams manifests language's broadest functional value through the material resources of lyric. The discursive junctions of Bernadette Mayer's *Studying Hunger Journals* activate the rhetorical relations of lyric, epistolary, and diaristic address as sites where speakers and addressees materialize as embodiments of the pronominal figures "I" and "you." I test these materializations against psychoanalytic and structural linguistic models of subject formation in order to read Mayer's drive towards atemporality and the indeterminacy of her interlocutors in terms of the personal history her journals document. Through the materializations and dematerializations of grammatical persons, Mayer rehearses the lack and losses that motivate her hunger and which the operations of language make manifest.

In my last chapter, I read Spahr's collection of prose, verse, and prose poetry, *Well Then There Now*, in terms of its orientation towards difference as the material consequence of her opaque plural pronominal lyric protagonists "we" and "they" and her transparent first person prose speaker, as well as the intertextual reading that her multi-mode collection demands. I argue that Spahr's materialization of difference and the readerly exclusions it enacts constitutes an anti-pluralist resistance to rhetorical demands of readerly identification and inclusivity with poetic speakers. The "matter" of Spahr's works—personal, political, environmental, and economic systems of interrelation and complicity—becomes "radical" by virtue of a rhetoric that manifests difference as the fundamental condition of language and the requisite term in active, self-organized reading.

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Introduction

This project began with the observation that long poetic works emerging from modern and contemporary experimental literary practices often share the feature of being mixed in mode. These works incorporate prose along with verse and feature different types of discourse: lyric and narrative, but also quotation or imitation of writing and speech from non-literary practices such as journalism, advertising, and historical documentation. Canonical works of American and European literary modernism that utilize mixed modes include Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, John Dos Passos's *U.S.A.*, and William Carlos Williams's *Paterson*, which I address in my first chapter. These texts model the innovations that anticipate some key characteristics of postmodern literature in the second half of the century: textual fragmentation, quotation and pastiche, and the expression of multiple discourses and genres in a single work. The poetic works I address in my second and third chapters, Bernadette Mayer's *Studying Hunger Journals*, and Juliana Spahr's *Well Then There Now*, contribute to this latter period of literary experimentation.

Deconstructionist and poststructural analyses of these techniques endeavor to show how disruptions of literary convention and normative referentiality expose the operations of language as instantiations of the ideologies and hierarchies that organize society, the self, and all modes of representation. In my dissertation, I pursue this line of thinking by examining three mixed mode poetic works in terms of the metatextual relation between their subject matter and their discursive modes. I argue that each of these works—Williams's *Paterson*, Mayer's *Studying Hunger Journals*, and Spahr's *Well Then There Now*—materializes an essential feature or consequence of language—portability, subjectivity, and difference—which serves as a metaphoric term that is crucial to parsing each work's thematic material.

Mixing modes is a way of expanding poetry's material. I use the term "material" in the sense of the subject matter that poetry engages, but also in the sense that language is the medium of literature, analogous in some ways to the materials that are the medium of visual artworks. In language-based works, different discursive modes access different resources that are determined by histories of literary forms and rhetorical devices for engaging audiences. As an example, I would point to the conjunction between two modes of listing that characterize the sonnet sequence of *Well Then There Now* in which Spahr juxtaposes statistical data from a blood sample with more conventional lyric syntax and diction:

> potassium at 4.6 milliequivalents per liter
> chloride at 98 milliequivalents per liter
>
> carbon dioxide at 26 milliequivalents per liter
> blood urea nitrogen at 17 milligrams per decaliter
>
> A catalogue of the individual and a catalogue of us with all.
> A catalogue full of thought.
> A house where we with all our complexities lie.

A catalogue of blood. [1]

In the shift between the names and quantities of organic compounds to the paratactic nominal phrases of the last stanza, the text activates different types of shared knowledge, vocabularies, and reading practices within the uniform stylistic frame of a list. The attention required to parse the statistical information differs from the reading that the last stanza activates; in this way, the juxtaposition occurs both at the level of discourse and the kind of reading it invites.

A second example, from *Paterson*, illustrates a modal juxtaposition that emphasizes graphic as well as discursive variation:

> John Johnson, from Liverpool, England, was convicted after 20 minutes conference by the Jury. On April 30th, 1850, he was hung in full view of thousands who had gathered on Garrett Mountain and adjacent house tops to witness the spectacle.

This is the blast
the eternal close
the spiral
the final somersault
 the end. [2]

The descriptive journalistic language of the prose segment assumes entirely different conventions and communicative relations between author and audience from the ones assumed by the terse lyric stanza that serves as both the literal and ironic conclusion to this segment and the fourth book of *Paterson*. The communicative registers of these two segments activate different readerly expectations regarding the function of these utterances; whereas the prose segment invokes historicity and the language of documentation, the verse segment operates outside of questions of facticity and chronology. The affect and syntactic structure of the segments differ greatly, implying different speaking subjects and addressees. In these ways, the discursive modes of journalistic prose and lyric utterance offer Williams different material resources with which to evoke narrative, lyric, historical, atemporal, prophetic, or colloquial registers of address.

But because the "material resource" of poetry is the medium of language, when seeking to articulate poetry's materiality, we need to qualify our sense of what we mean by "material." Poems have materiality in the conventional sense of the term when they achieve graphic form in writing, and the performance of a poem might be said to have material qualities in manifesting language in the physical exertions of speech. But how should we think about the materiality that poetic language asserts? Do we locate language's materiality in its graphic expressions, in

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[1] Juliana Spahr, *Well Then There Now* (Boston: Black Sparrow Books at David R. Godine, 2011), 24-25.

[2] William Carlos Williams, *Paterson*, rev. ed., ed. Christopher MacGowan (New York: New Directions Books, 1992), 202.

the symbolic structure of the linguistic sign that is its fundamental unit, in the functions and subjects language serves through its articulations as speech?

Ferdinand de Saussure's distinction between language (*langue*) and speaking (*parole*) assigns separate properties of concreteness to each phenomenon. For Saussure, language refers to the system of signs that is the "social product of the faculty of speech" and the "collection of necessary conventions that have been adopted by a social body to permit individuals to exercise that faculty."[3] He attributes to linguistic signs a reality and tangibility no less concrete than the "psychophysical" phenomenon of speech, arguing that signs may find full representation in written symbols, whereas speech acts escape visual representation.[4] Jacques Derrida's response to Saussure's account of writing as merely the graphic representation of language reverses this hierarchical relationship by demonstrating that writing—the "framework of the *instituted trace*"[5]—is not representative of language, but fundamental to it. Derrida advances a theory of writing ("arche-writing") that supersedes the "vulgar" concept of writing as derivative of and secondary to speech. Emblematic of what Derrida terms *différance* and the function of the "trace," writing makes manifest the absences upon which all systems of signification depend: the temporal and spatial absence of the referents to which signs refer and the originary breach, experienced as "trace," between presence and absence, which motivates representation. The materiality or presence of a referent or a graphic unit perpetually recedes from the perceiver through the differing and deferring process of signification, so that in Derridean terms, writing, speech, and language only materialize the coming-into-being of signs, or the process and condition of referentiality itself.[6]

Poetry's foregrounding of the structural units and principles of language afford it a special capacity to make manifest (and disrupt) conventional referential operations and in doing so, to point to all the other ways language engages our perceptive capacities. While Derrida and Saussure endeavor to characterize the materiality (and immateriality) of language as a system, we might also consider the materiality of language as experienced in the social context that it both assumes and necessitates. If we accept that language, speech, and writing constitute symbolic negotiations of absences, how do the tangible presences of text, word, and reader register these negotiations? Ron Silliman's Marxist analysis of the dematerializing process of referentiality assigns a "perceptible presence" to the word or the signifier that is effaced, along with its "connecting point to the human," when the signified eclipses the signifier through the use of language that cultivates the illusion of realism or a natural relationship between words and their meanings and effects.[7] In a process analogous to the capitalist commodification of objects, language that

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[3] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin, ed. Perry Meisel and Haun Saussy (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 9.

[4] Saussure, 15.

[5] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 46.

[6] Derrida, 47.

[7] Ron Silliman, "Disappearance of the Word, Appearance of the World" in *The New Sentence* (New York: Roof Books for The Segue Foundation, 1987), 8-12.

carries out primarily "expository, descriptive and narrative capacities" isolates object (referent or "meaning") from process (the signifier, the signifying act, the communicative gesture),[8] producing the appearance of a "universe [of independent objects] prior to, and outside, any agency by a perceiving Subject."[9] By claiming that "reference possesses the character of the relationship of a movement to an object," Silliman separates the process of referral from the objects of referral[10]: a distillation that departs from a Derridean account of signification and characterizes reference as a "movement" that is the consequence of the "connection" between the object or signified and a perceiving subject, rather than a feature of the object itself. Words don't intrinsically "mean" anything; we set meaning into motion.

Silliman argues that the "gestural poetic form"[11] preserves the materiality of language by foregrounding the "mark or sound"[12] of words as well as the agency and interventions of a perceiving subject who enables or interrupts referential processes. The role of the subject in language's operations introduces yet another site on which to mark the materiality of language. While Silliman points to the agency of subjects who enable language, Jacques Lacan's adaptation of structural linguistic principles towards theories of the psychoanalytic subject posits language as the condition that enables subjects. Observing that language and its fundamental division between signified and signifier precede and encode an individual's coming into being, Lacan theorizes that through participation in speech, individuals symbolically situate themselves as subjects of and subject to language. The irreducible divisions which constitute the symbolic order of language demand that subjects, through speech, enact a process of self-alienation whereby they express themselves only by referring to themselves as the referent (signified) of their own speech. This is most evident when considering the consequences of the pronominal figure, "I," which Lacan illustrates in this expression from his essay "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis": "I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it as an object."[13] Given this formulation, subjectivity more properly serves as a marker of language's materializations, rather than its materiality. The subject is what language produces and makes manifest, and it is inseparable from the articulations of language as speech.

So asking about poetic language's materiality leads us to consider what language materializes: what it makes manifest or causes to be perceptible, and how these manifestations serve poetic works. At the intersection of the theories and critical praxes described above, we find a matrix of terms that demonstrate different

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[8] Silliman, "Disappearance of the Word," 10.

[9] Silliman, "Disappearance of the Word," 8.

[10] "Both movement and object carry their own integrities and are not confused: a sequence of gestures is distinct from the objects which may be involved, as distinct as the labor process is from its resultant commodities." Silliman, "Disappearance of the Word," 10-11.

[11] Silliman, "Disappearance of the Word," 12.

[12] Silliman, "Disappearance of the Word," 8.

[13] Jacques Lacan, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink in collab. with Héloise Fink and Russell Grigg (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 247.

ways of conceiving of the material qualities and manifestations of language: the "concreteness" of the graphic representation of speech, the fundamental differences and deferrals inscribed by linguistic signs, the emergence and interventions of a perceiving subject. To say that any of these conditions or features constitutes "materiality" is to speak in metaphoric terms; what gets materialized may not itself be "material." Asking what a poem materializes alongside and through the materializations of language is also a way of asking what that poem is about and what it does. What is the subject matter that it manifests and what intersubjective relations—between author and reader, communities of readers, speakers and figures of address—do its modes of discourse produce? In weighing the matter of poems against the discursive relations and operations that the poems make particularly manifest, we come to what these poems value.

For Derrida, "*difference* [is] the source of linguistic value"[14]; it is the term and condition upon which any signifying system depends. For Silliman, a text acquires "reading-value" [15] through the medium of exchange among readers; exchange reintroduces the material operations of perceiving subjects that recovers for texts the materiality that capitalist commodification of the word effaces. In this dissertation, I identify the discursive materializations that constitute the terms of value that operate across the mixed modes and subject matter of three long poetic works composed in the U.S. between the period of late literary modernism and our most recent decade. This period of time, from the late 1940s through the first ten years of the 21st century, coincides with the era of American postwar economic expansion, its leadership role in the inauguration of globalized and financialized markets, and the attending cultural and militarized imperialisms that now characterize American interventions in the world. The terms of value that emerge from these poetic works register the larger crises of value that motivate each work's expansive response to its own historicity, whether through a localized scrutiny of the American social body, as in *Paterson*, a rigorous scrutiny of self and personal history, as in *Studying Hunger Journals*, or a series of reflections on local and global scales of place, affiliation, and historical complicity, as in *Well Then There Now*.

In my first chapter, I read Williams's epical work *Paterson* against a hierarchical division between material and form that Williams both advances and undermines through an uneasy mapping of this division onto the prose and verse segments of the work. *Paterson*'s non-literary prose ephemera—personal correspondence, statistical data, archival material documenting the history of Paterson, NJ—ostensibly serves the symbolic function of "material" within the poem's economy, while its verse segments provide the formal innovations and cohesion that are meant to transmute the poem's materials into the higher, aesthetic realization of form. The division between material and form finds thematic expression through the poem's meditations on the squandering of American "raw materials" (its terrain and natural resources, captured dialects, local histories, and the libidinal and creative drives of the people of Paterson and of Williams's intimate

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[14] Derrida, 52.

[15] Ron Silliman, "Re Writing: Marx," in *The New Sentence* (New York: Roof Books for The Segue Foundation, 1987), 19.

and poetic circles) and its gestures towards the formal transformation of these materials into the "Beautiful Thing," the "radiant gist," the "Language."

My reading destabilizes this thematic and structural division, demonstrating that the poem's critique of existent American social and economic structures points to the work's valuation of mutability and potentiality over formal realizations. We see this at the level of its linguistic operations, which foreground the interrelation, portability, recombinatory capacities, and sensory registers of its verse and prose material. I argue that the poem's materiality resides in expressions of the mobility of its linguistic units and metaphoric figurations. By privileging movement, changeability, and exchange over formal realization and a stable hierarchy of discursive modes, *Paterson* activates at the level of its discursive economy a metaphoric model of movement that serves as a corrective to the socioeconomic and expressive paralyses the poem explores thematically.

My second chapter adopts an explicit question that Mayer's *Studying Hunger Journals* articulates, "Who is the you," as the structural and thematic problematic of the work. Presented as a record of the author's interiority as documented through memory, fantasy, reflection, and the order and play of literary composition in both prose poetic and verse sequences, *Studying Hunger Journals* positions that interiority in relation to a range of ambiguously identified second person addressees. Moments of direct address serve as occasions for illustrating conduits of communication, desire, and psychoanalytic models of subject formation as a consequence of the articulations of speech and writing. The explicit objects of the work's scrutiny—Mayer's "shifts in consciousness" and the phenomenon of hunger as a metonymic figure for desire—come into view only through Mayer's acts of interlocution, framed as epistolary address, lyric invocation, or the basic grammatical relation between the pronominal figures "I" and "you." Over the course of the work, these interlocutions evoke not only the psychotherapeutic relationship the journals document (Mayer shared these journals with her psychiatrist as part of their therapeutic work) but also the intersubjective condition of language and the necessity of positing a "you" in order to formulate and express an "I."

I test Mayer's expressions of direct address against Lacan and Émile Benveniste's accounts of the pronominal markers of subject formation as well as Jonathan Culler's work on apostrophe as the fundamental discursive mode of lyric poetry. I argue that Mayer capitalizes on the trope of direct address as a way of accessing what Gertrude Stein terms the "continuous present" of acts of speech in which subjectivity materializes and finds expression. Mayer's drive towards the atemporality of the continuous present constitutes a metatextual inquiry into the material relationship of language and subjectivity, but also a thematic response to her own historicity: the chronological accumulations of loss and lack that motivate her hunger.

In my third chapter, I read the poems, prose poems, and essays of Spahr's *Well Then There Now* as a multi-modal project that tests plural pronominal speaking positions as sites for readerly exclusions. These gestures of foreclosure express a larger valuation of difference as the basis for the work's literary and political orientations, which broadly critique the logic and environmental consequences of private property under capitalism, globalism, and western imperialism as

experienced through Spahr's geographically localized and autobiographical mediations. At the level of literary form, the trope of difference directs our intertextual reading across the collection's works (each originally published separately) and within verse works such as "Sonnets" and "Unnamed Dragonfly Species" which interweave different discursive modes, or "Some of We and the Land That Was Never Ours" and "Things of Each Possible Relation Hashing Against One Another" which pair verse and prose poetry with expository prose that in turn points to other textual sources.

At the level of the discursive relations evoked by Spahr's plural protagonists through the activation of the grammatical figures "we" and "they," I compare the opacity of these collective speaking positions with the relative transparency of the first person that narrates Spahr's essays, "2199 Kalia Street" and "Dole Street." I argue that both strategies—opacity and transparency—reflect a rhetorical stance that does not invite addressees to affiliate with or inhabit its enunciating figures or positions. We understand ourselves to be neither included in the "we" nor affiliated with the "I," and thus occupy a space that is fundamentally "other" or excluded. Drawing from Ellen Rooney's critique of the politics of pluralism in literary criticism and Sianne Ngai's theorization of an anti-pluralist, anti-capitalist "poetics of disgust," I read Spahr's gestures of readerly exclusion as an effort to mine the productive potential of difference. I argue that Spahr materializes difference as a grammatical necessity as well as a crucial term for readerly acts of self-identification and orientation that challenge the leveling and marginalizing logic of liberal democratic pluralist inclusion.

In all three readings, I focus on the interrelation between discursive modes and thematic content in order to distill a principle of value grounded in the material properties and consequences of speech and writing. At the intersection of their thematic matter and their linguistic materializations, these works amplify the subject formations intrinsic to language, as well as the sensory and referential operations that function across literary and non-literary modes of writing. In doing so, these poetic works point to the social and political efficacy of poetry as the site of active, material encounters between speakers, readers, and the mediations of language.

Chapter One

Materializing Movement:
William Carlos Williams's *Paterson*

Prose Material and Verse Form

Whether read as poetic visual bricolage drawing from Cubist experiments, or as poetic alchemy of the antipoetic, *Paterson*'s partnering of Williams's lyric compositions with assorted historical and biographical prose ephemera has the cumulative effect of foregrounding the poem's varied source materials as well as the architecture keeping it all in place. The world as physical, material resource for poetry is both a first principle for Williams's poetics and a refrain in his own statements about his work, though he vacillates between conceiving of poetry as the mechanism through which materials are organized, or itself a higher order of organized material. In a 1937 essay for *The Columbia Review*, Williams asks readers to "think of the poem as an object, an apple that is red and good to eat—or a plum that is blue and sour—or better yet, a machine for making bolts."[1] Nearly fifteen years later in a 1951 radio broadcast on writing, Williams sustains this analogy of poetry as machine or mechanism: "a poem is an organization of materials. As an automobile or kitchen stove is an organization of materials. You have to take words, as Gertrude Stein said we must, to make poems. Poems are mechanical objects made out of words to express a certain thing."[2] Williams's insistence on the material content and machine-like properties of poems and the words (and images or "things") with which they are built reflects his affiliation and identification with the modern painters he admired[3] and, to some extent, the process- and machine-minded movements of Cubism and Futurism; at the same time, his work on capturing colloquial speech and developing the "variable foot" rhythmic unit reflects his interest in exploring the particular features of his own artistic material, the English language and American idiom.

But beyond reading Williams's interest in materiality as part of a poetics grounded on analogies to the plastic arts, I am interested in testing the materialism that pervades his work and critical writings as a barometer for certain struggles with form that are evident in the epical, mixed-mode *Paterson*: "epical," due to Williams's own investment in the work as an epic with a heroic figure and the

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[1] William Carlos Williams, "Poetry," *The Columbia Review,* XIX, no. 1 (November 1937): 3.

[2] In citing poetry's expressive function, Williams's account of poetry as a mechanical organization of materials speaks to his fantasies of formal and procedural precision and strains the limits of his analogy. William Carlos Williams, *Interviews with William Carlos Williams: "Speaking Straight Ahead,"* ed. Linda Welshimer Wagner (New York: New Directions, 1976), 73.

[3] Henry M. Sayre's comprehensive study, *The Visual Text of William Carlos Williams* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), explores Williams's close relationship to the visual arts and argues for the predominance of a visual aesthetic over a metrical principle in Williams's poetic composition. Bram Dijkstra's introduction to the collection of Williams's essays, *William Carlos Williams on Art and Artists* (New York: New Direction, 1978) offers a critical assessment of Williams's elevation of art as practice and principle over other means of social or political engagement.

poem's ambitions as a cultural record[4], and "mixed-mode" because of its partnering of varying types of prose—epistolary, documentary, dialogic, etc.—with a range of verse forms: lyric, narrative and dramatic, among others.[5] Taking into account Williams's broad conception of his "material"—the language of Americans, but also the local people, places, pastimes and histories that constitute the "matter" of *Paterson*—and his search for a form sufficient to express all this matter, the "material" of *Paterson* exerts a substance or force which typically resists yet requires "form" in order to be of value. *Paterson*, I will argue, tests processes of valuation that prioritize material potential over formal resolution in resistance to the paralysis, alienation, and failures of an American populace structured by economic and social relations that obstruct the free circulation and expression of desire. "Value" in *Paterson* is a multivalent field on which linguistic materializations enact poetic transformations that compete with the dematerializations of conventional modes of valuation that produce fixed forms: gendered hierarchies, paralyzed economies of currency and desire, language reified through disuse, misuse, and poor use. For Williams, literary materializations manifest the raw materials of poetry through expressing their functional potential to articulate and amplify a living language, accessing the "radiant gist" that will awaken the "inert mass" and revive "'the people,' the Democracy" (108-109). In resisting established forms—"that radiance… unapproached by symbols," "relief from 'meaning'" (109-112)—Williams's primary struggle in *Paterson* expresses itself in materializations that permit the accretions of form, but resist formal reification through the mobility and mutability of poetic utterance,

The relationship between form and material in early sections of *Paterson* and in Williams's reflections on his work from this period explicitly conceive of form as both the privilege and, because of its elusiveness, also the burden of artistic endeavor: that which the artist must discover and refine. Early in the composition process, Williams admits in a letter to friend and fellow poet Horace Gregory that:

> All this fall I have wanted to get to the *Paterson* poem again and as before I always find a dozen reasons for doing nothing about it. I see a mass of material I have collected and that is enough. I shy away and write something else… I thought all I had to do was to arrange the material but that's ridiculous. Much that I have collected is antique

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[4] "I had a concept that came to me: it was to speak as a person, as a certain person; and I thought to myself: 'Well, if I am going to speak about a person it must be an actual person, but a really heroic figure as all epic poems are. But also a fanciful poem. It must be a fanciful poem, but dealing with particular events and a particular place.'" John C. Thirlwall, "William Carlos Williams's *Paterson*." *New Directions* 17 (1961), 307-310, quoted in Williams, *Interviews*, 72.

[5] "Prosimetrum" might serve to describe *Paterson*, according to the definition that Kristin Hanson and Paul Kiparsky offer—"mainly verse with some prose"—though nearly half of *Paterson* consists of excerpted prose from external sources. Kristin Hanson and Paul Kiparsky, "The Nature of Verse and its Consequences for the Mixed Form," in *Prosimetrum: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Narrative in Prose and Verse*, ed. Joseph Harris and Karl Reichl. (Cambridge, England: D.S. Brewer, 1997), 36.

now. The old approach is outdated, and I shall have to work like a
fiend to make myself new again.[6]

Documentation of the challenges an artist's materials present is commonplace and canonical to the conventions of mastery, regardless of the finished work's relative transparency or opacity in regards to the creative process. In this case, the permeability between the fictional, mythic elements of *Paterson*—Paterson the poet and patron source of the city, his wanderings, the narrative figuration of the Passaic River—and Williams's own life and the archival documentation that constitute nearly half the poem's content generates a gravitational pull towards the poem on all historically contingent texts and ephemera, from Williams's body of work to his personal correspondence. Williams's struggle to resolve this poetic work into a cohesive form is evident in the biographical ephemera, and so permeates the poem, foregrounding his ambitions for the work against the terrain of *Paterson* and refracting throughout the poem in various permutations: the theme of divorce and failure of language, and the quest for the "Beautiful Thing."

The refrain of the poem, at least in the first four books, is the struggle to make or distill a unified form and language out of a vast amount of material, a process often described mathematically, as when the poem announces its tactics as "a reduction to one," "rolling / up the sum"[7] or in physical terms, treating the poem as freshly broken ground:

>   .   .   a mass of detail
>   to interrelate on new ground, difficultly;
>   an assonance, a homologue
>
>   triple piled
>   pulling the disparate together to clarify
>   and compress[8]

At this early point in the poem – part II of the first book – the "mass of detail" might easily refer to the diverse prose material Williams introduces in the first part of the book, which ranges from the first of several excerpts from letters that poet Marcia Nardi sent to Williams, to local folklore of the fantastic, historical census records, and accounts of notable locals who died spectacularly in waterfalls (one in the Passaic and the other, "Sam Patch," who became a daredevil jumper after surviving a plunge into the Niagara, but died attempting a jump into the Genesee River). While topographical details have been introduced in verse to establish the mytho-figural status of Paterson, both city and man – "Paterson lies in the valley under the Passaic Falls / its spent waters forming the outline of his back" (*P* 6)—the verse content and its varying registers range in such a way as to suggest encompassment of and movement through detail, rather than the substance of raw details themselves. Each

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[8] William Carlos Williams, *Paterson*, rev. ed., ed. Christopher MacGowan (New York: New Directions Books, 1992), 19.

[8] William Carlos Williams, *Paterson*, rev. ed., ed. Christopher MacGowan (New York: New Directions Books, 1992), 19.

[8] William Carlos Williams, *Paterson*, rev. ed., ed. Christopher MacGowan (New York: New Directions Books, 1992), 19.

prose excerpt acts as a discrete entry with thematic unity, while the verse moves easily from a broad-ranging, incantatory and exclamatory appraisal of Paterson's environs to an individualized perspective through which a particular "I"— masculine, wry, and attentive to erotic possibility—recalls, for instance, the details of a *National Geographic* photograph of an African chief and his nine wives assembled "in a descending scale of freshness" (*P* 13), or makes a detailed appraisal of young girls passing in view ("Ain't they beautiful!" (*P* 18)). Given this structure, prose excerpts provide the "mass of detail" which verse—aided by the focalizing recurrence of the poem's observing "I" whom we read as an analog for Williams— must "interrelate on new ground," locating "assonance" and "homologue" and "pulling the disparate together to clarify / and compress."

Just two stanzas below this, the individualized speaker suggests that imagining beauty where there is none (or perhaps where there is only a "mass of detail") is the sole motivation sustaining his life: "The thought returns: Why have I not / but for imagined beauty where there is none / or none available, long since / put myself deliberately in the way of death?" (*P* 19). The injunction to invent form is therefore both the prerogative and objective of the poet who, confronted with the world's mass of dissonant material, must find and rhyme like forms (assonance and homologue) in order to "clarify and compress," thereby discovering beauty. The verse sections of parts I and II do just this. By means of the exclamations "They craved the miraculous!" and "A wonder! A wonder!" that flank the prose excerpt detailing a "natural curiosity"—a diminutive man suffering from a hugely overgrown cranium in the community of colonial-era Paterson (*P* 10)—the poem "compresses and clarifies" the compendium of folklore detailed in part I so that we understand the relationship of assonance and homologue that interrelate the giant sturgeon caught in the Falls, the local man suffering from both dwarfism and macrocephaly, the abundance and notable size of the region's freshwater pearls, and the impossibly "GRRRREAT" exploits of Sam Patch. If examples of the naturally miraculous and the fantastically giant produce thematic assonance between the prose passages, the poem's mythic figures of Paterson and his female counterpart, the mountains of Garrett Mountain Park ("Pearls at her ankles, her monstrous hair / spangled with apple-blossoms…" (*P* 9)), suggest the greater homologies at work here: the tremendous human energies and fecundity that produce the local miracles recorded in prose, but which only the verse composition makes visible as indigenous and accessible resources.

The struggle to compose or discover form in a mass of material therefore has an analogue in the relationship between the prose and verse of *Paterson*, with prose suggesting local relationships of assonance between instances of historical documentation, primary source ephemera, personal correspondence, which verse organizes and elevates into formal and thematic homologies. In his 1944 introduction to *The Wedge*, which collects many of the poems Williams had written as preliminary attempts at *Paterson*, Williams reminds us that poetry must operate as a machine, this time in terms of an economy that efficiently "drives" the matter that prose merely carries:

> Prose may carry a load of ill-defined matter like a ship. But poetry is the machine which drives it, pruned to a perfect economy. As in all machines, its movement is intrinsic, undulant, a physical more than a literary character. In a poem this movement is distinguished in each case by the character of the speech from which it arises.[9]

The figuration of verse as an economy whose "intrinsic, undulant" movements derive from the "speech from which it arises" points both to the economic critique that *Paterson* will articulate as well as Williams's conceptualization of poetry as a "physical" refinement of speech, the empirical manifestation of language. Williams's idealization of poetry as having been "pruned to a perfect economy" which overtakes and drives prose, figured here in terms of the unwieldy economy of sea trade and cargo ships, is unsurprising in an essay whose first statement is that "the war is the first and only thing in the world today…[this writing] *is* the war or part of it, merely a different sector of the field,"[10] and in a collection that had to be published independently because New Directions, Williams's publisher, could not acquire sufficient paper due to wartime rationing.[11] Williams even describes the work of forging new poetic form in terms of combat, in a letter from the same year: "we cannot go back because then the form becomes empty, we must move into the field of action and go into combat there on the new ground."[12]

Williams's alignment of poetry with the efficiencies of innovative, mechanized industry and with the American war effort reflects his affiliation with Futurism as well as the audience for whom he had designed *The Wedge*: deployed GI's with limited space for personal effects. In a letter to lifelong friend and collaborator Ezra Pound, Williams observes that *The Wedge* is his most popular book due to its small size and weight, and frets over New Directions's plan to publish a collection of his complete poems, because "one of [his] ladies said recently: When you want to lie in bed and read poems you don't want to [*sic*] big heavy book that tires you to hold it."[13] Williams's attention to the material realities of publishing and marketing poetry and the expediency of aligning poetry with a national cause and cultural identity[14] reflects his awareness of poetry as part of a larger economy, and therefore a system that might operate according to its own rules of material value and exchange. Paterson's symbolic economy rests on the functional potential of its linguistic materials, which acquire and express value through demonstrations

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[9] William Carlos Williams, *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams Volume II: 1939-1962* (New York: New Directions, 1988), 54.

[10] *Ibid.*, 53.

[11] William Carlos Williams, *I Wanted to Write a Poem: The Autobiography of the Works of a Poet* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), 70.

[12] Letter to Horace Gregory dated May 9, 1944. William Carlos Williams, *The Selected Letters of William Carlos Williams*, ed. John C. Thirwall (New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1957), 227.

[13] Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams, *Pound / Williams: Selected Letters of Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams*, ed. Hugh Witemeyer, (New York, 1996) 259.

[14] In a speech to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1952, Williams echoes the militaristic language of his introduction to *The Wedge* by stating that "As to the modern poem, my own field, the line is our battlefield." William Carlos Williams, *A Recognizable Image: William Carlos Williams on Art and Artists,* ed. Bram Dijkstra (New York: New Directions, 1978), 219.

of their mutability and portability across literary modes and figures. These moments of mutability and portability enable the exchange and circulation of literary material and associative affect that constitute material "value" within the poem's symbolic system.

Economic principles therefore operate both figuratively and literally in *Paterson*, informing our understanding of the poem's materialism as a theme, value, and conduit for Williams's engagement with his historical present. Jay Rogoff observes that the poem's economic critiques are best understood as a metaphor for its search for poetic idiom and technique and as a major strain in its lyric structure;[15] but more specifically, *Paterson*'s economic valence foregrounds symbolic material exchange as a system in which poetry may operate on its own terms. Book I was published in the year after the end of World War II, and Williams's faith in America's abundance of natural and cultural resources and his determination to forge these materials through the work of poetry echo the broad optimism and vigor of the American postwar economy which, on the strength of the robust military-industrial complex[16] that, nascent during the period of *Paterson*'s composition, would evolve to support an emerging foreign policy of military and economic intervention, established the country's global influence in the second half of the 20th century. The Cold War, originating in the escalating disagreements between the United States-led Western allies and the Stalin-led Soviet and Eastern Bloc nations about how to reestablish stability and security in post-war Europe, largely defined America's political climate for the duration of Williams's life and career. These political relations contextualize both Williams's nationalistic claims for the supremacy of American art and artists, as well as his critiques of capitalism and the American banking system: a topic which Williams, following Pound's example in the *Cantos,* explores in *Paterson* as one of the reasons American resources have been squandered and their full utilization and expression suppressed.

By 1946, the year of Book I's publication, Williams' support for C. H. Douglas's economic theory of Social Credit (prominent in Book IV) was the sole vestige of Pound's political influence on Williams's beliefs, even as his influence as a poet never waned. As early as 1919, Pound had accepted the principles of the Social Credit economic movement, "a halfway house between capitalism and socialism" which recommended nationalizing credit banking, among other measures, in order

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[15] Jay Rogoff, "Pound-Foolishness in 'Paterson,'" *Journal of Modern Literature* 14, no. 1 (Summer, 1987): 35.

[16] Although the end of WWII prompted rapid demobilization of the military, the ensuing years saw the centralization and growth of the Department of Defense and the establishment of the National Security Council in 1947, which in turn determined American foreign and defense policy for the next thirty years, with an eye towards matching or exceeding Soviet Russia's commitment of "13.8 per cent of its GNP to arms, as against America's 6-7 percent" and extending American's military commitments and base occupation, internationally. Paul Johnson, *Modern Times: The World From the Twenties to the Nineties* (New York: Perennial Classics, 1991), 442-443. While the term "military-industrial complex" would not be coined until Eisenhower's farewell address following his second term in 1961, Truman's administration—the same eight year period in which Williams published *Paterson* Books I through IV—saw the unprecedented expansion of the U.S.'s defense commitments, out of which emerged the military-industrial complex in its current form.

to combat private banks' "usurious" and restrictive impact on the public consumer's power to purchase and thereby distribute the abundant products of modern industrial economies.[17] During the Depression, Pound was an active advocate for the movement, and Williams began attending Social Credit meetings in 1933; but as Pound radicalized to the right, supporting both Mussolini and Hitler's dictatorships, Williams leaned leftward, demonstrating sympathy for the proletarian movement in the Soviet Union and supporting the Republican cause during the Spanish Civil War.[18] Williams formulated *Paterson* in part as a response to the long form accomplishments of Pound (and as a rebuke to T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*) and his response registers their personal and political differences. Overt inclusion of Pound in the poem, through quotation of Pound's letters to Williams, portray Pound at his most pedantic and blustering: prescribing books for Williams to read in a letter that appears in the Library scene of Book III, expounding his extreme economic views in a letter included in Book V, and reductively characterizing the two poets' aesthetic differences in the first book:

> *P.*   Your interest is in the bloody loam but what
>   I'm after is the finished product.[19]

The reduction of Pound and Williams's aesthetic differences to that of opposing interests in the "finished product" and the "bloody loam" of poetry is an imprecise account of their aesthetic differences, but a useful signaling moment in *Paterson* that characterizes its expansiveness as fueled by a material inclusivity as well as a material specificity: the "bloody loam" of American soil as manifested in its people, spoken dialects, energies and economies. So, although Pound's *Cantos* likely inspired Williams's use of letters and historical documents in an epic-length poem carrying out a large-scale critique of existing social and economic formations, *Paterson* demonstrates Williams's political and aesthetic departures from Pound's model[20] on several levels: through its focus on an American populace and cultural inheritance, and its prioritizing of materiality over "product" and the versatility and circulation of literary theme, matter, and affect—what I am calling "materialism" or potentiality—over formal closure. At the end of Book IV's second section, which features Williams's most overt economic critique of a currency-based economy in favor of the credit-based principles of Social Credit theory, Williams explicitly aligns "credit" with "value" and the "radiant gist," a figure for the illumination of knowledge and innovation:

> MONEY : JOKE   (i.e., crime
>   under the circumstances : value
>   chipped away at accelerated pace.)

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[17] Pound and Williams, 123.

[18] *Ibid.*, 123-124.

[19] Williams, *Paterson,* 37.

[20] See Rogoff', "Pound-Foolishness in *Paterson*," for a discussion of Williams's "exorcising" of Pound through selective and critical quotation of Pound's untenable economic views.

....…

Money : Joke
could be wiped out
at stroke
of pen
and as when
gold and pound were
devalued

Money : small time
           reciprocal action relic
precedent to stream-lined
           turbine : credit

………………………………………………

Credit makes solid
is related directly to the effort,
work: value created and received,
"the radiant gist" against all that
scants out lives.[21]

Williams cultivates an opposition between credit which, "stalled in money," must be released to "cure the cancer / the cancer, usury" (182) and money which, tied to gold, can be "'put aside' / for private purposes" (183)—stolen—and embodies "value / chipped away at accelerated pace." The economic analogy to Williams's project of socially mobilizing, aesthetic acts of valuation rests in Williams's privileging of a system of exchange rather than acquisition: channels of movement rather than accumulations of capital; "value created and received" rather than value "chipped away."

       Michael Tratner's *Deficits and Desires: Economics and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Literature* offers a complementary analysis of the principles of Social Credit that informed both Pound and Williams's acts of poetic intervention towards socio-economic reordering. Tratner argues that for Pound and Williams, the economic entities of money and credit serve as analogies for literary structures: money amounting to a "quick joke" and credit reflecting the "gist," an "enigmatic phrase" that is "like credit, 'radiant,' expanding in all directions from its enigmatic core."[22] Focusing on Social Credit theorist C. H. Douglas's fixation on the "blockage" money creates, thereby keeping masses divorced from the abundance there is their due, Tratner conceives of Pound and Williams's epical verse projects as models of

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[21] Williams, *Paterson*, 181-185.
[22] Michael Tratner, *Deficits and Desires: Economics and Sexuality in Twentieth Century Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001) 126.

expansive sharing and exchanging of cultural knowledge that will redistribute "value" more widely:

> …[Douglas] is against the labor theory of value, shared by most capitalists and Marxists alike. On a more abstract and philosophical level, he is against the idea that there can be a direct correlation between what a person does and the value that results from those actions. In other words, there is a disparity between product and intentional act. Things emerge that are remarkably greater and more valuable than the materials and labor and conceptions that went into them. Douglas attributes this explosive multiplication of value to a source that was very dear to both Pound and Williams: culture… Douglas's theory applies to the labor of creating poetry as to any other labor: the "value" of a poem, then, does not correspond to the labor the poet performs or to what is in the poet's mind. The poet's labor and his originality are at best small increments in the "cultural inheritance," from which the poem gains most of its value….
>
> Douglas also proposed another "intangible" factor that produced wealth (besides the cultural inheritance), what he called the "unearned increment of association," increased value gained by having more people interact with an object (p. 189). A poem thus gains an "unearned increment of association" as more poems and more readers join with it in the cultural process of, we might say, "doing literature." The sources of poetic power, as of any other power, are not in the individual but in the vastness of history and the vastness of current methods of distribution.[23]

A mobilization of credit will "explode" fixed trajectories of currency accumulation and enable greater channels for social association among people and the things they share, resulting in a "radiation" of value generation. Tratner points to Douglas's rejection of a fixed relationship between labor and value and the system whereby laborers are rewarded with the monetary equivalent of their labor as the key turn of his proposal for an "explosion" and "radiation" of the channels for value generation. The trope of a credit "explosion" appealed to Pound and Williams, Tratner argues, because of its affinity with modernism's interest in "fracturing" received aesthetic structures: "credit economics and fractured poetry are for Pound and Williams two systems dependent on each other. The radiant gist of Williams's fractured poems will be released only when the economy is transformed, and the economy will be transformed only when current thought patterns are fractured."[24] My interest in *Paterson*'s tropes of movement, transformation, and the channels and junctures for the exchange of materials shares with Tratner's analysis the recognition that what Williams sought was broader access to and activation of an abundance of resources:

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[23] Tratner, 129-130. Tratner cites C.H. Douglas, *Social Credit* (New York: Norton, 1933).
[24] Tratner, 129.

cultural, technological (the "stream-lined turbine"), and natural wealth. Rather than binding value to fixed currencies—received or newly forged forms—Williams wished to explore the value that might be generated from the circulation of shared entitlements and inheritances: "the 'radiant gist' against all that / scants our lives."

In his 1952 address to the American Academy of Arts and Letters entitled "The American Spirit in Art"—delivered in the same year that Williams was offered the Library of Congress's Consultant in Poetry position—Williams identifies the principle that motivates American art (the absence of which, Williams problematically claims, perhaps conscious of the McCarthian loyalty investigation to which the Library of Congress appointment required him to submit, ensures the inferiority of Russian art[25]):

> The basic idea which underlies our art must be, for better or worse, … abundance, that is, permission, for all. And it is in the *structure* of our works that this must show. We must embody the principle of abundance, of total availability of materials, freest association in the measure, in *that* to differ from the poem of all previous time.[26]

Williams's myopic nationalism aside, his call for an artistic structure that assumes and expresses both an abundance of resources from which to draw as well as free creative license—an abundance of forms, styles, themes and subject to pursue—also describe the compositional principles of *Paterson*. The city of Paterson's place in American industry and manufacturing history factored greatly in the poem's inception; Williams chose Paterson as his poem's locale because the city originally had been founded to serve as the new American republic's seat of industrial production, carrying out then U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton's vision for American wealth and economic independence from England (a history documented in Book II with some irony through its junctures with the rantings of a street preacher railing against the pursuit of wealth). Williams's principle of a particularly American "abundance" in poetic resources therefore has a real world corollary in his selection of this location and this historical nexus for the turf and spirit of his work. Williams's ambitions for *Paterson*—to concentrate and make something valuable of the abundance of material resources that include the nature, culture, populace and history particular to Paterson—therefore respond to the Hamiltonian industrial-economic project that was the city's founding objective. Just as Hamilton saw in the Passaic Falls the tremendous indigenous resource that might power the mills of the nation's first planned industrial city, Williams uses the volume, power, and movement of the falls as the elemental analogue to the regenerative potential of the social body that *Paterson* aims to mobilize against the tropes of paralysis, divorce and alienation that haunt the poem, In light of the

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[25] "You see what a mess the Russians make of it when they try (through Marx) to imitate us. Instead of freedom they found themselves on the denial of freedom; instead of giving their writers a free rein to develop what they, as a nation, are in need of, they castrate them, leaving us conceptually (if not in practice) supreme. (The lag of the middle ages is too much for them, to make the necessary readjustments they are, to all intents and purposes, impotent." Williams, *Recognizable Image*, 220.
[26] *Ibid.,* 217-218.

eventual exhaustion of Paterson's industrial resources,[27] and its citizens' mixed legacy of eccentric daredevilry, personal failure and violent crime, all of which *Paterson*'s prose text ephemera and verse meditations document, the poem offers its literary collation of material abundance as a corrective project of valuation to Hamilton's wealth-based industrialization of the region.

Between Williams's 1946 characterization of the "ill-defined matter" of prose and the poetry which transforms matter through its "perfect economy," and his 1952 statements towards a politics and aesthetics of abundance—the same time span in which the first four books of *Paterson* were published—the "finished product," in Williams's poetics, appears to take secondary importance to the "bloody loam" out of which a poem is made. *Paterson*, in reflecting roughly fifteen years of work, is a record of Williams's evolving poetics of materialism and the diminishing ideal of form. Seeking a relationship of prose-as-material and verse-as-form in *Paterson* assumes a form-material opposition that for some scholars underlies a modernist, intentional failure of form in *Paterson*, a reading that Fredric Jameson offers in "The Poetics of Totality," and to which I'll respond below. For this study, the form-matter distinction is a productive point of tension because the prose-verse hierarchy it initially structures destabilizes over the course of the poem, The materiality that verse "form" is meant to harness and transform in *Paterson* comes to include the material resources of speech that are available to both prose and verse, troubling the unilateral model of prose material "fueling" the machine of verse-as-form. I'm also prompted by Williams's conception of poetry as a carefully tuned economy to consider the ways Williams attempts to generate alternate value from the material qualities that *Paterson* draws from its wordly "matter," which range from the geographic features and history of Paterson to the documents and figurations of both real and imagined lives, as well as the work's linguistic "materials": the semantic and sensory resources of verse and prose activated through poetry's instantiation. *Paterson*'s materialism, I will argue, locates value in the functional potential of its materials in an embodiment of "the principle of abundance, of total availability of materials, freest association in the measure" that Williams identified as crucial to the fullest expression of the arts, and the fullest expression of a social body, empowered to speak, to hear and to be heard, and to love.

In identifying "functional potential" as the quality that distinguishes "material" from "form" and therefore determines material "value," I draw broadly from the Aristotelian theory of hylomorphism, which holds that all things in existence are composites of form and matter. As outlined in Aristotle's *Metaphysics,* form and matter are not things in themselves, but refer to differing states of being, whereby form exhibits "actuality" and matter exhibits "potentiality": "Again the matter is potentially because it may go to the form; and at any rate whenever it is

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[27] Hamilton's state-sponsored Society for the Establishment of Useful Manufacturers privately managed the Passaic Falls and owned the charter for the city of Paterson until the mid-twentieth century, by which time the steel and textile industries that had flourished there in the 18th and 19th centuries had abandoned the city.

actually, then it is in the form."[28] In this formulation, matter is defined by its potential for form, and form is the actualization of matter's potential. Charlotte Witt offers a cogent analysis of this principle that emphasizes the adverbial nature of "actuality" and "potentiality" as determinates for formal and material states of being:

> To see that matter and form are to one another as potentiality is to actuality, is to see that they are neither two definitionally independent objects nor two definitionally independent parts of a whole. It is because what a potentiality is is dependent upon what an actuality is, that composite substances are unified objects of definition. Matter is definitionally dependent upon form. There is, therefore, only one definition; matter and form as ways of being of the substance satisfy that definition to different degrees.[29]

The tensions that arise in mapping "form" and "matter" onto disparate elements or textual modes in *Paterson* originate in the definitional interdependence of the concepts of form and matter outlined here, as well as the historical evolution of the form-matter opposition into a hierarchy based on gender or class. Hierarchized form-matter binaries have produced narratives whereby form emerges from masculinized interventions into feminized materials,[30] or through aristocratic or artistic operations on unruly, raw materials, as in Carla Billitteri's analysis of Williams's "politics of form," which the following section will address. In referencing these originating conceptualizations of form and mater, I aim to reintroduce the principle of potentiality as the condition of materiality that does not depend upon or contribute to a hierarchized ordering of form over material, but acknowledges the interdependence of form, as actualization, and material, as potential.

Distinguishing Form from Material

Williams's early elevation of verse as the ordering apparatus or machine-like technology over prose as "ill-defined" material prompts Carla Billitteri, in "William Carlos Williams and the Politics of Form," to examine the contradictions *Paterson* presents, due to William's aesthetic principles of artistic authenticity and the form-giving privilege assigned to art and artists, which she reads as fundamentally at odds with his wish to revolutionize the technological apparatus of his art, language. Examining Williams's aesthetics through the lens of Walter Benjamin's theorizations on revolutionary versus reactionary, auratic forms of art, Billitteri observes that

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[28] Stephen Makin. *Aristotle: Metaphysics Theta: Translated with an Introduction and Commentary*, Clarendon Aristotle Series (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 11.
[29] Charlotte Witt, "Hylomorphism in Aristotle," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 84, no. 11, *Eighty-Fourth Annual Meeting American Philosophical Association, Eastern Division* (November 1987): 679.
[30] In "Form and Gender," David Summers traces the evolution of the gendered distinction between form and matter that spans definitions and applications modeled by Plato and Aristotle through Immanuel Kant and Martin Heidegger. David Summers, "Form and Gender," *New Literary History* 24, no. 2. *Reconsiderations* (Spring 1993): 243-271.

William's investment in the "beautiful semblance" of a work of art is also an investment in the auratic presence of the "aristocratic" man of genius, the artist. Furthermore, William's attachment to the concept of poetry as a machine that elevates mundane language ("There is no poetry of distinction without formal invention, for it is in the intimate form that works of art achieve their exact meaning, in which they most resemble the machine, to give language its highest dignity, its illumination in the environment to which it is native.")[31] reveals a correlation between Williams's "mechanized (or engineered) Romantic doctrine of the work of art" and "developing forms of social control" emerging in the mid 40's, when Williams published the statement quoted above, in *The Wedge.*[32] Reading Williams's mobilization of the American vernacular as "a show of aestheticized populism," Billitteri argues that his work is "structurally functional in masking a politics of form where the semantic order achieved within the poem-machine goes hand in hand with the promotion and the establishment of a larger design of social order."[33] Despite citing some of Williams's more strident claims regarding poetry's technological revolution of the world and the potential for war to elevate poetry's significance,[34] Billitteri refrains from accusing Williams of a Futurist glorification of war, instead emphasizing the role this dream of aestheticized social order plays in *Paterson*'s formal structure, where the artist is the artistocrat-king who produces verse, and the world, his chaotic subjects and subject-matter, exist only in prose:

> ...the first three books of *Paterson* counterpoise the "mob" against "the poet" in a set of well-designed parallelisms, overlapping structures of rhetorical, thematic, and allegorical containment. Prose, for instance, is rhetorically set against poetry, an opposition that seems to actualize Williams's belief...that prose is a "ship that carries a lot of ill-defined matter." Prose is, in fact, for the most part, the discursive space of the mob, or of those who aspire to elevate themselves from the populace to the aristocracy, but cannot because of their maddening petulance and lack of mastery over their words and thoughts.[35]

Coupled with the observation that Williams (and Louis Zukofsky, who helped to edit Book V) consistently gave prose less attention than the poetry during the editing and type-setting process (242, 247), Billitteri cites the Marcia Nardi ("Cress") letters in the poem as a central example of Williams's consistent devaluing of the prose of

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[31] Williams, *Collected Poems II*, 55.

[32] Carla Billitteri, "William Carlos Williams the Politics of Form," *Journal of Modern Literature* 30, no. 2 (2007): 50.

[33] *Ibid.*

[34] Billitteri alludes to but does not quote this statement from the essay, "Midas: A Proposal for a Magazine" (1941): "War elevates the artist, the builder, the thinker to the peaks of the stars, trebles his significance. In times of peace, he is, at best, a humdrum worker not because he must be do but because he is perpetually laboring under weights to inflame and to magnify. But in times of war— helplessly split off in the cyclotron of the times—he becomes inevitably king of men..." Williams, *Recognizable Image,* 158.

[35] Billitteri, 58.

the "mob" in favor of the elevating heights and highly crafted form of his own lyric accomplishments in *Paterson*.

The characterization of *Paterson*'s prose as the mostly unlearned and maddening voice of a populace intent on upward mobility overlooks the range and role of the poem's prose matter, from Williams's own prose compositions, both fictional and adapted from historical accounts, to more informal and, to be sure, sensationalist or "nonliterary" documents. Her reading assumes a fixed hierarchy in which *Paterson*'s verse retains its privileged status over prose, and this study argues that *Paterson* dismantles that hierarchy. Billitteri's observations regarding the ideological contradictions that limit the revolutionary impact of Williams's formal innovations are in tandem with my interest in the tensions that arise in attempting to map the form-material divide that Williams articulates in *The Wedge* and elsewhere, onto the prose and verse of *Paterson*. For Billitteri, the viability of Williams's vision of a reconstituted social order enabled by the elevation of the vernacular is hindered by his nostalgic attachment to the artist's class specific privileges[36]; she argues that Williams bears out Benjamin's prediction that a conception of art that clings to the values of authenticity, auratic-originality and absorption of the audience in the unity and singularity of the artwork results in a reactionary aestheticizing of the political, rather than a politicizing of the aesthetic.

A reading and poetics that prioritize verse form over prose matter in *Paterson* curtails a reading of *Paterson* that seeks equivalences between the prose and verse, that considers the free transfer of material between prose and verse, and that observes the interrelation of form and material within both prose and verse. Many readings of *Paterson* aim to describe a formal heterogeneity, reflecting a unifying, ordering poetic eye, hand, and mind pitted against the failing myths, trivial realities, and everyday, human landscape of a declining, post-industrial city. The readings view Williams's failures to achieve the "rigor of beauty," to "separate that stain of sense from the inert mass" (108), and to realize the "Beautiful Thing" as expressions of modernism's prerogative to fail in its quest for perfected form as a means of resisting reification, as in Jameson's "Poetics of Totality"; or of Williams's own ideological ambivalences, whether in correcting class or gender imbalances, as in Billitteri's reading or Elizabeth Gregory's *Quotation and Modern American Poetry*: *"Imaginary Gardens with Real Toads."*[37] James Breslin's account of *Paterson* as the presentation of a poetic field of formal disintegration in which we observe "raw material in the *process* of generating symbolic import" and witness the "act of creation, not its finished product" [38] shares my reading's interest in *Paterson*'s

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[36] In "The American Spirit in Art" (1952), Williams claims that "the artist is the most important individual known to the world." Williams, *Recognizable Image,* 212.

[37] Gregory argues that Williams's prose-verse structure is an index of the poem's attempt to reorder or upend hierarchical systems, reflecting challenging junctures between the canonical and undervalued, the dominant against the weak, conventional and marginalized forms, and ultimately reflecting Williams's deep ambivalence towards truly restructuring received hierarchies, either in literary or socio-political arenas. Elizabeth Gregory, *Quotation and Modern American Poetry: "Imaginary Gardens with Real Toads"* (Houston: Rice University Press, 1996).

[38] James E. B. Breslin, *William Carlos Williams: An American Artist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 174.

foregrounding of material potentiality rather than formal resolution, but retains the categories of "contemporary matter" and "eternal form" as a crucial dichotomy for the poem, observing in *Paterson*'s final book a celebration of the "marriage" of these oppositions.[39]

My reading develops a concept of materialism in *Paterson* as the determining value in the relationship between matter and form that variously and, at times, uneasily maps onto the relationship between the poem's "material"—its linguistic as well as thematic resources—and the verse elaborations and architecture that transmute these materials into "form": the organization and mobilization of poetic materials. Drawing from principles I outline above, "material" resources and "form" are designations that track the relative qualities of potentiality versus actualization of potential in the figures and forms that populate and structure the text of *Paterson*. In scenes of failed sexual union and descriptions of an unheard, unarticulated language as well as the obstructed path and stifled potential of credit, *Paterson* dramatizes the failure of formal actualizations—existent social and economic relations, existent manifestations of language—to meet material potential. This failure enables Jameson to read the tension between the work's worldly, physical elements and figural substantiations as an expression of the poem's evasions of concrete figuration and its failures to achieve a cohesive, totalizing form. My reading's attention to junctures between prose and verse and the ways *Paterson* accesses its "material"—whether through the subject matter verse shares with prose or through expressions of the functional potentiality of language—seeks a model of exchange, rather than opposition, between the disparate modes of the poem; these exchanges constitute the work's negotiations between potentiality and actualization, between states of materiality and "form." *Paterson* explores a language-based materialism that enables the symbolic economies and forces of poetry as tangible utterance and graphic matter to act alongside the economies and forces that inhere in the poem's thematic matter, as we will see below: the gendered, socio-economic conditions Nardi identifies as central to her struggles as a writer, the dual role that natural forces (the waterfalls, destructive fires, floods, and storms) serve as both allegorical figures and historical, physical phenomena, and the thematic turn to non-literary arts—visual works and dance—in the work's later sections. *Paterson*'s investment in "form" as manifested in symbolic figuration or the orderings of verse structure is its expression of a greater investment in materiality: the potentiality inhering in real and imagined lives, historic and as-yet-unrealized natural resources, and the transformative, synesthetic operations of speech, the living embodiment of language.

Prose Matter and Verse Movement: Equivalence and Exchange

I share Billitteri's interest in the Nardi documents as illustrative of Williams's treatment of prose in *Paterson*, but not as confirmation of the abject status of Nardi's writing and the other prose in the poem, or as indication of bad writing and a failure of language that is a reflection of the poem's failure to achieve successful formation

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[39] Breslin, 207

or totalizing figuration, as in Jameson's account. An excerpt from an early letter from Nardi is the first prose text to be included in the poem, designating special status to her contributions, though the majority of her work is found in Book II. Far from being simply one among many of the prose excerpts—though she is one among many personal correspondents Williams includes—Nardi's work constitutes a significant portion of Book II: two substantial paragraphs in section I, two in section II, and in section III, yet another paragraph as a preface to the notably long and vitriolic letter that concludes both the section and the book. The rapid amplification of her voice and her complaints between Books I and II and its culmination in the spectacularly angry letter of Book II contribute to the material impact her writing has on the poem: just one of many excerpts from Williams's correspondents at first, though expressing a resentful and accusatory tone that is all its own, and eventually the dominating feature and voice of the last section and the book. Rather than seeing Williams's use of Nardi's letters as merely the cruel exposure of her artistic despair and personal miseries[40] – though it is that, to be sure, and Williams never received written permission to use her work[41] – and the abject counterpoint to Williams's own compositional achievements in *Paterson*, I am interested in the writing as a prose unit that resonates in the verse as a productive (literally, for Nardi produced many such letters) reply to Williams' work, and emblematic of the role prose plays in *Paterson*.

Nardi and Williams were in contact between 1942 and 1943, and 1949 and 1956. As excerpts from her letters appear in Books I and II, we see that their relationship is strained and asymmetric, due to Nardi's requests for assistance and affirmation from Williams, though the documentation is biased, showing us only Nardi's increasing agitation about the status of their correspondence and none of Williams's replies. Nardi's self-denigration, resentments, and creative, financial and personal frustrations are a painful counter-refrain to the verse sections that bear no trace of this relationship or the textual intrusions of these letters (unlike other "bleed-through" moments, when the verse will quote, repeat, or perform a variation on subject matter or phrasing that appears in a proximate section of prose), though there are homologues to Nardi in imagery of thwarted conception and reduced or exhausted resources. Any assonance between Nardi's letters' complaints and the poem's own eruptions of despair and self-perceived failure is nullified by the disparity between the tremendous amount of poetry that the poem's speaker produces despite his "obstacles"—in theory, the entire text of *Paterson* itself— and

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[40] Elizabeth Bishop wrote to Robert Lowell, "…he shouldn't have used the letters from that woman—to me it seems mean, and they're much too overpowering emotionally for the rest of it so that the whole poem suffers…" Marcia Nardi and William Carlos Williams, *The Last Word: Letters Between Marcia Nardi and William Carlos Williams*, ed. Elizabeth Murrie O'Neil, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1994), xviii.

[41] After they were unable to locate Nardi to obtain permission, Williams and James Laughlin proceeded with Book II's publication; when she reappeared, having discovered her work in his poem when she happened upon the text in a bookstore, they resumed correspondence and Williams wrote shortly thereafter to Laughlin a letter that serves as informal written testimony in anticipation of any legal issues: "the woman gave me verbal permission (tho' it would be hard to prove it) to use anything I pleased of her letters in *Paterson*. That I can swear to with a clean conscience…Naturally I must count on you to corroborate my testimony if my word is brought into question." *Ibid*., 138-139.

the complete absence of poetic material from Nardi, despite the fact that she enjoyed intermittent publication and recognition, as well as Williams's own high estimation of "her real worth as a writer."[42]

An important exception can be found in the echoes of Nardi's text in the following book, Book III. In a section of 18 verse couplets at the beginning of section II, Williams's verse draws from Nardi's anxieties about the circumstances that are required to write and the challenges of living while pursuing art, but its presentation as couplet verse offers pointed contrast to Nardi's ever desperate and lengthening prose letters:

> The writing is nothing, the being
> in a position to write (that's
>
> where they get you) is nine tenths
> of the difficulty: seduction
>
> or strong arm stuff. The writing
> should be a relief,
>
> relief from the conditions
> which as we advance become—a fire,
>
> a destroying fire. For the writing
> is also an attack and means must be
>
> found to scotch it—at the root
> if possible. So that
>
> to write, nine tenths of the problem
> is to live.[43]

Nardi's long, confessional version of these complaints provides a view into an experience that seems wholly characterized by the obstacles of "living" and lacking a position from which to write (though this is ironic, given her writing's length and visceral impact), and with a verbosity and articulation that overwhelms the sparsity of Williams's couplets:

> I have been forced, as a woman not content with woman's position in
> the world, to do a lot of pioneer *living* which writers of your sex and
> with your particular social background do not have thrust upon them,
> and which the members of my sex frown upon….so that at the very
> moment when I wanted to return to writing from living (with my

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[42] Nardi and Williams, 162.
[43] Williams, *Paterson*, 113-114.

ideas clarified and enriched by living) there I was (and still am)—
because of that living—completely in exile socially….

You've never had to live, Dr. P—not in any of the by-ways and
dark underground passages where life so often has to be tested. The
very circumstances of your birth and social background provided you
with an escape from life in the raw; and you confuse that protection
from life with an *inability* to live—and are thus able to regard
literature as nothing more than a desperate last extremity resulting
from that illusionary inability to live….

But living (unsafe living, I mean) isn't something one just sits
back and decides about. It happens to one, in a small way, like
measles; or in a big way, like a leaking boat or an earthquake. Or else
it doesn't happen. And when it does, then one must bring, as I must,
one's life to literature; and when it doesn't then one brings to life (as
you do) purely literary sympathies and understandings, the insights
and humanity of words on paper *only…*[44]

Exploring the same themes that Williams's couplets express—the struggles to
overcome the material conditions that can be isolating or alienating for the writer—
Nardi's multiple page letters articulate the constraining material circumstances
determined by her gender, class, and economic resources. In contrast with Nardi's
ever-lengthening and anxious prose, Williams's nimble, couplet verse exhibit a levity
and insouciance that, in the second half of this couplets series, also characterize the
platitudes from his patients and acquaintances who praise his poetry but with a
blind "sub-intellection":

...They see

to it, not by intellection but
by sub-intellection (to want to be

blind as a pretext for
saying, We're so proud of you!

A wonderful gift! How *do*
you find the time for it in

your busy life? It must be a great
thing to have such a pastime.

But you were always a strange

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[44] Williams, *Paterson*, 90.

> Boy. How's your mother?)
>
> --the cyclonic fury, the fire,
> the leaden flood and finally
> the cost—
>
> Your father was *such* a nice man.
> I remember him well
>
> Or, Geez, Doc, I guess it's all right
> but what the hell does it mean?[45]

Williams captures the colloquial rhythms ("How *do /* you find the time for it…") of his admirers' well meant but hapless response to his poetry, their arrangement in couplet verse an arbitrary lineation that emphasizes the vacancy of the colloquial against the substance of his writing, once non-parodic verse intervenes, "—the cyclonic fury, the fire, / the leaden flood and finally / the cost—" only to be interrupted by the reassertion of the colloquially vocalic. The staging of Williams's own acknowledgment of the difficulties he faces as a writer in contrast with Nardi's lengthy complaints could be read as a tacit exposure of Nardi's failure of form: her "formless" mass of prose against his tightly structured couplet verse. But the burden of "bad writing," if that applies here, does not fall on Nardi's prose in this comparison. Between the two sections, the chirping platitudes of Williams's speakers operate as the most tired articulation of all, whose clichés of rhythm and phrasing Williams highlights by means of awkward line breaks that disregard speech pattern in favor of emphasizing the strangeness and yet immediate, pleasing familiarity and ubiquity of this kind of speech: literally strange speech, as when Williams introduces a line break between "strange" and "Boy."

Jameson includes Nardi's writing along with other examples of "bad poetry and doggerel" in *Paterson* as:

> …the sign, not only of misguided aesthetics and popular kitsch, but even more fundamentally of the longing of the inarticulate to capture and express unique existential moments for which they have no language; so that in just such moments of failed verse—which are then narratively realized in the failures of "C" and above all in the bad poetry of the crippled heiress of Book IV – the dialectic of Williams's own poem is itself implicitly concentrated: in order to succeed it must fail, only the impossibility of language can convey the dilemmas of an American language that has not yet come into being.[46]

Jameson has relegated Nardi and other examples of "failures" and "bad poetry" to the position of the crippled, longing, and inarticulate masses in the same fashion as

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[45] Williams, *Paterson*, 114.
[46] Fredric Jameson, "The Poetics of Totality," in *The Modernist Papers*, (London, 2007), 28-29.

Billitteri's argument, in which these examples of bad writing are dialectically opposed to Williams's best but ultimately unsuccessful efforts to generate a viable new American (verse) language from the raw materials of contemporary speech and linguistic resources. But Jameson's assessment of Nardi's failures has more to do with the sentiment and the subject her writing captures, than with any qualitative assessment of the writing itself. Similarly, his claim that these inarticulate masses "have no language" overlooks the prolific lengths of Nardi's writing and the sheer physical presence as text it exerts in Book II. This assessment of a dialectical divide in *Paterson* thus rests more firmly on symbolic figurations – Nardi as woman to Williams's man, failed poetess to his celebrated and accomplished poet, as historical fact to literary artifact – than on any substantial assessment of real differences or oppositions between her writing and Williams's.

Williams himself suggests a reading in which Nardi's importance in the poem lies mainly in what she as a person and a writer symbolized for him. To his editor, he justifies the use of her work without written consent because "it was necessary in my composition to exhibit an attitude of mind which she represented for me"[47] and to a reader who had written to ask about the letter's significance, Williams offers a reading of the work as symbolically useful for the figural relations of *Paterson*:

> Its position in the book gives it whatever significance it has by being the woman's reply to the man, Paterson. You might call her Mrs. Paterson. It is the woman striking back at the man, at all men. But there is also in my use of the letter a recognition of the writer of the letter as a writer. It is in many ways good writing. That is the final reason for including it. I hesitated a long time over whether or not to leave it out. Finally it went in. Some think it is the best thing in the book, that it makes me look second rate. Wouldn't that be a good thing if it were true? And perhaps it *is* true: all the more reason for having printed it. I have nothing to sell.[48]

Here, Williams reveals his respect for the writing in the letter and its clear utility to him as a literary device, which in fact confirms as accurate and perceptive Nardi's bitter accusation, in an early section of the long letter in Book II, that "my attitude toward women's wretched position in society and my ideas about all the change necessary there, were interesting to you, weren't they, in so far as they made for *literature?*" (87). Williams's assessment of the work as belonging to a "writer," rather than a failed or inarticulate voice from the crowd, and even as "good writing" that potentially outshines his own work in Book II suggests that the relationship between "nonliterary" prose and the verse which encompasses it strives for egalitarian exchange rather than hierarchical ordering.

Jameson observes in moments of bad or failed writing *Paterson*'s dialectical struggle towards an impossible, totalizing synthesis, thwarted by the "impossibility of language" that served the poem's greater expression of "an American language

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[47] Nardi and Williams, 138.
[48] *Ibid.*, 184-185.

that has not yet come into being." While this study does not dispute this reading of failed synthesis and reconstitution, whether of an "American language" or of an invigorated American populace, I want to emphasize the moments of productive exchange between prose and verse that point to the materialism Williams sought to access in advance of and as the prerequisite to any hope of greater social reorganization or rearticulation. Jameson also points to the crucial work these exchanges carry out in his observation that the movements between disparate, textual materials have greater significance than the materials themselves:

> I want to argue that it is not (it is rarely) the substance of any particular moment of this streaming [of the poetic text itself] which is of any great significance: that it to say, many anecdotes are told, many moments of expression are registered, which lodge in the mind and the memory: but none of those has ultimate significance in itself…. None of them has aesthetic significance either (if that is a separate thing from the former), since what is aesthetic here—and what is significant as well—is rather the shifts and modulations between all these disparate materials…. It is therefore not in moments of rest or stillness that *Paterson* can be said to do something unique, but rather in the ceaseless transitions and modulations, whose fundamental effects surely turn on the distance between the various materials.[49]

Jameson attends to the transitions, shifts, and modulations between distinct moments of expression as the tactics Williams employs to resist figuration of stable themes and meanings in favor of "pure forms or flourishes of narrativity" and "some purer form of movement which would take all these diverse materials as its composite embodiment."[50]

So, a more productive comparison of the interplay between Nardi's substantial material in Book II and Williams's amalgamation of her material into his own verse might focus on what the two writings share and which features the verse draws from the prose. One stanza from the couplet series provides some insight in its distinction from the other 17 couplets in its configuration as a tercet, the third line an enjambment that orphans "the cost" as its own line:

> —the cyclonic fury, the fire,
> the leaden flood and finally
> the cost—[51]

"…the cyclonic fury, the fire, / the leaden flood" describes the elemental landscape in Book III, placing the cyclone of section I in a series that will unfold in the following sections. The tornado of section I that "pours / over the roofs of Paterson" (112) is superseded by the fire that destroys the Paterson library and concentrates in the

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[49] Jameson, 21.
[50] Jameson, 22-24.
[51] Williams, *Paterson*, 114.

"black plush…dark flame" of the "Beautiful Thing" in section II (128), and resolves in the flood that leads back to the falls at the conclusion of section III, drawing the past into the cascading present towards the pooling future that lies ahead (144). "The cost," at this point in the poem, is already a familiar unit, having been introduced at the outset of Book III, section I, and recurring throughout that section as a generative unit that produces a variety of word and idea play. Section I—which follows Nardi's expansive letter at the end of Book II—begins with spare verse: short lines that evoke nursery or folk rhymes:

> I love the locust tree
> The sweet white locust
>   How much?
>   How much?
> How much does it cost
> to love the locust tree
>   in bloom?
>
> A fortune bigger than
> Avery could muster
>   So much
>   So much
> The shelving green
>   locust
> whose bright small leaves
>   in June
> lean among flowers
> sweet and white at
>   heavy cost[52]

Less directly a reply to Nardi compared with the couplet verses which repeat her anxieties, this section is nevertheless positioned as a reply to Nardi in that it immediately follows her writing in the poem's sequence and, in its meditation on "the cost" as a concern for poetry, it mirrors Nardi's concern for what living has cost her poetry, and vice versa. Only in this case, "the cost" operates not as a signal for any symbolic, semantic weight—money or lack thereof, the emotional consequences of poverty and social isolation—but as a signal for the operations of poetry, ultimately divorced from the material operations of the world, but modeling a system of valuation based on the recombinatory, compositional potential of linguistic units. The repetition of "locust tree" and "sweet white locust" engenders the chorus of "How much / How much" which is echoed in the second stanza as "So much / So much," so that by the end of the first stanza when "How much" does not produce the anticipated question "How much does one love the locust tree?," but instead, "How much / does it cost / to love the locust tree / in bloom?," the nonsense of the question is tempered by the inherent aural sense of the poetry, in which

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[52] Williams, *Paterson*, 95.

"locust" visually and aurally mimics "the cost" in stress and consonant structure. The variation on "sweet white locust" in the last lines of this section, "the flowers / sweet and white at / heavy cost" appropriates "cost" to serve as a quality or feature of the heaviness of the blooming flowers, or perhaps even the heaviness of their scent in June: transforming "cost" into a compositional unit that carries out figural and aural functions, in addition to semantic ones.

As a reply to Nardi, this could be viewed as insultingly frivolous and at a remove from the real, material concerns that her writing expresses; as with the verse couplets in section II, the "locust" segment presents a highly crafted and condensed verse reply to the relative expansiveness of her prose. But the recurrence of "the cost" later in this section in advance of the transformations brought about by the elemental forces that Book III describes, and its status as one in a series of natural forces ("—the cyclonic fury, the fire, / the leaden flood and finally / the cost") suggest that Williams, perhaps in accepting Nardi's criticism of the divide between the ethics of his literature as opposed to his real life, has also adopted her writing's fixation on the material conditions of writing, and the capacity (or incapacity) of poetry to enact similar transformations of material elements. "The cost" returns in section II in a refrain that borrows from the language of economic theory as a counterpoint to the nursery rhyme of its initial delivery in the opening stanzas of the section:

> Certainly there is no mystery to the fact
> that COSTS SPIRAL ACCORDING TO A REBUS—known
> or unknown, plotted or automatic. The fact
> of poverty is not a matter of argument. Language
> is not a vague province. There is a poetry
> of the movements of cost, known or unknown
>
> The cost. The cost[53]

Here Williams balances the semantic weight of language, dense with resonance and references to concerns and strategies expressed elsewhere in the poem –for instance, typographical amplification of dogmatic pronouncements and—with the material features of the word unit, emphasized in its repetition here and its reference to the section's first, locust tree stanzas: "The cost. The cost." The textual space separating the two modes of use and the observation that "There is a poetry / of the movement of cost, known or unknown" make us attend to the gulf between the two modes of the use of "cost:" semantic-symbolic, or a material product and unit of language: a gulf that verse traverses instantaneously, in a "poetry of movement." The movement of "cost" is itself a unit of the poem's poetry: the migration of a phrase from unit of playful rhyme to rhetorical political statement and back to the status of unburdened (or less burdened) sound unit.

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[53] Williams, *Paterson*, 110

To designate the movements of this linguistic unit a kind of "poetry" is to assign poetic value to the agility with which a word or words may perform a variety of labors: the mutability of words' value and utility constitutes their functional richness. In this case, the mobility, mutability, and range of functional equivalences for "cost" expand upon the semantic value of the word and substantiate its occurrences as a response to the emotional and material concerns expressed in Nardi's letters. So Williams assigns multiple functions to "cost" that assert both the materiality of the term as a poetic unit with a graphic, sonic presence and also, conversely, the dematerializations that enable worldly determinations of "cost" and "value" and that also produce linguistic signification, through which words operate symbolically. My attention to certain poetic functions as markers of literary materiality that may productively engage with the matter and materiality of the world at large draws from a model of reading that Christopher Nealon develops in "The Inert and the Poetic." Attending to the modulations in textual transparency, density, and varying emotional registers exhibited in an excerpt of Lisa Robertson's *The Weather*, Nealon suggests that poetic swiftness in producing meaning and mobilizing affect and emotion may be the central tools with which poetry combats the pervasiveness of capital and consumption; these features of verse mobilize readerly attention towards and away from the text,[54] he argues, thereby constituting a literary materiality that has the potential to compete with worldly materiality. This poetic materiality, determined by poetry's capacity to manage and activate differentials in "significance, and speed, space and time"[55] does not emerge from the fact or features of language alone, but from poetry's history of forms and functions, imprints of which inhere in verse like Robertson's, which offers its own, internal competitions for readerly attention as an analogy for the opposition between capital and poetry as tangible forces in the world.[56] I share Nealon's interest in the forms and functions of poetic utterances as a historically material force that, in the case of *Paterson*, constitutes Williams's primary resource against the energetic, economic, and spiritual decay of the American social body his poem documents.

Revisiting Williams's 1922 description of poetry as a machine that drives the ill-formed matter of prose, we see that his attention to the movement of poetry literalizes its effects as physical: "As in all machines, its movement is intrinsic, undulant, a physical more than a literary character. In a poem this movement is distinguished in each case by the character of the speech from which it arises."[57] In this statement, as in Williams's commitment to "no ideas but in things," Williams's materializing aesthetic agenda places poetry in competition with the physical world: a competition not between the literary and the worldly,[58] but between the physical world and an equally physical force in poetry, which draws its physical character—

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[54] Christopher Nealon, "The Inert and the Poetic," (Cornell University Comparative Literature Graduate Student Lecture Series, November 6, 2007).

[55] *Ibid.*

[56] *Ibid.*

[57] Williams, *Collected Poems II*, 54.

[58] In differentiating the "literary" from the "physical," we see Williams describing a hierarchy of forces in being "literary" implies a quality of non-physicality, dependent on symbolic rather than tangible features.

its movements—from the usage of language: instantiations of language in speech and its graphic documentation in literary forms. In claiming that the movement of poetry originates in the "character of the speech from which it arises," Williams suggests that features such as the rhythms, diction, stress patterns, aurality, and syntax of speech constitute the tangible features that poetry captures and evokes; and in prioritizing poetry's "physical" character over its "literary" character, Williams claims for poetry a presence and substance equal to other physical matter in the world as a result of its "physical" movements: those features which are most directly apprehended by the senses, rather than comprehended as abstraction and idea.

By virtue of his investment in a specifically American mode of "speech" rather than the abstractions of pure language, Williams's poetic practice, like Nealon's model of reading and literary materiality, offers an alternative to the "linguistically autonomous," Adornian model of lyrical reversion to the resources of language as an alienated subject's response to the ubiquity of commerce.[59] Nealon cites an argument that Adorno outlines in "On Lyric Poetry and Society" in which lyric verse, the literary form through which subjectivity may find its most complete expression, foregrounds the dual nature of language as a way of diagramming its own dialectical relation to society:

> The paradox specific to the lyric work, a subjectivity that turns into an objectivity, is tied to the priority of linguistic form in the lyric; it is that priority from which the primacy of language in literature in general (even in prose forms) is derived. For language is itself something double. Through its configurations it assimilates itself completely into subjective impulses; one would almost think it had produced them. But at the same time language remains the medium of concepts, remains that which establishes an inescapable relationship to the universal and to society.[60]

Here, Adorno describes the dual function of language in relation to the subject: both the medium through which subjective awareness and its expression are realized (though the implication is that subjective impulses are prior to – not produced by – language) and the "medium of concepts," that which links the visceral self to society and the shared, abstract concepts that pervade all social relations. Adorno's lyric subject, by virtue of standing for that which we call individual, the "not-social," the escape from the "weight of material existence" and "the coercion of reigning practices, of utility, of the relentless pressures of self-preservation," is both a crystallization of a subject position and, by virtue of its defensive self-generation, a necessary product of that which threatens to subsume the subject: worldly

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[59] Nealon, "Inert and Poetic."

[60] Theodor W. Adorno, "On Lyric Poetry and Society," in *Notes to Literature*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Sherry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 43.

reification and commodification.[61] Against the dangers of isolating the subject in lyric to the point of the subject's own reification, Adorno's solution for the poet, which Nealon challenges as politically fatalistic, is a self-sacrificing strategy of effacing the self in pursuit of a "pure language":

> If the subject is to genuinely resist reification in solitude here, it may no longer even try to withdraw into what is its own as though that were its property; the traces of individualism that has in the meantime delivered itself over to the market in the form of the feuilleton are alarming. Instead, the subject has to step outside itself by keeping quiet about itself; it has to make itself a vessel, so to speak, for the idea of a pure language.[62]

This solution, which Adorno himself recognizes as only intermittently and momentarily possible in instances where "what is possible transcends its own impossibility,"[63] keeps the oppositions of society and subject in play and depends for its functioning on the perpetual martyrdom of the poetic subject in service of the "collective undercurrent [that] provides the foundation for all individual lyric poetry."[64] Nealon's proposal, drawing from Gayatri Spivak's theory of the "affectively necessary labor" which must be accounted for in understanding the circuits of capital,[65] is to chart the modulations in a text's internal relations – the speed and transparency with which it produces meaning or affect – as a historically grounded measure of the relations that characterize the relationship between poetry and capital, and subject and superstructure.

      One might observe in Williams's lyrical experiments in Imagism, especially in the sparse, descriptive poems of *Sour Grapes* (1921), an analogue to Adorno's "pure language" model of linguistic autonomy and evacuation of the subject position as a concession to a lyric totality that resists contamination from the language and systems of capital. *Paterson*'s ubiquitous refrain and "virgin purpose" (186)—to make audible and articulable "the language, the language" (11)—might also seem to enact the kind of "affirmative utterance in the scene of the negative"[66] that Nealon identifies in "sacrificial poetics" like Adorno's, insofar as *Paterson* posits the lack of a viable language as motivation for a prolific engagement with "language" that would

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[61] Adorno, 39-40.

[62] *Ibid.*, 52.

[63] "In industrial society the lyric idea of a self-restoring immediacy becomes—where it does not impotently evoke a romantic past—more and more something that flashes out abruptly, something in which what is possible transcends its own impossibility." *Ibid*.

[64] *Ibid.*, 45.

[65] Nealon focuses on Spivak's reformulation of the "totality of productive relations" to include the relational, affective exchanges—women's work, emblematically—that ensure survival and represent a value that capital must capture and exploit at varying rates: enough to keep cycles of labor and production in motion, not so much that individuals, deprived of sufficient affective resources for "survival and comfort," rise up. Nealon, "Inert and Poetic."

[66] Nealon, "Inert and Poetic."

seem to belie this lack.[67] However, *Paterson*'s engagement with "language" manifests as an account of speech acts, rather than a search for "pure language" as a signifying system: an investment in *parole* rather than *langue*, palpable in the poem's accounts of unheard voices, deficient faculties of hearing, and in its mythologizing of the "chattering" wellspring of language: "And standing, shrouded there, in that din, / Earth, the chatterer, father of all / *speech*" (*P* 39; italics added).[68] In the narrow sense of "lyric," *Paterson* might be categorized as such only in local moments and effects, and therefore falls outside the parameters of the sustained, subjective expression that characterize the verse mode Adorno tests for subjective interventions in bourgeois, alienated use of language. But lyric as the site for subject formation and expression is a useful paradigm to test the way that expressive labor has been distributed across prose and verse in *Paterson,* and to understand the poem's foregrounding of lyric modes in its final book.

Verse Figuration and Material Transformations

In Adorno's recourse to "pure language" as the subject's response to reification, in Nealon's search for a materialism that does not inhere in "language itself" but draws from features that are specific to poetic utterances and literary history, and in Williams's investment of his poetic materialism in the "physical" movements of the speech from which poetry is drawn, there is a shared interest in the ways that literary language may engage (antagonistically, in Adorno's terms; allegorically, in Nealon's) with the matter of the world through the particular materiality that literary forms offer. Williams's suppression of poetry's "literary" character in favor of its "physical" character belies the rich literary history reflected in *Paterson*'s form and materials: not least of which include the poem's literary provenance in the classical tradition of epic and its ubiquitous references to literature written by Williams's contemporaries and canonical predecessors. In conceiving of his poetry's materiality as "physical" movement rather than "literary" achievement, Williams uses a narrow definition of the "literary" (perhaps restricted

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[67] Jameson argues that *Paterson* "never seeks to substitute itself and its own linguistic capacities (as both Whitman and Stevens might be seen very differently as doing) for the inability of Americans to speak (and to speak a language uniquely and recognizably American, rather than English)." Jameson, 8.

[68] Analyzing a short poem by German poet Stefan George, Adorno similarly invokes the trope of hearing one's defamiliarized language as a crucial experience towards recovering language's "intrinsic being": "…the ear of George…hears his own language as though it were a foreign tongue. He overcomes its alienation, which is an alienation of use, by intensifying it until it becomes the alienation of a language no longer actually spoken, even an imaginary language, and in that imaginary language he perceived what would be possible, but never took place, in its composition…. Only by virtue of a differentiation taken so far that it can no longer bear its own difference, can no longer bear anything but the universal, freed from the humiliation of isolation, in the particular does lyrical language represent language's intrinsic being as opposed to its service in the realm of ends." Adorno, 52-53.

to allegorical structures and symbolic figures[69]) and provides a model for writing that is complementary to Nealon's model of reading, in which poetic materiality comparable to the physical matter of the world may be found in the dynamism and movements achieved within the text. In the case of *Paterson*, dynamism and movement occur at junctures between disparate textual materials and the disparate modes of prose and verse: the dynamism of movement achieved through the collaging of all this textual matter.

Since "there is a poetry / of the movements of cost," in *Paterson*, and "cost" itself is a site of mobility in meaning—from semantic to sound-derived—as well as a marker for the "material," a value that recurs in the Nardi letters and in Williams's verse response to her prose, the dynamics of the exchange and transformation of materials or material qualities seem operative both on a formal level as well as a figural or thematic level. The transformations of "cost"—its textual movements throughout these sections and its range in figural use—operate in tandem with the series of natural forces that transform the landscape and locale of Book III, and themselves transform from literal to figurative forces. On the one hand, the elemental transformations are literal and historically grounded, as Williams draws inspiration from the devastating fire, flood and tornado that struck Paterson at the turn of the century, and cites, in prose, historical accounts of the 1902 fire's origins. On the other hand, the transforming and transformative elements serve a shifting figurative function in these sections: the fire of section II becomes that which enables artistic realization of beauty through the destruction of the library and the stale authority its books represent ("Beautiful thing! Aflame / a defiance of authority" (119)), the competing destructive-creative force against which the artist must operate ("...Beat you / at your own game, Fire. Outlast you: / Poet Beats Fire at Its Own Game!" (119)), and as a figure for beauty itself, a concentration of artistic impetus:

> Rising, with a whirling motion, the person
> Passed into the flame, becomes the flame—
> The flame taking over the person…
> …………………………………………………
> The person submerged
> In wonder, the fire became the person
> But the pathetic library (that contained,
> perhaps, not one volume of distinction)
> must go down also—[70]

In the union of person and flame that produces a submergence in "wonder," fire operates allegorically; in the guise of that which takes down the "pathetic

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[69] Jameson argues that *Paterson* avoids the trap of becoming "literary" by treating symbolic figuration as a taboo and "reversing the figurative process, which tends otherwise to formalize itself in the production of just such official 'themes' (and as the word suggests, in doing so to turn the work into mere Literature)." I'll address this argument below. Jameson, 27.
[70] Williams, *Paterson*, 122-123.

library," fire as a physically destructive force competes with the allegorical fire of Williams's artistic revolt against obsolete literary authority and traditions. The fluidity of fire's figuration in this excerpt and in section II is typical of Williams's figuration throughout *Paterson*, where major, recurring players, from the waterfalls to the plenitude of dogs that appear throughout the text, carry symbolic weight inconsistently, at times exhibiting large allegorical resonance—the falls as the font of the new, American poetic language, dogs as unruly thoughts or unruly poets ("…just another dog / among a lot of dogs. What / else is there? And to do? / The rest have run out— / after the rabbits" (3))—and at other times, acting as a literal thing in the world: inspiration for ekphrastic poetic description and subject "matter" of the poem's mise-en-scène.

The toggling here, whether between one phrase's shifting labors as semantic figure or as a material unit of sound and syllabic stress, or between large figures in the poem that resist a static and consistent symbolic assignment, foregrounds movement for its own sake. Movements between states constitute the primary thematic achievement of the poem, rather than the resolution of stable figures into an organized mythology of a renewed language drawn from the earth and falls of Paterson. While this redemption narrative haunts the poem with varying levels of insistence, its hallmarks—the distant roar of the yet-to-be realized speech of the present and references to the elusive force that will combat divorce and repressed desire—cannot compete with the local and immediate movements, diversions and gestures of the poem, which assert an alternate narrative that prioritizes present-tenseness and immediately accessible energies, as prosaic or unrefined as they may be. When Williams resolves the ranging, allegorical movements of fire in Book III in his rapturous love poem to the momentary embodiment of the "Beautiful Thing"—a downtrodden, violated, and erotically idealized woman who Williams, in the role of doctor and artist-supplicant, elevates as a "black plush…dark flame" (128)—the resolution is transitory and, we understand, limited by the viscerality (the "'dying swan'," the "busted nose") of the temporary form on offer. As with the concentration of energy and affect in the "Radiant Gist" moment of Book IV—a homonym for Book III's "Beautiful Thing," situated this time in the realm of scientific discovery and the figure of Marie Curie—these moments of narrative resolution and concentration of symbolic figuration, are, as Jameson observes, Poundian and "inconsistent with [*Paterson*'s] deeper logic, since for once an idea is projected rather than dealt with negatively."[71]

This "deeper logic," for Jameson, expresses itself in a strategy of negative figuration, whereby figures and symbols are dismantled or abandoned as soon as they're realized, and an "anti-substantive or process-oriented treatment of these materials as they succeed each other in the textual stream."[72] Instead of stable figures and themes, Jameson observes in the poem a new kind of structure that wishes to be "purely formal movement rather than narrative of even a collective actantial variety," relying on "shards of narrativity [that] are abstracted from these anecdotal materials which come to function as new narrative components in their

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[71] Jameson, 23.
[72] *Ibid.*, 24.

own right and as the possible building blocks of new kinds of meta-narrative constructions."[73] Viewing the poem as a collection of movements—"pure forms or flourishes of narrativity as such and in the abstract, something like narrative ornamentation"[74]—Jameson responds to the textual landscape of the poem, itself a collection of disparate materials linked through "ceaseless transitions and modulations, whose fundamental effects surely turn on the distance between the various materials."[75]

Jameson's attention to the movements between materials that constitute the poem's unique achievements stops short of reading these movements as conceptually significant: "the modulation[s] must not always be understood in a signifying way, after the order of the montage or even of the ideogram."[76] Instead, these modulations, along with the deployment of isolated or ironized narrative gestures and the overall strategy of collage, contribute to the poem's resistance to stable figuration and the narrative themes that such figuration produces:

> The rapid shifts in materials, the collaging of other documents and voices, along with their preoccupations and equally nascent themes, constitutes a basic 'technique' for doing this, and clearly enough, the faster and more numerous such shifts and changes in direction, the more surely will the mind be diverted from this temporary fixation or obsession…for, with respect to an aesthetic of totality, this kind of thematization, not to speak of outright symbolization, or even conceptual reification, may be seen as just such a pathology, an attempt to hold fast morbidly to a single figure[77]

Jameson's treatment of the impulse to seek and compose figurative language and thematic unity as a "fixation or obsession" as a morbid "pathology" makes sense in light of the Hegelian, dialectical model of totalization that sustains his reading of *Paterson*: the antagonistic relationship among its material components (prose and verse, good writing and bad), its status as literary, Heideggerian work in which earth and world assert their immanence as oppositions, and the poem's totalizing, epic investment in resisting particular themes in order to claim universal breadth. Jameson's analysis of the natural forces that traverse Book III – wind, water, earth, and fire – carries out this model of a contingency of oppositions that produces greater incompatibilities rather than synthesizing bridges: that seeks movements and uneasy truces between opposed forces, rather than a resolution of differences in unifying figures or themes. Whereas the literalized and allegorical employment of the element of fire reflects, in my reading, a similar pattern of use at the level of the linguistic unit, Jameson argues that the way in which Williams employs the elements—abstracted yet concrete, in necessary combination with one another to

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[73] Jameson, 23.
[74] *Ibid.,* 22.
[75] *Ibid.,* 21.
[76] *Ibid.,* 22.
[77] *Ibid.,* 27.

achieve expression (tornado leads to fire which leads to flood, fire requires air for expression, the falls exist only in terms of its arc through the air, etc.[78])—reveals the poem's doomed yearning to act as a physical element in its own right: appropriating elements into its "gigantic material collage," as a means of adopting the physical materiality of those elements:

> …Williams's four elements…are the raw materials of the poem in as literal a sense as is possible for "letters" or "literature" which cannot physically incorporate the physical as such….the raw sensory constituents or component parts of the physical world are grossly appropriated into the aesthetic construction, and circulated 'with the bare hands' throughout the other materials. No other modern work has so consequently aspired to this reduction to the physical…. it does not make for vulgar materialism in any obvious sense but also marks the distance of 'civilization' from matter by the equally necessary failure of the effort, since *Paterson* cannot bring water and fire before us in any immediate let alone sensory fashion.[79]

By this formulation, *Paterson* evokes natural forces as a means of substantiating itself as equally material and physical as earth, wind, fire, and water; at the same time, Jameson argues that *Paterson* develops an "anti-substantive" strategy towards figures and themes that might emerge in the course of its literary accumulation of ideas. The opposition between these two strategies—moving towards and away from material substance—is resolved through a Heideggerian reading of the poem as a site for the struggle between earth and world: a competition among oppositions[80] that is staged against "not a place but the absence of place…and also the absence of voice" and illuminated by the element of "History," which draws from the poem's materials their "implicit historicity."[81]

     This view of *Paterson*'s materiality-turned-immaterial by the swiftness of the distracting, abstracting, and opposing movements between and away from substantive figuration complements my reading of the exchanges between prose and verse, in its attention to the way that movements between states or between prose concentrations of detail and verse flourishes of lyricism or narration manifest the poem's particular relationship to its matter. For Jameson, the confrontation of the material against the immaterial carries out the essential work of the poem, through which the poem mobilizes its failures: the failure to constitute an American

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[78] Jameson, 36-37.

[79] *Ibid.*, p 37.

[80] A competition of such oppositions—the defining feature of an authentic work of art in the Heideggerian model—produces "an awareness of the contradiction so intense as to sharpen our simultaneous life in both dimensions at once…. This is then what *Paterson* seems to confirm in the way in which it is the indirection of the topology and of the contingent history of the urban agglomeration that somehow gives the inhuman earth beneath Paterson to be felt; while it is at the same time by way of the material elements that the social community, with its perpetually repressed pasts, is brought into view as a world." *Ibid.*, 34-35.

[81] *Ibid.*, 41.

voice, to materialize a stable sense of place, to achieve a physical presence as a "thing" that surpasses the abstraction of "ideas" (as in the poem's early stage mantra, "no ideas but in things"). These failures produce a dialectical *via negativa* approach to form that has come to characterize most readings of long, epical Modernist works, "in which something is kept alive by virtue of the untruthfulness of the very form itself" and which Jameson calls "the fundamental ontological "strategy" of *Paterson* as a whole."[82] The dialectical model of form realized through the failure of form depends on markers of the absence of and opposition to form, which Jameson reads in certain moments of reverse figuration (eg: the eagle climbing into an egg, rather than emerging from it: an allegorical interjection in the midst of Book II), in instances of "bad poetry" (the previously cited examples of Nardi's letters and the poetry of "Corydon" in Book IV's pastoral exchange) and in the poem's "elaborate detours around abstraction and conceptuality"[83]: its perpetual return to that which "can be grasped by the senses" and is "more tangible and thing-like than the associations left often by the vagueness of conceptual language,"[84] the natural forces of Book III.

A prose to verse transition dramatizing the start of the 1902 fire that provides much of the imagery for Book III, section II exhibits a slipperiness of figuration that falls under Jameson's rubric of diversionary tactics by which "the mind is diverted from this temporary fixation or obsession [with the cohesion of a figure or theme]," but also asks us to consider what this kind of movement accomplishes substantively, as opposed to negatively. Section II, as we have seen, opens with a series of couplets in which Williams adopts Nardi's observations on the conditions and social position required to write. In these stanzas, too, Williams introduces the figure of flames and of fire, initially in terms of scientific first principles—"Fire burns; that is the first law"—but thereafter turning to colloquial platitude and idiom ("Talk / fans the flames") and crude metaphor: "...to write / is a fire and not only of the blood.... The writing / should be a relief, / relief from the conditions / which as we advance become – a fire / a destroying fire" (113). Here we may see evidence of what Jameson calls "detours around abstraction" which sometimes take the form of a homeopathic therapy[85], for as quickly as Williams offers a symbolic order, he changes the terms of its relations and so accomplishes a sleight of hand in which fire might symbolize everything, and therefore, might also mean nothing.

As if to remind us that sometimes a fire is just a fire, following on the prose and verse exchange that follow this section's opening couplets, Williams asserts the literal and historical fact of a fire by narrating in prose an anecdotal account of the origins of Paterson's 1902 fire, beginning *in medias res* at the moment the fire starts and employing simple, declarative prose with minimal affect to describe in neutral

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[82] Jameson, 14.

[83] *Ibid.,* 31.

[84] *Ibid.,* 29.

[85] In discussing Williams's homeopathic approach, Jameson more specifically refers to the persistence of "ideas" in a work that purports to give us "no ideas but in things," observing that Williams's "montages and ideograms," as committed as they might be to the foregrounding of "things" rather than "ideas," manages still to generate "theory" with great force. *Ibid.*, 30.

terms the car barns in which the fire ignited. A lyrical anthropomorphizing of the books—and by extension, a literary tradition of men and their writing—that lie in disuse, awaiting rediscovery and activation follows this prose account, reasserting the locale of the Library as the ground where local details coalesce. Recommencing the anecdote of the fire, Williams' prose descriptions become lengthier and employ pronominal deictics and the abbreviation "tho'" for "though," suggesting the features of personal oral history and an eyewitness account. At the dramatic height of the account – "Before noon the whole city was doomed"—Williams reintroduces verse with the already loaded term, "Beautiful thing" and a verse embellishment and restatement of the prose: "—the whole city doomed! And / the flames towering ·" (116).

The verse section that follows juxtaposes the prose from which it draws narrative substance, in enacting both a description of the fire but also an enactment of the speed and quality of the fire's flames: a performance dependent upon the compositional capacities of free verse:

                    --the whole city doomed! And

        the flames towering .

                like a mouse, like
                a red slipper, like
                a star, a geranium
                a cat's tongue or –
                thought, thought
                that is a leaf, a
                pebble, an old man
                out of a story by

                Pushkin   .

                        Ah!
                rotten beams tum-
                bling,

                    .   an old bottle
        mauled.[86]

The swift series of similes—"like a mouse…a red slipper…a star …a geranium… a cat's tongue"—are diminutive and domestic, and seem less aligned with the "towering flames" that doom a city than with an intimate and interior catalogue of sensory treasures. One might see how a red slipper or a geranium in color and contour might accurately invoke a flame, how the flickering brilliance of a star or a

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[86] Williams, *Paterson*, 116-117.

lapping cat's tongue might mimic a fire's substance and movements, and how the speed with which these similes succeed one another might approximate the speed with which a fire consumes and transforms. The surprising construction, "the flames towering / like a mouse," highlights the inherent disjunctions of simile, whereby the alignment of dissimilar figures generate points of assonance which proliferate once an initial relationship of likeness has been established. Perhaps the flames tower with the speed and agility of mice finding their way into small spaces; but without dwelling on the comparison or asking readers to accept the simile as sound, the short verse line resolves with a line break at "like," as does the next verse line, thus emphasizing likeness, rather than the fact or imagery of the fire, as the central motivating term here; and so we accept that a mouse might also seem like a red slipper, which might also suggest a star or a flower or the pink flickering of a cat's tongue. Beyond carrying out a Jamesonian reversal or failure of figuration, this section's nimble movements through a series of similes achieves a richness in figurative terms and images for fire, and its mounting relations of likeness suggest the endless potential for poetic equivalence to produce meaning, even if literal equivalence—poetic material substituting productively for worldly material—is impossible.

The simile series pauses with the coordinating conjunction "or—" suspending its swift, figure-shifting momentum with the introduction of the abstract, "thought, thought," but recommencing its figural transformations as quickly as they had been paused: "thought / that is a leaf, a / pebble, an old man / out of a story by / Pushkin" (117). But the introduction of "thought, thought" breaks the spell of shape-shifting yet concrete imagery, for although there is a brief return to the concrete and material—"thought" concretized as a single leaf or a small stone—the series of similes conjures a character from a Pushkin text, and with this leap, the abstractions of fiction, history, literary tradition, and genre change our register of attention and prompt a return to the section's mise-en-scène, the library and all its contents aflame.

While Jameson's reading might find in this sequence the reverse figuration and agile avoidance of abstraction (with the exception of a homeopathic acknowledgment of the abstract) that characterize a modernist aversion to figural closure, the figural substance of this verse segment and the speed with which it accomplishes its transformations, in contrast with the linear attentiveness of the prose descriptions, also suggest its accomplishment lies in the figural ground it claims, rather than cedes, and in the model of transformative figuration that it generates. In a rare instance of symmetry across sections, Williams devotes an early segment of verse in each of Book III's three sections to a rapid catalogue of imagery and varying figuration focused around each of the natural forces and disasters that the three sections treat: a tornado in section I, a fire in section II, and a flood in section III. The three verse segments are each organized around the repetition of an invocation, "so be it," that punctuates the streams of imagery and changes in register from incantatory and grandly impersonal to private and prayerful. As in the first series in section I, the segment in section II, which follows the swift series of similes for fire, is prefaced by a brief section in which the element at hand—in this case, fire—acts allegorically ("there are fires that / smolder / smolder a lifetime and

never burst / into flame" (117)); the catalogue of imagery that ensues reasserts the material properties of fire by dwelling on the material transformations that it enacts:

> Papers
> (consumed) scattered to the winds. Black.
> The ink burned white, metal white. So be it.
> Come overall beauty. Come soon. So be it.
> A dust between the fingers. So be it.
> Come tatterdemalion futility. Win through
> So be it. So be it.[87]

Invoking wind along with fire, as does the equivalent segment in section I ("Blow! So be it. Bring down! So be it. Consume / and submerge! So be it. Cyclone, fire / and flood. So be it." (97), the segment's repetition of "so be it" enables the massing together of non-sequential imagery and non-sequential parts of speech: the nominal phrases "papers (consumed)…" "the ink burned white…" and "a dust between the fingers" interspersed with the adjective "black," and the imperative statements ,"come soon," "win through." and the ubiquitous "so be it," which establishes a punctuating rhythm of return. The repetitions of "so be it" in the context of thematically proximate but not descriptively or semantically cohesive statements have the effect of conferring equivalency across the disparate elements of this verse segment. In the imperative, "so be it," Williams commands that each suggestion, sensation, and image materialize and achieve equal states of "being" before the next element succeeds it.

The Materiality of Poetic Utterance

Williams therefore generates an accumulation of images and elements that convey the scene and sensations of a fire—a figuration achieved through multiplications, rather than reversals—that is also an aggregation of linguistic effects producing meaning through the logic of poetry, rather than the logic of prose syntax. Nealon's analysis of the way that sections of Lisa Robertson's *The Weather* forces readers to "read two ways at once" is germane to this argument, given his observations regarding the impact the imperative "say" has on Robertson's own rhetorically variegated verse. Nealon argues that the poem's imperative, "say," in serving as both a "rhetoric" and a "grammar," "insists…on splitting our attention between the parts' arrangement and their topicality"[88] through the process of trading dissonant combinations of parts of speech and opacity of meaning for moments of rhetorical clarity and emotional resonance. The experience of "reading two ways" might also productively describe the effect of *Paterson*'s larger and local architectures. At the broadest level, the poem's alternations between its substantial prose and verse sections ask readers to "read two ways": to anticipate the linear, sentence-level clarity of Williams's prose description of the Paterson fire, and in the

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[87] Williams, *Paterson*, 117.
[88] Nealon, "Inert and Poetic."

next moment, to parse the line to line leaps and bridging similes of Williams' verse depictions of fire. At the level of the verse phrase, as in the example of "the cost" or "so be it," Williams foregrounds the dual modes of verse signification in producing meaning semantically and as a unit of sound and stress,[89] a duality that Williams emphasizes in an interview with journalist Mike Wallace that Williams includes in section II of Book V: "In prose, an English word means what it says. In poetry, you're listening to two things…you're listening to the sense, the common sense of what it says. But it says more. That is the difficulty" (222). Williams describes the act of comprehension in terms of the act of "listening"; poetry "says more" than prose by means of what verse conveys beyond the "common sense" of a word's definition. Here, the conflation between listening and comprehending suggests that one of the ways verse "says more," for Williams, inheres in its aural effects.

The "difficulty" in the way that verse produces meaning is therefore descriptive of its characteristic resources: poetic language's capacity to register meanings simultaneously on multiple levels—rhetorical, affective—and in multiple sensory and experiential dimensions (Williams's limitation of these dimensions to aural ones, notwithstanding): visual, aural, spatio-temporal, etc.[90] Mutlu Blasing's work on the language of lyric poetry takes into account the way that the material features of verse language activate multiple registers of verse meaning, making her account of verse useful to test against the materialism that Williams's work manifests. Blasing's *Lyric Poetry: The Pain and Pleasure of Words*, like Adorno's "On Lyric Poetry and Society," begins with the assertion of language as a nexus of public and private dimensions: the medium through which the speaking subject enters, via *parole*, into the communal experience of social existence, the code, *langue*, which organizes and enables this shared existence, and, Blasing emphasizes, a code that is "alien" and must be acquired, thereby producing an initial moment and ensuing history of acquisition to which lyric poetry returns its audience, again and again. Blasing grounds the materiality of poetry in the materiality of language as a system that is distinct from all the meaningful discourse it enables:

> …[poetry] is a formal practice that keeps in view the linguistic code and the otherness of the material medium of language to all that humans do with it – refer, represent, express, narrate, imitate, communicate, think, reason, theorize, philosophize. It offers an experience of another kind of order, a system that operates independently of the production of the meaningful discourse that it enables. This is a mechanical system with its own rules, procedures,

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[89] Henry Sayre's reading of the visual dimension of Williams's prose and verse structure will be addressed, below.

[90] Andrew Welsh cites Pound in describing the three axes along which poetic language may be organized: aural (musical), visual, and logocentric. See his study on lyric poetry, *The Roots of Lyric: Primitive Poetry and Modern Poetics* for a discussion on the origins of modern poetry in the spatio-temporal organization of emblem, riddle, and ideogram poetry, and the musical organization of chants and charms. Andrew Welsh, *The Roots of Lyric: Primitive Poetry and Modern Poetics*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

and history. It works with a kind of logic that is oblivious to discursive logic.[91]

Verse is a formal return to the dissonance and fundamental gap between language and the uses to which it is put: a gap which is suppressed and minimized in normalized uses of language, but which poetry emphasizes in its staging of all meaningful discourse— narrative, emotive-expressive, logical-didactic, chant and invocation, etc.—as figures which emanate from the ground (and material) of language:

> ...poetic forms clearly accommodate referential use of language and rational discourse. But they position most complex thought processes and rigorous figurative logic as figures on the ground of processes that are in no way rational. When poetry construes the symbolic function and logical operations as kinds of games one can play with language—right alongside wordplays and rhymes—all superstructures, all claims to extralinguistic "truths" are in jeopardy. Poetry is a cultural institution dedicated to remembering and displaying the emotionally and historically charged materiality of language, on which logical discourse would establish its hold....
>
> Poetry foregrounds a linguistic nonrational that is not a byproduct of reason; rather, it is the ground on which rational language and disciplinary discourses carve their territories, draw their borders, and designate their "irrational" others.[92]

The figure-ground model of language and the discourses it enables encourages an approach to poetry in which the suggestion of "two ways" of reading that Nealon observes in Robertson's work, or the unresolved dialectics of totality that Jameson observes in *Paterson*, are emblematic of poetic language's properties and its trade in conflict, rather than in resolution of the ways in which language produces meaning. In, Blasing's terms, poetry negotiates between somatic and symbolic registers of meaning, employing features such as rhyme and rhythm to "ensure the audibility of the somatic materiality of language"[93] even as the referential use of language asserts itself.

Blasing's identification of the "somatic materiality" of poetic language that permits poets and readers to access a prior, prehistorical[94] and pre-referential

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[91] Mutlu Blasing, *Lyric Poetry: The Pain and Pleasure of Words* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 2.

[92] *Ibid.*, 3.

[93] *Ibid.*,101.

[94] A "prehistorical" relationship to language insofar as it predates one's earliest memories of expression through language; Blasing identifies the initial process of language acquisition in Freudian psychoanalytic terms as "a primal history, so to speak, of the training of the oral zone—a sexually charged zone because of its link to alimentary functions and survival-to produce linguistic sounds. Infants are seduced into discipline, and the individuated/socialized subject is formulated at a crux of

relationship to language suggests an enticing analogy for *Paterson*'s relationship to its own linguistic materials and materiality, particularly in its figuration of language as the indigenous and fluid resource (the Passaic Falls) which the poem attempts to access, despite the imperviousness of Paterson's residents to its audible roar and the poem's skepticism of its own methods and success. As we have seen, *Paterson* expresses the "somatic materiality" of language through its showcasing of material features of the language from which it is built: transformative speed and referential fluidity. Book III's catalogue of natural elements and their dynamic effect on the physical world and the senses also exhibits an awareness of language as textual building blocks; in the stanza that follows the initial treatment of the Paterson fire, "so be it" punctuates a sustained description of the "old bottle / mauled" and measures, in its recurrence, the substitutions and variations that enable language's swift transformations in meaning and evocation:

> A drunkenness
> of flames. So be it. A bottle, mauled
> by the flames, belly-bent with laughter:
> yellow, green. So be it—of drunkenness
> survived, in guffaws of flame. All fire afire!
> So be it. Swallowing the fire. So be
> It. Torqued to laughter by the fire,
> The very fire. So be it. Chortling at flames
> sucked in, a multiformity of laughter, a
> flaming gravity surpassing the sobriety of
> flames, a chastity of annihilation.[95]

"A drunkenness of flames" provides a theme and phrasal template from which other phrasal variations emerge: "guffaws of flame," "a multiformity of laughter," "a chastity of annihilation." The anthropomorphized bottle, "belly-bent with laughter," is also "torqued to laughter by the fire" and "chortling at flames sucked in" so that the "drunkenness" of the flames becomes a transmutable quality assigned both to the riot and dynamism of a blazing fire, and the bottle itself, deformed and overcome as if with drunken laughter. But instead of a deformity or deformation,[96] this

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pain and pleasure. Poetry formally returns to that crux, to the emotionally charged history of the disciplining and seduction into language…" Blasing, 13.

[95] Williams, *Paterson*, 118.

[96] Henry Sayre observes that the prose excerpts of Book I feature multiple instances of the deformed, the monstrous, or the grotesque (the giant bass, the man with the overgrown cranium, the drowned corpse found lodged in the "crotch" of two logs), suggesting that prose, in this system, is verse in its most deformed state. Henry Sayre, *The Visual Text of William Carlos Williams*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 102**.** Book I closes with John Addington Symonds' suggestion, from *Studies of the Greek Poets,* that the "deformed and mutilated verses" of rhythmically anomalous verse was meant to reflect the "distorted subjects" and "deformed morality" with which they dealt (Williams, *Paterson* 40). Williams includes this excerpt, no doubt, for its suggestion that new forms of verse evolve to reflect the language and spirit of its speakers and subject: the core challenge of Williams's poetics. But the binary (and hierarchy) of form and deformity—well-formed verse and ill-formed prose—is

segment describes a "multiformity," asserting the primacy of transformation, rather than destruction or degradation: the discovery of "multiforms" or multiple (new) forms through manipulation of a found form. The bottle "unbottled" (118) becomes:

> ...the glass warped
> to a new distinction, reclaiming the
> undefined.
> ....
> Annihilation ameliorated: Hottest
> lips lifted till no shape but a vast
> molt of the news flows.
> ....
> Poet Beats Fire at Its Own Game! The bottle!
> the bottle! the bottle! the bottle! I
> give you the bottle![97]

Williams places his own manipulations—the bottle anthropomorphized and melted into a molten figure for the new and the newly defined, as well as "the news" itself—in competition with the transformative capacities of fire: the literal transformation of materials versus Williams's manipulations of figural, literary material. While Jameson observes in such moments *Paterson*'s aspirations to a "reduction to the physical" and the poem's shortcomings in achieving a physical manifestation commensurate with natural elements, the rivalry Williams stages might also be read as a means to foreground the transformations and movements in meaning that verse language permits, and in Blasing's terms, the "somatic materiality" of the language that permits these experiments: the "molt" of news operating on a semantic level ("molt" referring to the molten material of melted glass) as well as a metaphoric level: the news and archival materials, such as those stored in the Library which inform the imagery of Book III, constituting the "molt" that is shed in the perpetual process of history's moulting—the perpetual production, loss and revision of historical trace.

The equivalent catalogues in sections I and II mirror this section's interweaving of the disruptive work of a natural force with the competing interventions of literary authorship or in some cases, readership. In section I, a series of scenes culled from "old newspaper files" details the victims of tornado, fire and flood—a burned child in a field, children drowned in a canal—and local, contemporaneous sites—"The Paterson Cricket Club, 1896," "Another Indian rock shelter found,"—and proceeds like an archival newsreel, punctuated only by the periodic confirmation "so be it" (98). As with the segment in section II, the repetition of the command, "so be it," has a leveling effect, whereby each facet of this catalogue, from the matter of fact description of a child's failed attempt to escape the fire, to the more obscure invocation of "the wind that has tripped us, pressed upon /

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challenged here by the suggestion of multiformity: transformations rather than deformations, viable adaptations rather than broken or lesser forms.
[97] Williams, *Paterson*, 118-119.

us, prurient or upon the prurience of our fears" shares the same stage, each equally conjured to "be" through the will of the poem's architecture. When the intrusion of the figure of a reader disrupts this shared stage and conflates Williams's interventions as reader-poet with our readerly ones—"The mind / reels, starts back amazed from the reading / So be it."—even this process is contained by the command "so be it," so that the conjuring of the elements operates in tandem with the conjuring of the poem itself: its varying registers of meaning and reference, and varying degrees of opacity or self-referential transparency.

Section III's elemental catalogue presents an even more literal pairing of natural element with materiality of text. Following the description of the rising waters of a flood, Williams posits a "counterpart": the rising mass of texts in the world, an equally bewildering and deadly force that is the obstruction that Book III symbolically resolves, in celebrating the fire that burns down the Library and its contents, thereby producing and refining the "Beautiful Thing" and the "radiant gist:"

<div style="margin-left:2em">

And there rises
a counterpart , of reading, slowly, overwhelming
the mind; anchors him in the chair. So be
it. He turns   .   O Paradiso! The stream
grows leaden in him, his lilies drag. So
be it. Texts mount and complicate them-
selves, lead to further texts and those
to synopses, digests and emendations. So be it.
Until the words break loose or—sadly
hold, unshaken. Unshaken! So be it. For
the made-arch holds, the water piles up debris
against it but it is unshaken. They gather
upon the bridge and look down, unshaken.
So be it. So be it. So be it.[98]

</div>

Here Williams is explicit in treating written matter as an accumulating mass that threatens to keep words bound up and "unshaken," just as speakers of a stale language remain themselves "unshaken": witnesses to, but not custodians or artisans of, the language that pools before them like a natural resource. The allegorical treatment of texts as comparable to the taxed but multiplying man-made structures that contain a rising mass of words relies on the poem's larger allegorical treatment of the falls and the river as the figures for the indigenous language that Williams seeks to voice. By this point in the poem, readers are familiar with the lament for a language divorced from the minds of its would-be speakers, of voicelessness, and of the waterfalls that present a solution, if only we would hear them. As the "stream" grows "leaden" within the figure of the reader in his chair, we understand that the mass of texts—the "Dead men's dreams, confined by these walls" (100) and the "books / that enfeeble the mind's intent" (102)—threatens to

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[98] Williams, *Paterson*,130.

halt the live stream of language; "so be it" in this instance registers the resignation of the voiceless bystanders to language's leaden reification.

But Section III and Book III conclude with the reassertion of the movement of the Paterson river towards its culmination in the falls, and a reminder that "this rhetoric / is real!" (145), substantiating the poem as a force in the world, and the means by which the poet may pursue "the roar of the present, a speech…my sole concern" (145). Williams's own assessment of the river's symbolic work in the poem is imprecise in its inclusiveness: the river stands for life itself as well as a symbol with democratic universality, due to the classes of people the river's course interconnects:

> The Falls were spectacular; the river was a symbol handed to me. I began to write the beginning, about the stream above the Falls…. I took the river as it followed its course down to the sea; all I had to do was follow it and I had a poem. There were the poor who lived on the banks of the river, people I had written about in my stories. And there was the way I felt about life, like a river, following a course. I used documentary prose to break up the poetry, to help shape the form of my poem…. In my mind, all along, I was disturbed as to how I would put the thing down on the page. Finally I let form take care of itself; the colloquial language, my own language, set the pace.[99]

While this is an idealized version of the poem's composition and the exception among the multiple accounts of Williams's frustrations in composing the poem to his satisfaction, his romantic narrative of simply following the course of the river and allowing his sense of the living vernacular to "set the pace" reinforce the importance of movement and speed in Williams's (post facto, at the least) conception of the poem's structuring principles, as well as his treatment of prose as having a material impact in "shape[ing] the form of my poem" through interruptions that "break up the poetry." As we have seen, the materialism of the language of *Paterson*—its "real rhetoric"—applies to its function as a physical element comparable to the elements that ravage Paterson in Book III, the material (and form-shaping) presence of its prose matter, as well as the particular literary materiality of the verse matter: its ability to move, transform, and resonate variously beyond the capacities of its worldly resources, the textual ephemera that constitute half its material and the physical elements and urban landscape to which the poem stands in symbolic relation.

Verse Synesthesia

Williams's recognition of prose and verse as "shaping" forces in this poem that act in structural opposition to one another—one "breaking up" the space exerted by the other—as well as the conduits for the utterances—"the colloquial

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[99] William Carlos Williams, *I Wanted to Write a Poem: The Autobiography of the Works of a Poet* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), 72-73.

language, my own language"—that "set the pace" of the work designate the visual and temporal dimensions of the work as crucial to the text's material operations. The aspects of *Paterson*'s verse that differentiate it from the prose and which constitute its particular materiality—its appearance as well as its pace and the mutability of its signification—also parse as visual and temporal effects, In the sections below, I focus on the work's capitalization on these features of verse: mobilizing thematic matter with the material interventions of a linguistic mode that operates multi-dimensionally, or as Blasing observes, synesthetically.

In Blasing's system, lyric verse produces synesthetic effects by organizing auditory information into units that signify verbally and visually through their graphic appearance as text, while foregrounding this organizing and signifying process as unstable and contingent upon choice as well as the history of a somatically and symbolically realized speaker. This somatic- and symbolic-contingency and the aforementioned capacity to foreground the strangeness of the linguistic code give verse its material specificity as a medium that is uniquely tuned to the phenomenon of subject formation through the acquisition and operations of language:

> This rhythmic alternation between sound and word, between sensation and representation, is not "inside" poetry; it *is* poetry. Lyric language is a transmodal, synesthetic process of images dissolving into music and music becoming visible. The lyric "I" is the medium of this transport, an alternation between the specular and the acoustic, sense and sound, cognition and sensation. And its native tongue is neither music nor image but a "voice" and uttered sounds.[100]

> Writing secures the word against phonemic dissolution, just as eroticization secures an articulate body. In both cases, the "written" or coherent word protects against dismemberment. The graphic inscription of the word further secures the spoken word in visual elements; it effects a passage from aural to visual processing of words, from an audial to a specular relationship to language. The literal dismemberment of the spoken word into visual signs wards off the threat of a dismemberment of the word into bodily depths. Writing draws borderlines, producing oral auditory sensations of words as a text, the way eroticization produces the body as a text.[101]

Blasing's model of subject formation through the simultaneous inscription of erotogenic zones onto the body and the subject's introduction into (and emergence through) language relies on the identification of the oral zone as the same physical site through which both erotogenic and linguistic functions are negotiated. Challenging Gilles Deleuze's assertion that the sexual inscription of the body prefigures its linguistic inscription in a logical passage from physical to

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[100] Blasing, 85.
[101] *Ibid.*, 90.

metaphysical operations (sense into signification), Blasing refers to Serge Leclaire's account of the mapping of pleasure zones on the body as a process of translating the "undifferentiated physiological body of the infant"[102] into a differentiated, symbolic one, made legible through the memory of pleasurable and unpleasurable sensations associated with different sites of the body and through the affirmation of these pleasurable sensations as fulfilling to another, the caretaker figure.[103] As a phenomenon with a history contingent on communicated pleasure as well as self-realized pleasure, the teaching and learning of desire is therefore, for Blasing, inseparable from the process of language acquisition, itself a practice founded on learned pleasures: "both language learning and the erotogenization of the body are intersubjective processes that render physiological phenomena into signifying phenomena, and both are individuating/socializing processes."[104]

While subject formation as contingent on the linguistic and erotogenic history of a speaker and subject-body has not been a focus of this study, Book V, the last complete book of *Paterson*, features a prominent lyric exploration of subject dissolution and retention through language, and an ekphrastic engagement with visual artwork that intersects with Blasing's model of verse as a synesthetic medium whose force lies in its foregrounding of the materials and material history of language as a learned code that is integral to subject formation. The capacity of writing and verse in particular to protect against "phonemic dissolution" and, by association, against symbolic "dismemberment" of the body through a loss of its articulate(d), symbolic script underwrites a paradigm of poetic form that resolves material (and, in Blasing's model, physiognomic) chaos and excess: a paradigm *Paterson* tests both in its architecture of verse structure encapsulating prose matter and in its self-conscious declarations of identity and intent:

> How to begin to find a shape—to begin to begin again,
> turning the inside out : to find one phrase that will
> lie married beside another for delight   . ?
> — seems beyond attainment   .[105]

In this excerpt from the section that follows Book III's catalogue of storm, fire and flood, the mud left in the receding flood's wake—"a sort of muck, a detritus, / in this case—a pustular scum, a decay, a choking / lifelessness"—prompts this rhetorical testing of the poem's capacity to take shape in the "delight[ful]" pairing of phrases

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[102] "The 'textual' inscription of the erotogenic body on the undifferentiated physiological body of the infant entails a process of selecting and zoning of the body into surfaces and is concurrent with the selection and zoning of acoustic into phonemic phenomena." Blasing, 78.

[103] "Sexual pleasure is 'born from a play within the memory of satisfaction,' Leclaire writes, but for a satisfaction to be so 'inscribed,' a 'supplementary factor' is necessary: the satisfaction must be 'regarded as *jouissance* in the eyes of another.' For what invests the zone with sexual value is the other's pleasure in the experience." Blasing cites Leclaire's example of the mother's caress and appends the example of the mother's pleasure in breastfeeding as moments in which the infant learns to associate interpersonal pleasures with its complementary, solitary pleasures of feeding and sucking. *Ibid.*, 79.

[104] *Ibid.*, 80.

[105] Williams, *Paterson*, 140.

amid a landscape of detritus, decay and stench. In its reiterations of beginning—"to begin to find shape—to begin to begin again"—this passage also reiterates *Paterson*'s initial dedication, in which "a gathering up" and "a taking up of slack" (2) echo this passage's investment in shaping, though without imbuing its materials to be shaped with connotations of decay: a pessimism made explicit by the poem's integration of prose passages detailing acts of violence, greed and squandered resources—both human and material—but which the poem mediates with a competing strain of optimism and self-certainty over the course of its five books.

       The shaping function of verse that this passage names and the poem's opening dedication to reduction, resolution, and "an enforced pause" (2) themselves approach resolution in Book V's valorization of "the measure" that serves as the concluding gesture of the book:

> The measure intervenes, to measure is all we know,
>
>   a choice among the measures . .
>
>   the measured dance[106]

The interventions and "enforced pauses" of poetic measure, figured here as a dance, perform an organizing and delimiting function that, in Blasing's model of lyric operation, secures the integrity of symbolic form—the subject, the word—against a dismembering dissolution into the formless continuity of pre-linguistic sounds and their physiognomic counterpart, the pre-symbolic body. Verse organizes the "phonemic flow" through meter's measurements and regulation, and the hierarchy of word units.[107] Blasing argues, in fact, that verse's synesthetic translation of aural information into the lexical and visual terms of writing necessitates poetry's range of devices in order to visually convey the "excesses" of auditory information that cannot be resolved by word formation alone. She observes that Williams's triadic line, in offering mainly a visual, as opposed to a syllabic or metric, regularity, implicitly understands the synesthesia of verse language:

> In poetry, this visual medium [graphic writing] must institute different kinds of excess texture, affects and rhythms to compensate for the excess auditory material that cannot be transcribed. Thus visual patterns of letters and spacing would also be operative in a written text, apart from the patterns of phonemes in sound devices such as alliteration and rhymes. In this sense, writing recreates a synesthetic experience, where patterns of visual units may make for auditory measures. William Carlos Williams's "triadic lines," for example, seem to work this way. Williams assigns one beat per line, regardless of the number of stresses or syllables (1957, 327). The visual equivalence of these lines is to be apprehended as an audial

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[106] Williams, *Paterson*, 235.
[107] *Ibid.*, 91.

equivalence of duration, so that we hear a "new measure"…. Williams's visual arrangements on the page defend against auditory chaos. Here the visual order performs the function of meter—a measuring system that segments and punctuates the phonemic flow and institutes a synesthetic rhythm, foreclosing dismemberment.[108]

In Blasing's identification of the segmenting and punctuating work of Williams's triadic line as a visual "measuring system" and in Williams's dedication to invention, pausing, shaping, and gathering, there is a shared view of poetry as an organizing activity that operates at the level of linguistic signification's visual and rhythmic arrangements.

The triadic line, introduced in *Paterson* and which Williams explored in his late works as "the solution of the problem of modern verse,"[109] first appears in Book II following a pointed parody of *The Waste Land* in which metric regularity serves and substantiates a thematic fatalism:

> But Spring shall come and flowers will bloom
> and man must chatter of his doom .   .
>
> The descent beckons
>   as the ascent beckoned…
>   Memory is a kind
> of accomplishment
>   a sort of renewal
>   even
> an initiation, since the spaces it opens are new
> places
>   inhabited by hoardes
>   heretofore unrealized, …[110]

The gradations of text and the negative space of the typesetting, along with the less quantifiable "variable feet"[111] of Williams's tercets carry out a compositional looseness that Williams tunes towards a new "musical pace" more appropriate to the rhythms and quality of speech, and free of the rigid regularity exemplified in the prefacing lines of rhyming, iambic tetrameter. Williams wants to emphasize the musicality of his looser measure, but even in this short excerpt, the trope of "the space it opens," even functioning figuratively here as the "new places" opened up through the renewing expansions of memory, also underlines the visual implications

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[108] Blasing, 92-93. On the structure of the triadic line, Blasing cites *The Selected Letters of William Carlos Williams,* ed. John C. Thirlwall (New York: New Directions, 1957).

[109] Williams, *Selected Letters*, 334.

[110] Williams, *Paterson*, 78.

[111] In letters to Richard Eberhart (1954) and John C. Thirlwall (1955) describing the innovation entailed in his triadic verse, Williams assigns one beat to each line of verse, which then serves as a "variable foot" as opposed to a regularly measured foot with a set syllable count. Williams, *Selected Letters*, 327, 334.

of this new composition: the literal spaces opened up by the triadic text's arrangement, and the "hoardes / heretofore unrealized" that such spaces might thereby host. We see the implications of such a new "space" in the expansive and textually inclusive topography of the entire work, the range of represented voice and figures, or in the freedom of composition and typesetting exemplified in Book III's moment of Dadaesque typographical freedom, in which phrasal fragments and free floating words lilt across one page on disorderly, diagonal trajectories (137). Thus, as the prose segments of *Paterson* collect "hoardes heretofore unrealized" of the world's material resources (the archives of its local histories, the written records of its inhabitants' voices, accounts of its natural resources and excerpts of its cultural ones), the verse segments' synesthetic manipulations of referential language, in pitting sound against sense and aural flow against visual ordering, carry out their own expansive delineations of the material resources of language.

These parallel operations—the shaping and organizing of cultural matter through the poem's found and collaged prose text and verse's synesthetic delineation of the aural materials of language into visually legible units—multiply determine materialism as a value and resource for the poem. Along with the thematic registers of "materiality" encoded throughout the poem's first few books— economic systems operating on both institutions and individuals, archival records as historical matter, prose matter resisting the structuring of verse form— depictions of the "roar" of language, figured by the Paterson falls, coincide with the model of verse materialism that Blasing develops, in which lyric verse visually and symbolically resolves auditory excess. Figured variously as "a language (misunderstood) pouring (misinterpreted) without / dignity, without minister, crashing upon a stone ear" (15) and "the water pouring still / from the edge of the rocks, filling / his ears with its sound, hard to interpret" (16), the "roar" of language in the form of the falls motivates the poem's self-appointed task of "combing" the "waters" into visible, comprehensible order:

> (What common language to unravel?
> **.** **.** combed into straight lines
> from that rafter of a rock's
> lip.)[112]

> the future's no answer. I must
> find my meaning and lay it, white,
> beside the sliding water: myself –
> comb out the language—or succumb

> --whatever the complexion. Let
> me out! (Well go!) this rhetoric
> is real![113]

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[112] Williams, *Paterson*, 7.
[113] Williams, *Paterson*, 145.

The "real rhetoric" that will impose a visual order—"straight lines"—on a "sliding" body of language from which meaning must be extracted shares some features of Blasing's model of verse organization of the "phonemic flow," even as Williams implies a ground zero—the misunderstood "roar"—that actually entails a primary level of organization, implicit in naming this roar, "language." But like Blasing's "phonemic flow," the roar of the falls is a constant aural presence in the poem: the substance that pervades the dreams of the mythic, giant patriarch of Paterson – "in which a falls unseen / tumbles and rights itself / and refalls—and does not cease, falling / and refalling with a roar..." (97)—and the universal din that the inhabitants of Paterson and the figures of this poem must learn to hear and decipher anew, "with the roar of the river / forever in our ears (arrears)" (17). Williams's homophonic pairing of "our ears" with "arrears" literally reminds us of "our ears" in signaling the gap between aural information and its arbitrary verbal correlates— word units—meant not for "our ears" but for the visually-based operations and interventions of literacy: a moment that illustrates verse's capacity to both secure and test the integrity of linguistic units against the primacy and chaos of "phonemic flow."

But whereas these capacities are a given characteristic of verse materialism in Blasing's account, *Paterson*, as late as its fourth book, expresses a skepticism that its verse composition has succeeded in "combing" out a new order amid the ubiquitous roar of the manifestations of language, indecipherable and inaccessible to its would-be inheritors. In a foreshadowing of the dumb force of the deluges that plague Book III—literal storms and figural floods of dead texts— Book II dramatizes the reciprocal failures of speech that the poem confronts: language's paradoxically indecipherable yet audible presence, and the failure of its listeners to adequately hear:

> Caught (in mind)
> beside the water he looks down, listens!
> But discovers, still, no syllable in the confused
> uproar: missing the sense (though he tries)
> untaught but listening, shakes with the intensity
> of his listening
>
> Only the thought of the stream comforts him,
> its terrifying plunge, inviting marriage –[114]

The pre-syllabic uproar of sound that here produces no language without a full immersion—a "marriage"—with the fluid "stream" on the part of its straining listener, by the end of Book III has become the flood that unearths only "muck," "detritus," a "pustular scum," and a "leaden stream" in the reader's mind (130) and by Book IV, has receded from the foreground of the poem:

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[114] Williams, *Paterson*, 82.

> Haven't you forgotten your virgin purpose,
> the language?
>
> What language? "The past is for those who
> lived in the past," is all she told me.
>
> Shh!   the old man's asleep
>
> --all but for the tides, there is no river,
> silent now, twists and turns
> in his dreams   .**115**

This passage prefaces the final section of the book Williams had initially intended as *Paterson's* last. Its concluding terrain features Williams's nearly verbatim adaptation into stanzaic verse of an oral folk history of Paterson, prose excerpts detailing anecdotes of local, violent crimes, including the first documented murder in the county's history, an excerpt from a 1950 letter to Williams from Allen Ginsberg, a verse catalogue of women identified by name and physical assets in the style of Homeric epithets, and the final scene of the poem, also Homeric, in its evocation of a lone man and welcoming dog, turning away from the sea to head inland, and once again attuned "to the water's steady roar, as of a distant / waterfall" (202). This is the last appearance of the figure of the falls and its attending roar, and the book's vorticist concluding lines ("This is the blast / the eternal close / the spiral / the final somersault / the end" (202)) only perform the act of conclusion, rather than offering a substantive telos for the terms, values, or figures the four books develop.[116]

Book V does not reiterate the previous books' explicit investment in shaping and forming the material mass and audible yet inchoate roar of language. However, its championing of visual media, artworks and practices—the book is dedicated "to the Memory of Henri Toulouse Lautrec, *Painter*" (204)—culminates in an extended, ekphrastic engagement with the 16th century paintings of Peter Brueghel and the 15th and 16th century *Hunt of the Unicorn* tapestries, thereby exploring in multimedia terms verse's synesthetic properties as operating at the juncture of visual, textual, and aural materials. Book V's dedication to visual works is also an expression of Williams's well-documented, life-long admiration for and self-identified affinity to the visual arts and painting in particular and in its Brueghel segments, contributes to the body of work collected in *Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems* (1962), Williams's last complete collection of poetry. Previous books' engagement with the roar of language present the poem's struggles with language as a mediation between the aural and the visible, as in this description of the "falls" of language:

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[115] Williams, *Paterson*, 186.

[116] I agree with Jameson's reading of this conclusion, in which he observes a testing of various figures for narrative closure in the cyclical models of an Odyssean return and the "spiral" and "somersault" of the vorticist "end," and the teleological model, in the anecdote of a murderer's execution, all ultimately serving only as "sheer figuration, rather than as some ontological form or movement in reality itself." *Jameson*, "Poetics of Totality," 23.

> The language cascades into the
> Invisible, beyond and above **:** the falls
> of which it is the visible part –[117]

Here, language is the "visible" trace of the falls (themselves the source of the poem's ubiquitous "roar") that yet, as ever, escapes into invisibility, a synesthetic expression of its inaudibility. Book V restores visibility and image-production as paramount to verse's forming functions, though in their ekphrastic animation of the inanimate scenes depicted in Brueghel's work and the tapestries, these segments, as in earlier examples this discussion has examined (the scenes of swiftly shifting figuration, phrasal and word unit mobility and mutability) also draw on the temporal properties of verse as a syntactic medium that utilizes sequence, duration, and speed.

As a preface to his ekphrastic animation of Brueghel's *The Adoration of the Kings* (1564) in the third section of Book V, Williams constructs a genealogy of artists whose break with convention (and break with pre-established forms) constitutes the artist's "cure" for formal exhaustion and characterize the avant-garde experiments in painting with which Williams associates his poetry: the works of Paul Klee, Albrecht Dürer, "Leonardo," Hieronymus Bosch, Pablo Picasso and Juan Gris (220). In a conflation of painting with poetry, Williams initiates his description of Brueghel with the observation that the painter "painted a Baby / new born! / among the words" (223), itself a conflation of Biblical moments of substantiation: the birth of Christ and Gospel of John's inauguration of the world through the word. The description of Brueghel's scene cites its central figures, but it more closely attends to the artist's ethics and perspective:

> (I salute
> the man Brueghel who painted
> what he saw –
> many times no doubt
> among his own kids but not of course
> in this setting
> …………………..
> He painted
> the bustle of the scene,
> the unkempt straggling
> hair of the old man in the
> middle, his sagging lips
> ………………………………
> Peter Brueghel the artist saw it
> from the two sides: the
> imagination must be served –
> and he served

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[117] Williams, *Paterson*, 145.

Williams praises the painter's dispassionate accounting of all that he sees, implicitly aligning with Brueghel's work *Paterson*'s own project of serving both the dispassionate eye and the imagination in its depiction of the city's historical past and living present. Description of the armed soldiers permits Williams to name "the more stupid / German soldiers of the late / war" and the "30 years of / war" (223-225) that speak to the postwar years of *Paterson*'s composition. The kings' "rich robes" and their gifts for the Christ child enable a materialist reading of the scene, in which the verse imagines the material conditions of the scene: "But the gifts! (works of art, / where could they have picked / them up or more properly / have stolen them?)" (224-225). The poem's interaction with the painting is therefore both historicizing and materialist. It is materialist in its attention to the conditions implied by the scene depicted ("it is a scene, authentic / enough, to be witnessed frequently / among the poor" (223-224)), but also activating a materialism in the sense that I have been exploring in this study; the poem documents the thematic matter the painting provides and through ekphrastic translation of the visual artwork, utilizes that material's portability for the poem's own thematic development. The proximate prose section picks up the verse theme of depicting the poor alongside the wealthy, and negatively compares the "shoddy" work of the "featureless tribe that has the money now" in Paterson's own post-industrial boom, to the "suits of his [Brueghel's] peasants" that "were of better stuff, hand woven, than we can boast" (225).

The second extended ekphrastic engagement of the book interweaves figures and features of the Unicorn Tapestries (housed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Cloisters Museum, located east of Paterson, across the Hudson River), so that the actors and details of the tapestry—the Unicorn, the virgin, the flowers—appear to inhabit and dramatize *Paterson*'s own narrative terrain. The catalogue of spring flowers detailed in an excerpted letter to Williams in the second section of Book III—"Forgetmenot, Wild columbine, white and purple violets, white narcissus, wild anemones and yards and yards of delicate wild windflowers along the brook" (208) prefigure and are echoed in the multitude of flowers, too numerous to adequately name, that the verse identifies in the tapestries:

> I cannot tell it all:
> slippered flowers
>   crimson and white,
>   balanced to hang
> on slender bracts, cups evenly arranged upon a stem,
>   foxglove, the eglantine
>   or wild rose,
> pink as a lady's ear lobe when it shows
>   beneath the hair,
>   campanella, blue and purple tufts

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[118] Williams, *Paterson*, 224-225.

small as forget-me-not among the leaves.
                                        Yellow centers, crimson petals
                                                    and the reverse,
                        dandelion, love-in-a-mist,
                                        cornflowers,
                                                    thistle and others
                    the names and perfumes I do not know.
                                        The woods are filled with holly
                                                    (I have told you, this
                    is a fiction, pay attention),
                                        the yellow flag of the French field is here
                                                    and a congeries of other flowers
                    as well: daffodils
                                         and gentian, the daisy, columbine
                                                    petals
                    myrtle, dark and light
                                        and calendulas[119]

The "fiction" this scene produces—the verse account that strains to name every species and color while qualifying that it "cannot tell it all"—produces syntactically the effect of the tapestries' crowded visual details: "Small flowers / seem crowding to be in on the act: / the white sweet rocket, / on its branching stem, four petals / one near the other to / fill in the detail / from frame to frame without perspective / touching each other on the canvas / make up the picture:" (232). The staggered lines reproduced above graphically "make up" a different picture from the image that motivates the writing: the sequential ordering of syntax imposing a necessary linearity to the simultaneity—"frame to frame without perspective"—of a visual scene, producing a collaborative, pastoral catalogue.

        The synesthesia here translates the visual and imagistic into the textual and linguistic. Rather than striving to capture and impose a graphic and word-bounded form on aural matter—the roar and "phonemic flow" of an unseen, inchoate language at large—Books V's ekphrastic engagement with the still image animates, narrates, and hierarchizes graphic matter—the painted or woven image—by introducing the factors of duration, causation, and sequential, syntactic order. Turning the tapestries into a "living fiction," the ekphrasis dramatizes the implicit violence and viscerality of the scene, adopting the tapestries' central figure for the poem's own: "a milk white one horned beast / I, Paterson, the King-self / saw the lady / through the rough woods / outside the palace walls / among the stench of sweating horses / and gored hounds / yelping with pain / … Paterson, / keep your pecker up / whatever the detail!" (231). This self-directed exhortation to keep sexual agency in play corresponds with section I's concluding directive to youth at large ("'loose your love to flow' / while you are yet young / male and female / (if it is worth it to you) / 'n cha cha cha" (214)), the cheeky euphemism for sex, "cha cha cha," anticipating Book V's final figure of the contrapuntal "dance" of measures that

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[119] Williams, *Paterson*, 232-233.

closes both the book and the larger project (though Williams had begun work on a sixth book, which his deteriorating health prevented him from completing). The poem's turn towards dance as the analog for its creative work—mobile, rhythmic, temporally and spatially bounded— constitutes a synesthetic translation between dance as a performative and corporealized medium, and poetry as a graphically bounded one that shares dance's dependence on rhythm and its own corporeality by virtue of the "somatic materiality" of language.

The poem's concluding elevation of the measuring interventions of a "measured dance" – through which we arrive at "all we know" and "can know"– interrupts itself with a quoted phrase from Williams's 1955 poem, "Shadows," and introduces yet another sensory dimension to the poem's "dance" of measures: "'unless the scent of a rose / startle us anew'" (235). The quotation marks around the phrase and the "startling" introduction of scent—a class of sensory information that, like auditory information, is received passively (as opposed to visual information which is received only with an actively open, as opposed to closed, eye)—act as agents of the world's materials: phrases and excerpts from other texts interrupt the measured order of this text, sensory information startles and catalyzes perceptual shifts. In these lines, Williams walks a familiar line between concession and manifesto; his principle of knowing nothing but "the dance / to dance to a measure / contrapuntally" contrasts with a thinly veiled dismissal of *The Waste Land*'s negativism: "Equally laughable / is to assume to know nothing, a / chess game / massively, 'materially,' compounded!" (235-236).[120] Book V's synesthetic exchange between visual and literary material, aural source and textual sense constitute part of this poem's larger strategy of "compounded" materials: from the broadest structural level at which prose and verse text meet and mutually inform (and form) one another, to this local compounding of the still image with the temporally and syntactically expanded narrative of a visual scene, or the conflation of poetic measure with the measured phrases and sequences of a dance.
 As the poem's ultimate (or penultimate, counting Williams's drafts for a sixth book) gesture, this ekphrastic compounding of image, sound, text, body, and movement showcases the synesthetic agility of poetry that, as Blasing suggests, is a fundamental characteristic of lyrical language. Its synesthetic operations recall the personal, ethical, and visceral introduction into language that every speaking subject experiences, and which coincides with and determines subject formation. Only episodically observing conventional "lyric" form (occasional verse segments with a prominent speaking subject, featuring compositional regularity either through rhyme, line length, or stanzaic form), *Paterson* applies the synesthetic features of literary language more broadly. It not only capitalizes on visual- textual expressions of aural effects but, through collaging, quotation, and its culminating turn towards the expressive modes of visual and performing art forms, *Paterson* exercises poetry's capacity to signify graphically as well as semantically and syntactically. In Book V's sensuous, detailed, and comprehensive engagement with

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[120] Eliot's fretful speaker in "A Game of Chess" demands of her interlocutor "'Do / 'You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remem- / ber / Nothing?'" T. S. Eliot, "The Waste Land" in *Selected Poems,* 49-74 (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1964), 55.

the painted and embroidered image, it seems the poem would also, if it could, incorporate visceral experiences beyond sight and sound: "the scent of a rose" or the measured movements of a dance.[121] Blasing's model of language's synesthetic work holds that, by reminding speakers of their ears, lyrical language reasserts the contingency of the semantic unit as a sense-making and ordering form operating against the threat of phonemic (and sense/subject) dissolution. Williams's effort to challenge existing forms that fail to meet the abundance and potentiality of materials and to capture language as it is heard and used in a literary practice, extends a model of linguistic synesthesia to the level of a synesthesia of art media: prose material animated through verse framing, painting and tapestry temporalized through narrative, poetry measured through dance. In this way, poetry's "bare handed reply" to the Latin and Greek literary models—the models of verse at the height of its relevance and correspondence to the culture that produced it—turns to a collaboration with other art practices towards an inclusive, sensory, and visceral experience: exploiting an abundance of material capacities in efforts to transcend the modal limitations of form.

So in cultivating an abundance of archival, cultural, literary, and personal material, Williams capitalizes on the material properties of language and its synesthetic operations at the juncture of sound, sight, and semantic sense that determine both language and subject integrity and, in turn, encourage a "synesthetic" relationship of exchange between poetry and other art media. Book V, dedicated to Toulouse Lautrec and thematically tuned towards painters and the visual arts, embeds at its center a lyrical segment that explores the threat of phonemic and speaking subject dissolution, describing a disintegration of the lyrical subject that simultaneously affirms the integrity of lyrical language as a forming medium in which disruptive or disparate sensory and visceral experiences can cohere. The second section of Book V begins with a brief, first person statement about Sappho's poetry, credited to "A.P." and presciently comparing Sappho's tone to "the *silence* that is in the starry sky" (italics added), followed by Williams's own translation of one of Sappho's most well known works, fragment 31, in which the stability of the persona who speaks is undercut by the main expression of the poem, which concerns the inability to speak and the physical dissolution of the speaker and her senses: "At mere sight of you / my voice falters, my tongue is broken" (*P*, 215). The "breaking" of the speaker's tongue initiates further fragmentation of the speaker's body into its various parts and sense organs, rendered ineffective by the speaker's desire: "Straightaway, a delicate fire runs in / my limbs; my eyes / are blinded and my ears / thunder." The tenth line of the poem, an enjambment which produces "my limbs; my eyes" emphasizes the speaker's fractured self, and the conclusion suggests death: "I grow paler / than dry grass and lack little / of dying." Paradoxically, the disintegration of the speaker is the occasion which enables her to

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[121] Prior to Book V, Book IV's pastoral dialogue and "idyll" featuring the characters of "Corydon," "Phyllis," "The Poet" and "Paterson" invoke conventions of pastoral poetry as well as reminding readers of literary forms—dramatic dialogues—that, while constituting finished works in written form that are experienced through reading, are by generic definition written for the voice, the ear, and the body.

speak of her own dissolution, and the only representation of uncomplicated speech in the poem is the addressee's ("your sweet speech and lovely / laughter"), which we, the readers, do not have access to. Within the frame of the poem, the only "expressions" are non-verbal ones: "a tumult / in my breast," "a delicate fire," "my ears thunder," "sweat pours out."

This description of the failure of speech and the disintegration of the subject richly resonates with Blasing's proposal that lyrical language situates speakers and readers at the juncture between their somatic and semantic capacities for expression, thereby historicizing and documenting the process of language acquisition and use, and flirting with the threats of a chaotic, pre-linguistic, not-yet-formed subjectivity that language defends against. Referring to Freudian models of hysterical symptoms manifested verbally—literalizations, on and through the body "'reviving once more the sensations to which the verbal expression owes its justification' (180-81)"—Blasing describes certain hysterical speech disorders in which "language is de-figured by the body in a regression to the presymbolic, as articulate words disintegrate into phonemes, sounds, and eventually noises"[122] as evidence that speech negotiates both ego and sexual instincts, making it vulnerable to and symptomatic of disturbances to either ego or sexual functioning. Lyric language shares with hysterical language a "somatic materiality" that "bears inadvertent testimony to an erotogenic body that is only a script—a currency, a signifier…. An ego that is only a representation, an 'I.'"[123] A crucial difference between lyric language and hysterical speech disorders gives poetry its special status as a ritualized language that evokes primal sensory, visceral experiences through evoking the history and somatic materiality of language acquisition:

> While the hysteric 'speaks' a private language that would reduce the symbolic to the body, however, the message of the poet's formal and public medium is that one can never recover a not-already-symbolic language, a not-already-textualized body, a not-already-represented physiology; these figures of 'origins' become conceivable only in their vanishing into words…. Poetry is a way of remembering or retrieving the emotional and erotic resonances of the materials of language on the verge of their disappearance—or, rather, as the wake or trace of their disappearance in referential, "adult" language. [124]

Through this lens, the Sapphic speaker experiences a hysterical speech disorder that casts off a referential and symbolic system of speech to return to the bodily expressions that prefigure the linguistic expressions of pain or pleasure that are the foundation of socialized speech. The framing poem records this moment of linguistic and subject dissolution as a testament to the power of the speaker's desire, and, as Blasing's model might suggest, it equates this moment of erotic

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[122] Blasing cites Sigmund Freud in Joseph Breuer and Sigmund Freud, *Studies on Hysteria*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 1955 [1957]. Blasing, 99.
[123] *Ibid*. 100.
[124] *Ibid.*

recognition with the somatic, corporeal mapping that underlie subject formation through language acquisition. The speaker's catalogue of body parts reflects both the disintegration of her body due to the loss of her capacity to speak, but also affirms that poetry only exists and operates as a result of symbolic integrities: the map and script of the symbolic body as a whole composed of parts, the integrity of signifying language.

Without overstating the thematic continuity between Sappho's poem of sexual longing and the expressions of aging virility that follow its inclusion in Book V ("Paterson has grown older / the dog of his thoughts has shrunk / to no more than 'a passionate letter'/ to a woman" (227); "a milk white one horned beast / I, Paterson, the King-self / saw the lady" (231)), there is an enticing continuity here between Sappho's assertion of linguistic integrity in the face of chaotic, sensory dispersal—for the word does prevail by virtue of the framing poem, despite the performance of speech's failure—and *Paterson*'s synesthetic and ekphrastic turn towards other media (and in the case of the "scent of the rose," extra linguistic sensory experiences) in its final segments. Both endeavors foreground a language-based materiality: its grounding in the body's capacity to see and hear and the material continuity it might thus share with alternate modes of expression, whether in the form of the involuntary reactions of a physical body in crisis, the somatic weight of a dance, or the visual projections of a painted image.

Chapter Two

Subjects Materialized in Speech:
Bernadette Mayer's *Studying Hunger Journals*

The "hunger" in the title comes from regular hunger which I felt in the
extreme because my parents had died young (there was nobody to feed
me) & from a concept delineated in a line from a poem I wrote then:
eating the colors of a lineup of words. *You know how people say they*
"devoured" a book? The synaesthesia I experienced made the letters and
words seem as edible as paintings.
Bernadette Mayer, Introduction to *Studying Hunger Journals* (2011)

Beginning again and again is a natural thing even when there is a series.

Beginning again and again and again explaining composition and time
is a natural thing.

It is understood by this time that everything is the same except
composition and time, composition and the time of the composition and
the time in the composition.
Gertrude Stein, *Composition as Explanation* (1925)

What I seek in speech is a response from the other. What constitutes me
as a subject is my question. In order to be recognized by the other, I
proffer what was only in view of what will be. In order to find him, I call
him by a name that he must assume or refuse in order to answer me.

I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it as an object.
What is realized in my history is neither the past definite as what was,
since it is no more, nor even the perfect as what has been in what I am,
but the future anterior as what I will have been, given what I am in the
process of becoming.
Jacques Lacan, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in
Psychoanalysis" (1953)

Bernadette Mayer's *Studying Hunger* project encompasses a body of work
whose iterations include the handwritten journals Mayer kept between 1972 and
1974, the two part "lecture" excerpted from the journals in 1975 (*Studying Hunger*),
and the comprehensive transcription, *Studying Hunger Journals,* published nearly 40
years after the work's composition. The hungers that this work tracks are rooted in
the self-described "hunger" Mayer reports having "felt in the extreme because [her]

parents had died young (there was nobody to feed [her]),"[1] and the attending symptom she experienced at a later period of being unable to swallow for a period of time. Mayer thus models an interpretive paradigm that borrows from psychoanalytic practice[2] in seeking historically locatable events to account for expressions of need or frustration. She activates "hunger" as a term for the work that will operate metaphorically: as an analogue to grief and a symptom of loss or lack, but also expressive of a visceral relationship to language as a visually and materially available medium: "as edible as paintings." Diverse acts of consumption—from quotidian meals and midnight snacks to the climactic cannibalization fantasy that concludes *Studying Hunger* (and which appears early in the last book of *Studying Hunger Journals*)—punctuate the text as episodes where Mayer figuratively feeds the hungers that motivate the project, each instance of feeding never adequately meeting the literal or figurative hungers operating in the moment or throughout the text. In this way, iterative expressions of hunger and the trope of consumption contribute to the text's larger project of not only studying hunger, but of cultivating and instrumentalizing hunger as a textually productive force.

Mayer employs iteration at the level of phrases that recur—"you planned the disappearance of my desire;" "I had to stop. I had to stop & begin again slowly"—and on a structural level, through the recurrence of structural features such as journal entry dates, epistolary addresses, or the numbering of the sixth book's sequence of forty dream narratives and dream-motivated statements. Repetition, in the sense of an iterative ritual, also characterizes the journaling or daily record-keeping that generated the text of *Studying Hunger*, as well as *Memory* (1975), the work that precedes it. In the case of *Memory*, Mayer produced 36 photographs per day for one month as a record of her daily activities and a prompt for her retrospective, written account of that month. In the case of the *Studying Hunger Journals*, she kept a series of handwritten and illustrated journals in conjunction with the psychoanalysis she was undergoing at the time, with an awareness that the writing practice carried out a similar, mechanical record-keeping function as the camera had for *Memory*, producing material meant to undergo literary transformation: "I began to write continuously, on all vehicles and in all positions. I did not read or understand what I wrote. Gradually I began to translate some of it back into literature" (456). Mayer transcribed those journals into a manuscript of 363[3] typewritten pages, recording entries from April 1st of 1972 through December 17th of 1974. These she greatly abridged and adapted into the 71 page prose poem "lectures" for the 1975 publication. The repetition inherent to record-keeping, transcription, and translation as well as phrasal and structural recurrences in the text therefore

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[1] Mayer, Bernadette, introduction to *Studying Hunger Journals* (Barrytown: Station Hill Press, 2011), 3. Hereafter cited as *SHJ*. *Studying Hunger* (1975) hereafter cited as *SH*.

[2] Mayer refers readers to Sigmund Freud's analysis of patient "Anna O." for insight into her experience of being unable to swallow, thereby situating herself within a tradition of psychoanalytic case studies. *Ibid*., 3.

[3] Mayer makes reference to "five hundred pages of text" in her account of the work. Bernadette Mayer, "From: A Lecture At the Naropa Institute, 1989," in *Disembodied Poetics: Annals of the Jack Kerouac School*, ed. Anne Waldman and Andrew Schelling (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), 99.

constitutes both the project's production process and its mimetic relation to its most prominent theme, hunger.

Framing the work as both opposed to and structurally necessary to the realization of the previous year's work, *Memory*, Mayer anticipates some of the questions that her experiment confronts with an oblique precision that both courts and frustrates an understanding of the work's theoretical stakes:

> …[to] record special states of consciousness, special involving change and sudden change, high and low and food, levels of attention and how intentions change. And to do this as an emotional science as though, I have taken a month-drug and work as observer of self in process, to do the opposite of "accumulate data" (Memory), Yes, no. A language should be used that stays on the observation/notes/leaps side of the language border between observation and analysis (just barely), but closer I guess to analysis than "accumulate data." To use this to find a structure for Memory and to do this without remembering, what's the danger? What states of consciousness and patterns of them are new to language? What is the language for them. Answer "all" upside down.[4]

In striving for an "emotional science," in theorizing that "states of consciousness" may outpace language's expressive reach, and in prioritizing "observation" and "analysis" over mere "accumulat[ion of] data" among language's uses, Mayer sketches some of the ideological frameworks within and against which this work operates. Most explicitly, a work of "emotional science" that strives to self-observe so as to self-analyze describes the work of the psychoanalyst taken up by the analysand, and Mayer's hypothesis that certain "states" and "patterns" of consciousness" will require "new" applications of language outlines her interest in the relationship between language and the conscious and unconscious mind. While Mayer's early declarations of intent name "states of consciousness" as her object of study, the work's concluding reflections name the "unconscious," instead—"I had started, no, I start my making of the unconscious conscious…" (456): a recognition that scrutinizing "consciousness" raises the question of the "unconscious," or that which conscious reflection cannot capture.

This recognition recalls tenets of psychoanalytic theory which inform my understanding of *Studying Hunger Journals* as a project that draws from psychoanalytic and structural linguistic terms and relations towards an arduous metatextual inquiry into literary discourse's materializations of subjects and subjectivity, intersubjective relations, and "language" itself. These tenets describe the emergence of a subject through becoming a speaking agent, and the "splitting" or alienation this process entails due to the subject's entry into symbolic relation with herself and the world: "symbolic" because language operates through a system of signs whereby subjects materialize as referents for the grammatical person, "I." Jacques Lacan and Émile Benveniste's work on subjectivity as a consequence of

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[4] Mayer, *SHJ*, 15.

speech provide the theoretical grounding for these concepts; and "Lacan" appears in *Studying Hunger Journals* as a figure of address that Mayer employs with irreverence and familiarity, suggesting that Lacanian terms constitute a resource, though not a template, for Mayer's engagement with psychoanalysis. As distinct from *Memory*'s process of accumulating data, *Studying Hunger Journals*'s mission to "work as observer of self in process" in order to "find a structure" for accumulated data and to identify the lapses between "states of consciousness" and language adequate to their expression ("COLLAPSING STRUCTURES" is a refrain of the work*)* reflect Mayer's treatment of linguistic expression as a structuring system for tracking interiority that requires a split self: the self that "work[s] as observer" and the "self in process," both agent and object of inquiry. The work's intention—to chart the author's thoughts, memories, fantasies, and emotional states through linguistically articulated self-reflection and to examine when and why it becomes difficult to do so—aligns the project with the psychoanalytic and structural linguistic principles and hermeneutic systems that inform Mayer's poetics, pedagogy, and, at least during the time of the *Journals*' composition, her self-analysis.[5]

As Lytle Shaw insightfully points out, Mayer's work also demonstrates her affiliation with postminimalist artists and poets working in the 1960s and early 1970s: innovators of process-oriented, duration-based, and site-specific art events that challenged the materiality of the traditional art object, and the serial, experiential long poetic work that challenged the model of the discrete poem as "neutral frame" for the distillation of experience.[6] Arguing that Mayer's work should be understood within the interpretive paradigms that respond to postminimal visual and performance works, rather than those developed in reception to New York School and Language School literary projects, Shaw observes that Mayer, like the conceptual artists with whom she showed work in the 1960s and 70s, emphasizes the context or site of her works by presenting each as "a discrete conceptual project, with its own vocabularies and formal structures, with its own self-imposed research method and goals."[7] Shaw argues that, by assigning specialized vocabulary and formal parameters to each of her works, Mayer's projects test the authority and capacity of each discourse she examines, from epistolary address in The Desires of Mothers to Please Others in Letters, to photographic record in Memory, and the "emotional" record-keeping of Studying Hunger Journals.

In Mayer's foregrounding of discourse, Shaw observes a linguistic materiality that aligns her practices with postminimalist intervention in the consumption of art objects. Observing that postminimal visual or performance artists aimed to

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[5] "I kept these journals while seeing a psychiatrist. I'd gone to see him because I thought I might be crazy, after my work on memory, shooting 36 pictures a day & keeping a detailed journal having driven me to the brink. But I thought why not go over that brink & see what's there. On the other hand I didn't want to wind up in a mental hospital, tied to some bed or chair." Mayer, introduction to *SHJ,* 1.

[6] Lytle Shaw, "Faulting Description: Clark Coolidge, Bernadette Mayer and the Site of Scientific Authority," in *Don't Ever Get Famous: Essays on New York Writing after the New York School*, ed. Daniel Kane (Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2006), 154.

[7] *Ibid.*

dematerialize art objects by emphasizing process, environment, and temporality over object status, Shaw argues that poets similarly invested in resisting the easy consumption of their works inversely materialized poems through emphasizing process, discourse, duration, and the strangeness of language as a code:

> Emphasizing seemingly non-aesthetic, often scientific strategies for representing performances, processes and events, and stressing the relational aspects of artworks (their interactions with viewers and sites), the projects associated with [Mayer and Vito Acconci's] 0-9 often coincided with what Lucy Lippard calls "the dematerialization of art." For late 1960s artists the goal of dematerializing art often meant the dream of independence from the art world's commodity system, its traffic in things….

> If one expands the historical perspective to compare poetry from the same period, one is struck by a similar movement—but one that announces itself inversely as the materialization of language. For the desire to materialize, too, was directed against an easy "consumption"—now of poems as unmediated tokens of interiority. "Listen:" Mayer writes in Studying Hunger, "the world becomes progressively less edible" (SH, 46). To "materialize language" was not merely to emphasize its physicality—its spatial and sonic qualities— but also to acknowledge the lack of fit between words and things, to acknowledge the mystification of a view of the world as digestible in words.[8]

Studying Hunger Journals's treatment of language as a structuring code that assumes but does not produce a "fit between words and things" might seem to work against its adoption of the language and process of an objective, scientific discourse (the "month-long experiment" as a contribution to an "emotional science"). Shaw points to this paradox as one of the ways poetry foregrounds its materials and its materiality, if at the cost of (or in the service of) destabilizing everything from the poetic speaking subject to the authority and objectivity of the discourses tested. Mayer's deployment and disruption of scientific and other analytic discourses coincides, Shaw argues, with a contemporaneous "linguistic turn" in the humanities, whereby previously privileged modes for establishing truths, such as science and philosophy, were reconceived as written discourses with no greater claims to objective truths than any other. In the context of poetic experimentation, such gestures permitted Mayer to establish what Shaw describes as a "literalist framework": one that enabled her to "treat found vocabularies, especially those of science, as strangely physical things, and thereby…to invent a series of hybrid languages that produce their destabilizing and often humorous effects not just at, but almost literally in, the margins of epistemological writing."[9]

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[8] Shaw, "Faulting Description," 157.
[9] *Ibid.*, p 170.

Studying Hunger Journals's conceit of utilizing a scientific code and methodology in the service of diaristic and literary ends therefore reads less as an enterprise that will necessarily fail to produce "objective" results than as a way to outline the stakes of Mayer's literary experiment: a mining of the psychoanalytic and structural linguistic discourses that prompted the journaling towards "new" linguistic articulations of "conscious" states. Shaw observes that a stable "subject"—as organizing and unifying force of a poem, as object of analysis in psychoanalysis—is the casualty of a materializing poetics, which yet maintain the power to register emotion as a force that underlies "scientific" discourse:

> To materialize language was therefore also to cast readers back to the "raw material" out of which poems were built, raw material which, in some accounts, was also the socially charged atomic substance of identity—so that to disorder and recombine it beyond the code of the subject was to engage critically in the process of subject formation....[10]

> The repetitive references inside these books both to their self-consciously extreme conceptual frames, and to the movement among these frames, suggests a strangely literal sense of Mayer as an "experimental" poet—a researcher studying herself as an object of what Mayer calls an "emotional science project" (SH, 9). This formulation suggests not the common project of artists wishing to reduce the range of human emotions into a scientific system, but the stranger, less stable goal of engaging the currents of desire, the swerves in subjectivity, that underlie any scientific inquiry, rendering it "emotional."[11]

The "emotional science" that drives Mayer's self-examination in the *Journals* is a paradoxical conceit that enables the work's free ranging expansion into illustration, automatic writing, and conflation of autobiographical, dream, and fantasy material under the pretense of developing "a workable code, or shorthand, for the transcription of every event, every motion, every transition of his or her mind" (8). The prize, Mayer suggests, of employing such a code, would be the generation of "a great piece of language! information" (8) that, as Shaw observes and Mayer implies via the title of the work, may more persuasively demonstrate how subjectivity's "swerves," dictated by hunger as a metonym for desire, and the language employed to record them, mutually determine one another. "Studying" may be read as both a present participle, suggesting that the work examines hunger as its principal topic, and as a gerund, in which case the title describes the hunger for studying itself. To the list of intentions that seem to promise objective observation of self—"to record special states of consciousness. Special: change, sudden change, high, low, levels of attention"—Mayer adds "to be an enchantress" (16) and in the *Studying Hunger* version (which Mayer refers to as a lecture, meant to "make a science" of *Studying*

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[10] Shaw, "Faulting Description," 170.
[11] *Ibid.,* 159.

Hunger Journals[12]), she also lists her intent to "seduce by design" (8). That seduction is an explicit goal of this project of analysis and disclosure, both self-directed and through sharing her journals with her psychoanalyst, provides an early indication of the destabilizing and contradictory forces built into the poem's frame: to be both "observer" and "analyst," as well as the subject who seduces and enchants, whose "special states of consciousness" and changing intentions and attentions constitute the matter for analysis.

Mayer's mining of the vicissitudes of subjectivity within a variety of discourses, whether scientific, literary, diaristic, or epistolary, all of which *Studying Hunger Journals* employs, would productively be read in terms of a structural linguistic understanding of subjectivity as a consequence of speech. Émile Benveniste offers a basic formulation of linguistic determinations of subject in *Problems of General Linguistics* that resonates with Mayer's interest in observing "self in process":

> The "subjectivity" we are discussing here is the capacity of the subject to posit himself as "subject." It is defined not by the feeling which everyone experiences of being himself (this feeling, to the degree that it can be taken note of, is only a reflection) but as the psychic unity that transcends the totality of the actual experiences it assembles and that makes the permanence of the consciousness. Now we hold that that "subjectivity," whether it is placed in phenomenology or psychology, as one may wish, is only the emergence in the being of a fundamental property of language. "Ego" is he who *says* "ego." That is where we see the foundation of "subjectivity," which is determined by the linguistic status of "person."[13]

Arguing that "subjectivity" rests upon a speaking subject's capacity to verbally articulate herself in linguistic (and grammatical) terms as a "person," Benveniste posits that the "psychic unity that transcends the totality of the actual experiences it assembles" and a consciousness with "permanence" are linguistic properties, fundamentally. Further, the designation of "person" status depends upon a dialogic, intersubjective relationship with an other:

> Consciousness of self is only possible if it is experienced by contrast. I use *I* only when I am speaking to someone who will be a *you* in my address. It is this condition of dialogue that is constitutive of *person*, for it implies that reciprocally *I* becomes *you* in the address of the one who in his turn designates himself as *I*.[14]

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[12] "I called them lectures because they seemed different to me than regular poetry or prose, whether this was true or not. They seemed more an attempt to make a science of something (that could never be a science) (at least as we humans now know science)." Bernadette Mayer, letter to author, January 12 2012.

[13] Émile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meeks (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1971), 224.

[14] Benveniste, 224-225.

Discourse, understood as both spoken and written systems of communication, provides the conditions for the formation of subjectivity, and requires the positing of a second person, "you"—whether hypothetical, generalized, or specified—to whom spoken communications are addressed and against whom the "I" stands in relation. While language provides the forms and structure that permit verbal expression, discourse's intersubjective instances of address enable the constitution of subjects:

> Language is accordingly the possibility of subjectivity because it always contains the linguistic forms appropriate to the expression of subjectivity, and discourse provokes the emergence of subjectivity because it consists of discrete instances. In some way language puts forth "empty" forms which each speaker, in the exercise of discourse, appropriates to himself and which he relates to his "person," at the same time defining himself as *I* and a partner as *you*.[15]

Benveniste distinguishes between "language," which offers the "possibility of subjectivity," and discourse, which provokes the "emergence of subjectivity" through appropriations and embodiments of linguistic forms that distinguish first person speakers from their second person addressees. This discussion takes up *Studying Hunger Journal's* explicit question, "who is the you" (*SH* 9), as an expression of the work's larger interest in materializing subjects—both speakers and addressees—through the exercise of a literary discourse that transforms Mayer's psychotherapeutic self-documentation into a "hybrid language" of literary invention, autobiographical disclosure, and psychological case study. Through addressing a host of named as well as indeterminate second persons from the speaking position of an often indeterminate first person, Mayer activates an expansive range of the intersubjective relations assumed by these varying discourses towards materializing encounters with a continually reconstituted speaking subject, with specified and generalized others in relation to whom her subjectivity forms and re-forms, and with the temporal quality of subjectivity in writing.

    Studying Hunger Journals begins with a letter addressed to David Rubenfine, the psychiatrist treating Mayer during this time and with whom she shared her journals; he also contributed the introduction to *Memory*, which he described as "sensory prose poetry" that conveys the "primary mechanisms" of sensory perception, and replaces chronological ordering with "shifts of consciousness," and the "daytime logic" of "verbal thought" with "pictorial imagery."[16] Both *Memory* and *Studying Hunger Journals* confront the distinction between so-called "primary" and "secondary" mechanisms of perception: *Memory*, by juxtaposing the "instantaneous" photographic records of visually perceived moments and environments against the reflective work of remembering, narrating, and revisiting those scenes, *and Studying*

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[15] Benveniste, 227.

[16] David Rubenfine, introduction to *Memory*, by Bernadette Mayer (Plainfield: North Atlantic Books, 1975), 5.

Hunger Journals, by claiming to record states of consciousness as they occur, attempting to narrow the gap between first order sensations and the articulation and organization of these sensations as experience, memory, thought, desire, etc. Mayer's relocation of the opening letter to the second section of the 1975 publication and her gestures towards suppressing Rubenfine's name (compare "Dear David" (*SHJ*, 2) to "Dear Dash (David)" (*SH*, 42)) suggests an evolving sense of her work's addressee and imagined interlocutor(s), positions implicated in the work's explicit investigation into "the question of who is the you" (*SH*, 9). In asking to whom Mayer articulates her shifting "states of consciousness" in a work meant to "seduce by design" and to enchant, *Studying Hunger Journals* frames the discursive process of subject formation and the articulation of what Shaw might call "the currents of desire, the swerves in subjectivity" within the dynamics of intimate address: the necessity of an other—a "you"—for and to whom a speaking and perceiving position comes to exist. In this respect, *Studying Hunger* compounds *Memory*'s experiment of writing "in the present moment or in the continuous present, not trying to remember" [17]—an attempt to witness the "self in process"—by introducing vectors of desire and intent determined by the shifting identity and functions of an addressed "you."

In an interview for the *Poetry Project Newsletter*, Mayer credits Rubenfine with "facilitating" *Studying Hunger*, by providing the journals in which she recorded her self observations and the therapeutic care she sought after the emotionally difficult work of writing *Memory*:

> But after I wrote the book something happened, and I realized I had gotten on the edge, you know, and I went to see a psychiatrist. And it was through him, actually, that I started writing the other books like *Studying Hunger*. That was written all during the time I was seeing this psychiatrist. He bought me two journals so he could always have one and I could always have one to write in between our sessions. That way he could read what I'd written since the last time we saw each other….
>
> I couldn't have written *Studying Hunger* if I hadn't been working with him, I don't think, because I really thought I was an insane person, I was experiencing such strong responses to my parents' deaths, and stuff like that…. And he convinced me that I was not. And in the meanwhile we summoned up all these ghosts. I chose the form for *Studying Hunger* after seeing him for a while.[18]

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[17] Mayer, "From: A Lecture," 98-99. In reference to the title of *Studying Hunger Journals*, Mayer explains that she "loved gerunds because they signify the present." Mayer, introduction to *SHJ*, 1.

[18] Ken Jordan, "The Colors of Consonance: Bernadette Mayer talks about her new book, her history, workshops, dictionaries, sex, politics, and seeing colors," *Poetry Project Newsletter* 146 (Oct./Nov. 1992).

Both Rubenfine and Mayer's deceased parents are named, implied, and directly addressed figures throughout *Studying Hunger*, as are many of Mayer's personal acquaintances: lovers, friends, family members, and fellow artists and poets in the New York art scene of the mid 1970s. Filmmaker Ed Bowes, painter Rosemary Mayer, conceptual artist Vito Acconci, and poet Clark Coolidge, all intimately connected to Mayer, constitute the journals' social landscape alongside greater and lesser known literary figures (Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, Flannery O'Connor, Hugh Kenner, and Marcelin Pleynet), minor and major film stars (Rosalind Russell, Robert Montgomery, Elizabeth Taylor, James Dean and Rock Hudson) and the psychoanalysts Jacques Lacan and Sigmund Freud. Mayer's invocation of her intimate and artistic community as well as figures who resonate in the broader spheres of popular culture and canonized literary history aligns *Studying Hunger* in part with the coterie-conscious and culturally-quotidian works of New York School Poetry, most prominently evident in Frank O'Hara's body of writing. As in O'Hara's work, the frequent citation of proper names in *Studying Hunger* generates moments of conspicuous possibility and ambiguity when the writing addresses an unidentified second person, "you." This pronominal placeholder foregrounds its underspecification, inviting and resisting readerly identification as either the addressee or the eavesdropping observer gaining access to a moment of intimate address between Mayer and any one of the figures, living and dead, who have been "summoned up" by name throughout the journals, as if ghosts haunting the work and its speaker.

In charting the legacy of O'Hara's deployment of proper names towards a "poetics of coterie," Shaw characterizes Mayer's work from this time period as "far more procedural, serial and antisubjective than O'Hara's writing"[19] but draws a connection between O'Hara and Mayer's works of intimate address and naming, particularly in the case of Mayer's epistolary work, *The Desires of Mothers to Please Others in Letters*. In this work, Mayer collects a series of writings framed as unsent letters addressed to friends, family members, and acquaintances. Despite the historical weight of each letter's real addressee, the multiplicity of addressees foregrounds the occasion that addressing these others presents for Mayer: not simply the occasion to speak in a personal, biographically-inflected register, but the exercise of amplifying personal address into public occasion, producing works that orient simultaneously towards the addressees that Mayer names and the literary audience for the published text. *Studying Hunger* engages with the epistolary form, as in the aforementioned address to Rubenfine, and in section in which Mayer embeds greetings—"Dear Mr. Lacan," "Dear Dr. Lacan," "Dear Dr. Room," "Dear Joyce." (158-164)—in prose that is otherwise unmarked as anything other than diaristic stream of consciousness. These moments of address conceptually frame the observation or question that follows each salutation: "Dr Lacan, I wanted to better my dreams though La Langue, but what's the word for tongue?" (161). Here we see evidence of Mayer's interest in the operations that distinguish "La Langue" from *parole*, Ferdinand de Saussure's terms for the abstract signifying system, *langue*, which enables meaningful utterances in the form of speech, *parole*. In seeking the

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[19] Lytle Shaw, *Frank O'Hara: The Poetics of Coterie* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006), 249.

"word for tongue," Mayer makes reference to distinct spoken languages (English and presumably French, given her direct address of "Dr Lacan"). Mayer points to semantic equivalence, wherein different words share meaning and function ("tongue"), and in the range of proper names that serve as her epistolary addressees, she points to grammatical equivalence, as well. Her multiple, momentary, and cursory invocations of proper names signal the variety of relationships and the types of communications the grammatical unit of "addressee" permits. These range from her relationship to literary or psychoanalytic figures and traditions, as when she hails "Dr Lacan" or "James Joyce," to her personal relationships with individuals in her life ("Dear Clark" (186), "Dear David" (7, 41, 70, etc.) "Dear Marie" (174), "Dear Ted" (239)).

Far more often, however, Mayer simply addresses "you," eschewing a proper name for the pronoun of direct address, and over the course of the journals, the flux of people to whom this "you" might refer—every proper name she references, every instance in which the reader feels personally hailed as a reader—collectively overdetermines the "you" so that the task of identifying the object of Mayer's address recedes behind the act of direct address itself and the attending subject positions—"I" and "You"—Mayer simultaneously inhabits, populates, or evacuates. The opening epistle of the work, while explicitly addressed to Rubenfine, closes with statements to "you" that destabilize our sense of this text as a private communication intended for "David," and stage the question of "who is the you" that will motivate many of the journals' richest moments of reflection:

> Once I wanted to do something whereby a person, by means of a
> complicated code, would record his every thought and mind
> movement for a short while. I wanted to set it up. I feel that these are
> all clues and you must solve the puzzle. Not abstractly but
> hesitatingly, I also feel ashamed. I have thought, the thought popped
> up, so many times of you being "inundated" with written material and
> of course I want to please you.
>
> And my next thought always is: Do I know you? Goddammit, it drives
> me crazy. I know I'm not crazy. Can I give this to you? And then I feel
> desire and then I feel cold. I'm leaving everything open.[20]

Mayer generates "clues" that contribute to an "inundation" of material that produces for Mayer feelings of shame, desire, and uncertainty around the permission and knowledge that attend these acts of disclosure ("Do I know you?... Can I give this to you?"). The emotional response Mayer describes and the framing conceit of an epistolary address to her analyst evoke an archetypal psychoanalyst and patient exchange wherein the client's disclosures and her observable symptoms constitute the material the analyst analyzes. But as instances of direct address in the text eclipse and outnumber moments of epistolary greeting or named address of historical individuals, the patient and analyst relationship becomes just one

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[20] Mayer, *SHJ*, 9.

permutation of the broader relationship between speaker and interlocutor, and author and audience. The conceit of writing to and for an exchange with Rubenfine gives way to a writing project that mines the subject positions that enable communication.

These roles and the conduits between them take on figural substance soon thereafter in an entry ("July 11") that imagines iterations of an encounter between "I" and "You" that takes place in the space of a room, bounded by language, "the code," and the logic and plotting of dreams:

> Why suffer through the code, it's a path, I'm on it, you get it. You get it? Caught in this design these ropes I'm exhausted, I'm wide awake I'm looking for a language that will carry you to this place: this place is isolated: it is here and this, this here: if you would knock on the door a few hundred feet away, I would answer it and let you in. The opening of the door would excite me and the gesture you would make of our novelty. I would understand that it was strange that you were here and that movement our movement in our sphere, sphere of action and of motion and feeling, all this is constricted and that it is hard to move and agree with feelings, hard to move and be staid and satisfied be excited not denied. You and I would know this as you came in the door. I would answer it. You would make some gesture. You would move me. I would wait expectantly for the door to close behind you but the motion would seem longer to me than to you. To you I would appear nervous. You would wait for some sign. Seeing this I would do something dramatic something to satisfy a dream. Perhaps you would go outside again and repeat your entrance, only this time the door would be open and I would be sitting, my back to it, on the bed in some dream room...[21]

The citation of a particular language that carries one to another and a code that is a path one travels dramatizes a Jakobsonian model of communication (sender, message, receiver, code, etc.) as a social ritual in which shared customs and knowledge determine actions and expectations—to knock on a door is to request permission, and to open a door is to grant it—and speech acts are manifestations of social relations. The disjunction in the shared experience of this exchange ("the motion would seem longer to me than to you") and the necessity of signaling by both parties ("You would wait for some sign. Seeing this I would do something dramatic...") describes a communicative model that assumes stable subject positions existing at a distance from one another that must be bridged through ritualized acts of acknowledgment. The lengthy passage imagines this process of knocking, entering, and encountering three times, inflecting each exchange with different emotional stakes. The first encounter produces excitation and disjunction—"it is hard to move and agree with feelings, hard to move and be staid

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[21] Mayer, *SHJ*, 31.

and satisfied be excited not denied"—and the second encounter makes explicit that this imagined scene describes fantasy and desire:

> you can't stand to sit still, you don't really mean this, you want me, but
> all this is irrelevant to this design which isn't meant to be real this
> entrance your entrance is a clear fantasy this moment an entry merely
> in a notebook or other recording device, maybe something quicker,
> more attractive, blue, like you. I speak into the tape recorder. I say:
> there is a knock at the door.[22]

This moment references the composition of *Memory*, in which Mayer narrated into a tape recorder her memories of the month she had recorded in photographs, as she looked through those photographs. The pun of an entry into a room that is also an entry into a notebook invites further figuration for the social exchange taking place: a linguistic model that is amplified by the personal and literary relationships Mayer activates through her act of recording herself in the context of literary and artistic production. By the conclusion of the passage, Mayer relocates this exchange to the site of the present project, and introduces an antagonistic interdependence between "I" and "You":

> I seize on you: you illustrate me, your sons design need, you are a fake
> and the you in oceans makes me two, you know it and can't speak.
> Sleep doesn't refresh me as it does you, you design cool shaking you
> make me angry, we're cut short so we won't walk in together, I'm
> always sure there's more. I must begin to address myself now to my
> hunger since you've left me, haven't dared, and how could you outside
> all context, you could investigate but you're stuck, there's a knock on
> the door. I know it's you.[23]

The content evokes a "you" that provokes a false constitution of "I"—"you illustrate me… you are a fake"—the absence of "you" that provokes the speaker's hunger—"I must begin to address myself now to my hunger since you've left me"—and the splitting of the subject from a unity into a duality: "the you in oceans makes me two."

The plotting broadly invokes Lacanian models of language acquisition and subject formation, dramatized as a romance between "I" and "You," whereby desire and one's inauguration into language are both predicated on loss, the subject exists as a "duality" rather than a "unity," and the "fake" apparition of "you," an other, "illustrates"—imagistically delineates—the subject, and motivates a reading of *Studying Hunger*'s I/You relations as an exploitation of the structural linguistic principles that inform Lacan's logocentric model of subject formation. Most relevant here is Lacan's positing of a split subject as a condition of normative psychological development that initiates with the specular recognition of difference (the mirror

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[22] Mayer, *SHJ*, 31.
[23] *Ibid.*, 32.

stage, in infants)[24] and culminates in the individual's acquisition of and participation in language. Consequently, an individual's intrinsic, biological "needs" finds symbolic articulation through "demands" that can only be met by gestures that are always already symbolically mediated; "desire" emerges as a consequence of the irreducible difference between the "real"—that which resists or has not yet been symbolized—and the symbolic. In "The Signification of the Phallus," Lacan describes this trajectory as a consequence of the presence of the signifier:

> Let us examine the effects of this presence. They include, first, a deviation of man's needs due to the fact that he speaks: to the extent that his needs are subjected to demand, they come back to him in an alienated form. This is not the effect of his real dependence…but rather of their being put into signifying form as such and of the fact that it is from the Other's locus[25] that his message is emitted.
>
> What is thus alienated in needs constitutes an *Urverdrängung* [primal repression], as it cannot, hypothetically, be articulated in demand; it nevertheless appears in an offshoot that presents itself in man as desire….[26]

That which is "alienated in needs" originates, Lacan argues, in the "primordial relationship" that turns on the presence or absence of the mother, for the child, and takes on a particularity that is beyond demand: the "proof of love that rebels against the satisfaction of need." This, Lacan argues, "is why desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the very phenomenon of the splitting."[27] Understood as a force in excess of and external to the articulable circuit of demand and satisfaction of demand, "desire" therefore does not seek satisfaction and has no

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[24] "For the total form of his body, by which the subject anticipates the maturation of his power in a mirage, is given to him only as a gestalt, that is, in an exteriority in which, to be sure, this form is more constitutive that constituted, but in which, above all, it appears to him as the contour of his stature that freezes it and in a symmetry that reverses it, in opposition to the turbulent movements with which the subject feels he animates it. Through these two aspects of its appearance, this gestalt…symbolizes the *I*'s mental permanence, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination." Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror State as Formative of the *I* Function," in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink in collab. with Héloise Fink and Russell Grigg (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 95.

[25] Here, I understand Lacan to be referring to the Other as "language," though this is an inadequate account of the Lacanian Other. Bruce Fink's *The Lacanian Subject* offers this schematic of the "Other": "…the Other as elaborated by Lacan has many faces or avatars—the Other as language (i.e., as set of all signifiers); the Other as demand; the Other as desire (obect *a*); the Other as jouissance." Bruce Fink, Bruce, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 13.

[26] Jacques Lacan, "The Signification of the Phallus," in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink in collab. with Héloise Fink and Russell Grigg (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 579.

[27] Lacan, "Signification of the Phallus," 580.

true "object"; it attends but does not direct intersubjective relations of demand and satisfaction.

I read in Mayer's insistence that "I'm always sure there's more" in the above passage's search of a "language to carry you to this place" and in the passage's testing of various possibilities for intersubjective connection (approaches, departures, denials, excitations) an expression of desire as a ceaseless searching in and through language: a fixation on the repetitions of a "you" entering and departing the scene, producing excitation and frustration, rather than a stable figuration of and relation to any one object, "you." Bruce Fink's commentary on Lacanian formulations of desire points to this quality of desire as an end in itself:

> *Desire, strictly speaking, has no object.* In its essence, desire is a constant search for something else, and there is no specifiable object that is capable of satisfying it, in other words, extinguishing it. Desire is fundamentally caught up in the dialectical *movement* of one signifier to the next, and is diametrically opposed to fixation. It does not seek satisfaction, but rather its own continuation and furtherance: more desire, greater desire! It wishes merely to go on desiring…it is rigorously distinct from demand.[28]

Understanding desire to be "caught up in the dialectical movement of one signifier to the next" and "opposed to fixation," Fink associates desire with the "signifying chain," Lacan's term, adapted from Saussure's work, for the phenomenon whereby signifiers operate only through reference to other signifiers, resonating both horizontally—"in the direction in which it [the chain of discourse] is oriented in time"[29]—and vertically, in symbolic, metaphoric, and metonymic relation to other words and concepts.[30] In Lacan's formulation, desire is not only "caught up" in the ceaseless significations of language and the proliferation of symbols; desire and the speech acts that both engender desire and permit its recognition are also the only means by which living beings may intercept, as agents, the totalizing network of the symbolic:

> Symbols in fact envelop the life of man with a network so total they join together those who are going to engender him "by bone and flesh" before he comes into the world;…so total that they provide the words that will make him faithful or renegade, the laws of the acts that will follow him right to the very place where he is not yet and beyond his very death….

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[28] Fink, 90-91.

[29] Jacques Lacan, "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious," in *Écrits*: *The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink in collab. with Héloïse Fink and Russell Grigg (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 419.

[30] Lacan, "Instance of the Letter," 417-421.

Servitude and grandeur in which the living being would be annihilated, if desire did not preserve his part in the interferences and pulsations that the cycles of language cause to converge on him, when the confusion of tongues intervenes and the orders thwart each other in the tearing asunder of the universal undertaking.

But for this desire itself to be satisfied in man requires that it be recognized, through the accord of speech or the struggle for prestige, in the symbol or the imaginary.

What is at stake in an analysis is the advent in the subject of the scant reality that this desire sustains in him, with respect to symbolic conflicts and imaginary fixations, as the means of their accord, and our path is the intersubjective experience by which this desire gains recognition.

Thus we see that the problem is that of the relations between speech and language in the subject. [31]

Desire gains recognition through the intersubjective exchange of speech and sustains the "scant reality" of finding, through its expression, an accord between "symbolic conflicts and imaginary fixations." Speech prevents the "annihilation" of living being in the totalizing system of symbolic relations that predetermine its existence as a being and give meaning to its interventions in the world. "The problem…of the relations between speech and language in the subject" constitutes, for Lacan, the object of analysis and the site upon which to locate the distortions that produce psychological disorders: "In madness, of whatever nature, we must recognize in the one hand the negative freedom of a kind of speech that has given up trying to gain recognition, which is what we call an obstacle to transference; and on the other, the singular formation of a delusion which…objectifies the subject in a language devoid of dialectic."[32]

For Lacan, speech is the dialectical appropriation of language towards recognition by some real or proxy other; by definition, then, speech necessitates intersubjective relations between speakers and addressees, and is the means by which subjects are constituted:

…the speech value of a language is gauged by the intersubjectivity of the "we" it takes on…..

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[31] Lacan, "Function and Field," 231.

[32] "In madness, of whatever nature, we must recognize in the one hand the negative freedom of a kind of speech that has given up trying to gain recognition, which is what we call an obstacle to transference; and on the other, the singular formation of a delusion which…objectifies the subject in a language devoid of dialectic." Lacan, "Function and Field," 231.

> For the function of language in speech is not to inform but to evoke.
>
> What I seek in speech is response from the other. What constitutes me as a subject is my question. In order to be recognized by the other, I proffer what was only in view of what will be. In order to find him, I call him by a name that he must assume or refuse in order to answer me….
>
> …if I call the person to whom I am speaking by whatever name I like, I notify him of the subjective function he must take up in order to reply to me, even if it is to repudiate this function.
>
> The decisive function of my own response thus appears, and this function is not, as people maintain, simply to be received by the subject as approval or rejection of what he is saying, but truly to recognize or abolish him as a subject.[33]

Speech "evokes" rather than "informs" by positing only "what was" as contingent upon "what will be": the outcome of a response that a speech act generates, and the reciprocal confirmation or rejection and subsequent reconstitution of speakers and addressees as subjects serving particular relational functions. Here, we see the centrality of intersubjective address—the "I" in relation to the "you"—in Lacan's account of subjectivity as a consequence of speech, and speech—and the desire it both engenders and recognizes—as a defense against the absolute rule of the symbolic. Mayer dramatizes these processes of subject formation and reformation through investigating the interrelation of polarity and reciprocity between the "I" and the "you" in diaristic, epistolary, and literary discourse.

Literary criticism investigates the operations of direct address and subject formation in terms of a material history of forms—genres, texts, traditions—and figures—authors and audiences. Scholarship on poetic direct address focuses on the speaking voice and subject that are fixed, if momentarily, through the process of evoking a second person addressee, or on the engagement of the reader in witnessing (and responding to or identifying with) a second person addressee; the relationship between poetic address and addressee then serves as the ground on which to examine the political, ethical, and literary implications of poetic direct address. Jane Hedley's work on direct address in *I Made You to Find Me: The Coming of Age of the Woman Poet and the Politics of Poetic Address* treats lyric discourse as "always implicitly and often explicitly vocative [in] character"[34] and identifies three

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[33] Lacan, "Function and Field," 247-248.

[34] "What does it mean to say that lyric discourse is 'vocative'? Poems often purport to be addressed to a significant other, be it another human being, a divinity, a force of nature, or a personified work of art; at the same time, however, when Richard Wilbur insists that a poem is 'not a message from one person to another,' we know what he means. A poem's deictic pronouns, its 'I's and its 'you's,' are components of a verbal construct that is both 'self-focused' and, as a linguist might put it, contextually underspecified. Thus even if the poet is *ostensibly* addressing his daughter, as Wilbur

models for the rhetorical orientation of modern lyrics that configure poem, author, and reader in varying relation to the act of address. These models inform my reading of *Studying Hunger Journals*'s experiments in direct address as drawing from lyrical models of address among the other discursive modes the work engages. Hedley cites Jonathan Culler and Northrop Frye as central exponents of the understanding of lyric poems as expressions that readers "overhear," which are directed to figures of address with whom readers do not identify. Hedley derives this position from Culler's identification of apostrophe as the "founding trope" of lyric poetry, and from Frye's definition of lyric, as outlined in his *Anatomy of Criticism,* as the genre in which the poet utilizes the rhetorical tactic of apostrophe to deliver a soliloquy or to pretend to address an imagined interlocutor.[35]

Culler's account of apostrophe in *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* posits the literary device's presentation of a "radical interiorization and solipsism" as well as its capacity to constitute its objects of address as "subjects"; both capacities resonate with Mayer's text as a document of intense self-scrutiny that is also explicit in addressing its real and hypothetical audiences. Culler arrives as apostrophe's "radical interiorization" by outlining three prior levels on which apostrophe may be understood: as the poet's constitution of the universe as a "world of sentient forms" and objects of address that poets "formally will…[to] function as subjects"; the presentation of encounters with that world as "relations between subjects"; and as a means of "establish[ing] with an object a relationship which helps to constitute [the poet]" whereby the "object is treated as a subject, an *I* which implies a certain *you* in its turn."[36] Here Culler observes the affiliation of a "subject" with the pronominal form "I" which in turn implies a figure of address, "you," that in this formulation refers to the poet; apostrophic poems, for Culler, are "gratuitous invocations" which serve to establish the invoking voice as a "poetical and prophetic voice." Culler does not reverse the formulation in order to posit the poet as the subject, "I," that preexists its object-turned-subject of address. This would seem to posit the necessity of an intersubjective, communicative relation as a prerequisite for the authorization and activation of "subjects," and raises the question as to whether objects-turned-subjects carry the same "subject" status as poetic speakers-turned-subjects.[37] But citing the ultimately "fictive" nature of an apostrophic address ("fictive" because whether the poet addresses an inanimate object or a historical being, living or dead, both acts of addresses are in fact fictional

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himself does in one of his poems, we o not take such vocative gestures at face value: they are figures of address." Hedley cites Wilbur in Richard Gray, *American Poetry of the Twentieth* Century (New York: Longman, 1990), 223. Jane Hedley, *I Made You to Find Me: The Coming of Age of the Woman Poet and the Politics of Poetic Address* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2009), 4.

[35] "Frye's lyric poet is not unconscious of having an audience, but turns away from them by having recourse to a device that was, according to Cicero and Quintilian, part of the orator's stock in trade." Hedley, 6*.*

[36] Jonathan, Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 142.

[37] Benveniste's explication of the linguistic persons implied by the pronouns "I" and "you" assigns the "you" to the "non-subjective" position in relation to the "subjective person that 'I' represents"; I'll address Benveniste's pronominal schema in more detail, below. Benveniste, 201.

conceits), Culler argues that apostrophe is a self-oriented act of poetic intervention in the world:

> …this figure which seems to establish relations between the self and the other can in fact be read as an act of radical interiorization and solipsism. Either it parcels out the self to fill the world, peopling the universe with fragments of the self…or else it internalizes what might have been thought external…. to name as a *you* something which in its empirical state cannot be a *you*…is a way of preempting the place of the you…. It is only as a product of poetic intervention that the object can occupy the places of the addressee.[38]

On the basis of this formulation, Culler conceives of apostrophic address as participating in an interiorized "drama of mind"[39] rather than a dialogic or narrative engagement with the world of things and beings. This observation informs my reading of temporality and chronology in *Studying Hunger Journals*, and will be addressed in more detail, below.

Hedley contrasts this model of poetic address as an act that is "overheard" by readers and which serves primarily to constitute the poetic voice and subject with a model she associates with Helen Vendler, who has argued for lyric poetry as "a script for performance by its reader"[40] through which readers identify with and are activated themselves as speakers by the poem's speaker, the "I." We can also see suggestions of this dynamic in the definition Frye offers for the "radical of presentation" in lyric, whereby "the poet, so to speak, turns his back on his listeners, though he may speak for them, and though they may repeat some of his words after him."[41] Vendler conceives of lyric as "a moment of inner meditation" that "hopes for the reader's willingness to place himself or herself in the writer's subject-position."[42] Unlike a diary, which Vendler identifies as the "nearest prose equivalent to the lyric" and which readers receive as "the words of another person," lyric is "meant to be spoken as if the reader were the one uttering the words." Vendler argues that a conception of the audience's role as merely to "overhear" assumes that a reader participates only as a "disinterested spectator"[43]; her position assumes that "interested" reading produces identification with and adoption of the poet's words as one's own. This argument remains undertheorized in Vendler's account and begs the question of "interest" as the foundation for identification, but points to a rhetorical understanding of lyric poetry as the negotiation of speakers and addressees as inhabitable positions, a position that informs Charles Altieri's work on pronominal relations in poetry, with which I will also engage, below.

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[38] Culler, 146.

[39] Culler, 148.

[40] Helen Vendler, *Poems, Poets, Poetry: An Introduction and Anthology*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002), xlii.

[41] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays with a Forward by Harold Bloom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 249-250.

[42] Vendler, xlii-xliv.

[43] Vendler, xliii.

A third position, which Hedley associates with the work of W. R. Johnson, maintains that the "you" in poems of direct address is the locus for reader identification, thereby acting as "the reader's proxy inside the poem."[44] Hedley cites Johnson's observations that the first two positions—that poetry is primarily meditative, addressed to oneself or to an imagined interlocutor that merely serves the speaker's intentions—demonstrate a post-Romantic sensibility that has lost access to lyric function as established in Greek and Roman traditions, which innovated this verse form as "primarily an 'I-You- poem—addressed to readers either directly, or by way of a human interlocutor who serves as a 'symbolic mediator…between the poet and each of his readers and listeners.'"[45] Johnson invokes an Aristotelean model of oration to defend his conception of the proper form of lyric as a "'situation of discourse' (speaker, discourse, hearer) similar to that which obtains in oratory"[46] whereby the requirements of discursive performance motivate a clarification of the speaker's own person by virtue of an intensive orientation towards a "hearer":

> By focusing on what he has to say, on why he is saying it, and on the person *for* whom—not so much *to* whom—he is saying it, the speaker discovers the exact, the proper, form for his own character as speaker on the particular occasion, in this particular discourse; and, in fact, the purpose of discourse and the presence of the hearer furnish the speaker with enormous power and vitality. In a sense, the act of discourse clarifies the speaker's personality, he learns who and what he is by yielding himself wholly to the act of discourse; in performing his proper function properly, by discoursing, describing, deliberating, he becomes himself.[47]

Johnson distinguishes between the "person *for* whom" and the person "*to* whom" the speaker speaks, making a distinction between the figure of address within the poem and the intended audience for the rhetorical, lyrical address. This places readers ("hearers") in a relationship of proximity but not equivalency with a poem's explicit figures of address. Hedley develops this line of thinking in order to account for poems that address a specified "you" as well as poems in which speakers appear to address themselves:

> In poems where an "I-you" relationship is made explicit, the more socially embedded the relationship is, the more subject it must be to negotiation, the more alive to hypothetical differences in attitude or viewpoint between the "I" and the "you." But even where the "I" and the "you" share a single body they occupy different vantage points, so

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44 Hedley, 4.
45 Hedley, 8.
46 W.R. Johnson, *The Idea of Lyric: Lyric Modes in Ancient and Modern Poetry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 30.
47 Johnson, 31.

that even where feeling is "confessing itself to itself in moments of solitude," that confession is getting a hearing and, potentially, a reading.[48]

Hedley's account recognizes that the summoning of a interlocutor serves as a rhetorical device meant to persuade readers to adopt or test their sympathy to the poem's stated position and implied relationship with an other, but she does not specify whether readers are meant to find affinity with the "I" or the "you." Figures of address, in Johnson's account, serve as proxies for readers only insofar as they invite potential readers to locate themselves within the intersubjective exchange. Johnson's account of lyric discourse's fundamentally rhetorical function therefore carries some of the same emphasis that Culler's account does: that an interlocutory figure is necessary for clarifying and authorizing the poem's speaker. Whereas Culler argues for the "radical interiorization and solipsism" that apostrophe enacts in order to draw attention to the act of poetic intervention, Johnson emphasizes the rhetorical function of address, through which both speakers and addressees come into being and without which poetry is reduced to "no one…talking to no one about nothing."[49]

Charles Altieri, in the last chapter of *Canons and Consequences* ("Life After Difference: The Positions of the Interpreter and the Positionings of the Interpreted") approaches the question of how poems rhetorically engage their audiences by way of investigating the interpretive work available to a readership, as determined by the pronominal relations activated by literary texts that readers must navigate.[50] Altieri relies on a Wittgensteinian model of language and grammatical positions in order to argue for both the embodiment of subject positions that linguistic operations enable, and the versatility that subjects and interpreters of language bring to any interpretive opportunity:

> By relying on pronominal functions, we link Wittgensteinian grammar with the concept of positions that sustains Althusser's and Foucault's accounts of how subjects are constituted. But Wittgenstein's sense of the multiplicity of roles and his model of learning a language cut against their determinist understanding of the constitutive process, so we gain from Wittgenstein means for appreciating how we have at least the possibility of reaching agreement across substantial differences—as interpreters and as interpreters of interpretation.[51]

Here, Altieri suggests that by attending to the multiplicity of operations and utilizations language actually offers, we have greater agency as interpreters of texts: moving beyond "determinist" understandings of how pronominal positions—I, you,

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[48] Hedley, 10.
[49] Johnson, 13.
[50] Charles Altieri, *Canons and Consequences*: *Reflections on the Ethical Force of Imaginative Ideals* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990)
[51] *Ibid.*, 294.

him/her—constitute subjects (his examples refer to Althusserian interpellation and the Foucauldian subject as produced by discourse, both processes which emphasize the primacy of discourse in determining subjectivity) and understanding the empathetic mobility that active interpretation enables. In the footnote to this passage, Altieri elaborates on this mobility as a consequence of pronominal spaces as inhabitable as well as contextually specific positions:

> Structuralist theory taught us to treat personal pronouns as shifters, that is, as functions by which persons asserted themselves into sentences. Within a structuralist semantics, based on combinatorial rules for discrete entities, one could use the concept of a shifter to argue that there is no inner referent when one asserts "I"; the "I" is merely an operator that attaches sentences to positions occupied by agents in situations. But if one shifts to a Wittgensteinian semantics, which is based on grammatical dispositions formed as one learns a language, the sense of function played by these shifters changes radically. There is still no fixable inner referent for expressions of the "I"; but there are significant sets of expectations and interests that develop around our history of such uses…. Thus, while there may not be a transcendental ego, there may be transcendental functions that egos share and that play significant roles in our ethical lives.[52]

Altieri's identification of "transcendental (ego) functions" that might be activated by different subject positions, and the ethical potential in assigning meaningful sets of expectations and investments to these subject positions (rather than stable "inner referents") orients his work towards a universalizing account of subject and agency. For Altieri, the crucial interpretive labor for readers resides in our being able to "learn what a position entails, and…to learn to share that position, by the roles it comes to play in our linguistic negotiations with culture," and through which we come to understand shared needs, demands, and powers that dictate the "'pull' responsive to the world beyond the self and the 'push' stemming from the subject's own demands on that world."[53] The utility in Altieri's observations for my reading of Mayer's text resides in its bridging of a structural linguistic treatment of pronominal shifters as sites for subject formation only in transitory instances of discourse with the recognition that these pronouns, by virtue of their history of use, also invoke functions with greater permanence that readers and speakers may adopt. *Studying Hunger Journals,* being both an experiment in recording Mayer's interiority in part to advance a therapeutic correspondence, while also destabilizing, inhabiting, and evacuating both her own speaking-writing subject position and that of her myriad interlocutors, invites scrutiny of both its impersonal linguistic operations and its thematic and subjective continuities. Reading her work as an intersection of these modes frames Mayer's project of recording "states of consciousness" as a self-reflective document participating in literary and psychoanalytic discourses, and a

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[52] Altieri, *Canons and Consequences*, 351.
[53] *Ibid.*, 294.

scrutiny into the generation and occupation of subject and object positions—the I and the You—that both practices motivate through a speaker's appropriation of language.

This approach enables a reading of Mayer's pronominal tactics as simultaneously dedicated to developing a "deep inwardness"[54] and also exploiting the versatility of pronouns as underspecified markers of person. Altieri's accounts of first person utterance and first person address of a second person illustrate the relations on which Altieri's interpretive ethics rely and model some of the pronominal dynamics at work in Mayer's text:

> **On the first person singular, "I":**
> Questions involving this pronoun enter virtually every time we push against the limits of claims about truth and validity, because the "I" must account for whatever it is that makes the third person not suffice for certain interpretive needs and interests…. Clearly, contemporary suspicions of deep inwardness grant no "content" to the "I" that cannot in principle be described as if the "I" were a third person. And yet we know that we are not satisfied with even the most accurate third-person interpretation of a work of art. From a psychological point of view, what is missing is the response, the projection beyond what we know into what we care about as we imagine the meaning connecting to other aspects of personal life…. If the "I" is to have significant force, it must be the kind of entity that appeals to reasons without being determined by them: the "I" must be a force we read through its investments and judgments, not an abstract measure to which we refer those activities.[55]

> **On the second person singular, "you":**
> …we have in the "you" a complex locus of powers and concerns that enables us to show how it is often necessary and possible to move from formal conditions where reciprocity prevails (in ethics and in politics, as well as in the theory of knowledge) to intimate relations with the text (or person) where questions of the quality of response and commitment to the material interpreted replace those of validity and truth. When the "I" turns to third-person procedures, it accepts obligations of fairness and reciprocity to test the degree to which it can experience its desires as having successful claims on a community. But when the "I" turns to the singular "you," it seeks a relationship defined not by general rules but by specific conditions of adjustment and attunement ranging from intimate companionship to internalized tribunals with the authority to judge the individual's actions and ends.[56]

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[54] Altieri, *Canons and Consequences*, 29.
[55] *Ibid.*, 294.
[56] *Ibid.*, 306.

For Altieri, reciprocal relations rely upon validity and truth as the operative terms for subjects existing in third person relation to one another. When an "I" evokes third persons, "he," "she," or "they," that first person also evokes a community of differentiated subjects that exist at a fixed remove from one another, bridged only by their capacity to make comprehensible and sympathetic to one another their own desires and experiences; reciprocity determines legibility. Relations of direct address operate on entirely different terms; rather than engaging epistemology— what is knowable or known—an "I" addressing a "you" engages "questions of the quality of response and commitment to the material interpreted." The "I" must be understood in terms of its particular investments and judgments—"the response, the projection beyond what we know into what we care about"—while appeals to a "you" motivate relationships that might range from "intimate companionship to internalized tribunals with the authority to judge the individual's actions and ends." These relations are asymmetrical rather than reciprocal due to the "specific conditions of adjustment and attunement" that determine the expectations and obligations summoned by personal appeal.

Hedley, Culler, Vendler, Johnson, and Altieri's theories of address develop their models of pronominal relations in verse texts; Mayer's text, moving between prose and verse lineation, tests dynamics of address across varying modes of locution, from the highly codified and literary—sestinas, for instance, in Books I and IV—to the less easily codified open form of the journal entries that make up the majority of the text. Observing associative and paratactic principles of organization, Mayer's prose entries invoke an encyclopedic range of topics, images, and emotional and linguistic registers, often without coordinating gestures that substantiate the relationship—causal, associative, oppositional, etc.—between juxtaposed instances of subject or affect. Two models for this style of writing are relevant, here: Marjorie Perloff's adaptation of what Northrop Frye has identified as "free prose," and the "new sentence," coined by Ron Silliman to describe Bay Area experimental prose in the late 1970s and early '80s. In *The Poetics of Indeterminacy,* Perloff includes "free prose" in her survey of the "discontinuous 'prose' forms" that constitute some of the most influential, experimental poetry of this same time period.[57] "Free prose," a term Frye introduces in *The Well-Tempered Critic* (1963), describes prose writing that is characterized by associative rhythm, (the repetitive, short and irregular units of "ordinary speech" that feature "primitive syntax"[58]), but which does not organize around predicative sentences. As examples, Perloff contrasts Baudelaire's *Petits poèmes en prose*, which takes the complete sentence as its stylistic norm and relies on the causal, sequential organization of prose, against the writings of Arthur Rimbaud, Gertrude Stein, and Samuel Beckett, in which short phrases "pile up" and predicative sentences resist organization into coherent discourse.[59]

In his 1987 essay "The New Sentence," Silliman coins the "new sentence" to describe a form of experimental writing occurring "more or less exclusively in the

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[57] Marjorie Perloff, *The Poetics of Indeterminacy* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1981), 43.
[58] Northrop Frye, *The Well-Tempered Critic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), 24.
[59] Perloff, 43.

prose of the Bay Area," though he names Mayer among others outside of this region whose writing exhibits "something much like or tending towards [the new sentence]."[60] Silliman lists eight qualities of the new sentence that focus on its structural and referential properties, the paragraph as a unit of quantity rather than of logic, and the tension between the primary and secondary syllogistic operations of a grouping of sentences. Silliman draws from semiotician Ferrucio Rossi-Landi's model of syllogism as the means by which sentences integrate into higher units of meaning: logical conclusions derive from the proximate relation of one sentence to another, and sentences operate as structural units with use and exchange value analogous to the tools of labor production.[61] The syllogistic logic linking contiguous sentences is a primary operation that is distinct from the secondary syllogistic movement towards paragraph units or the entire work. Two features of the new sentence are most salient for reading *Studying Hunger*. First is its contextual dependence on the other sentences with which it is organized into paragraph units and with which it produces a "secondary syllogistic movement to create or convey an overall impression of unity" that is at odds with the "systematic blocking of the integration of sentences one to another through *primary* syllogistic movement."[62] The second can be identified in its internalization of the poetic qualities of torque, polysemy, and ambiguity, which in verse are the consequence of formal devices external to each individual line, such as line breaks and rhyme. In the new sentence of experimental prose poetry, "poetic form has moved into the interiors of prose."[63]

      Silliman's citation of linguist Valentin Vološinov's account of the paragraph's dialogic interventions into the "monologic utterance" of writing casts the structural devices of logical referentiality—organizing speech into units that integrate into higher units of meaning—as analogous to "exchanges in dialogue" that assume and implicate a listener or reader: "the paragraph is something like a vitiated dialogue worked into the body of monologic utterance. Behind the device of partitioning speech into units, which are termed paragraphs in their written form, lie orientation toward listener or reader and calculation of the latter's possible reactions."[64] In a close reading of a sample of Barrett Watten's work, Silliman identifies a similar orientation towards the reader at the level of primary syllogism; Watten's sentences, in their simultaneous suggestion and refusal of a "tidy little narrative" of logical contiguity, explore "the reader's recognition of [her] presumptiveness, this willingness to 'complete the syllogism.'"[65] In Perloff's exploration of "free prose's" resistance to organization into coherent discourse and Silliman's study of the new sentence's grammatical and syntactical movements towards and against a "full

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[60] Ron Silliman, "The New Sentence," in *The New Sentence* (New York: Roof Books, 1987), 88.
[61] Silliman cites Rossi-Landi's comparison of language-systems to labor production, parallel processes grounded in the need to divide labor in the community that drives the use of language. *Ibid.*, 78.
[62] *Ibid.*, 92.
[63] *Ibid.*, 89.
[64] Silliman cites Valentin Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I.R. Titunik, (Cambridge, MA: Seminar Press with Harvard University Press, 1973), 111. *Ibid., 76*-77.
[65] *Ibid.*, 77.

syllogistic leap…to create a fully referential tale,"[66] there is a shared recognition of the implicit (and sometimes direct) implication of a reader who performs the (sometimes presumptive) labor of textual integration. Considered alongside Altieri's reading of lyrical direct address as an appeal to readerly obligations, these accounts suggest points of intersection against which to consider *Studying Hunger*'s contingencies of address as a mode of engagement with the multiple "narratives" the work invokes: the narrative of autobiography, the psychoanalytic narratives of desire, lack, and subject formation, and the narratives that inhere in long, literary works.

In a passage that later follows the dramatized, reiterated encounters in a room between "I" and "You" cited above, Mayer develops a series of passages that name and enact the "confusion of yous": the ground on which she stages many of the work's moments of direct address. The passage begins with an idiomatic use of "you" that is synonymous with the general nominative "one," rather than exclusively denoting the second person: "If you wanted to be mean, if you wanted to you could be very good at it, you could be mean." Only with the contrasting first person statements that follow do we understand this first statement as a means of differentiating—if facetiously—"you" from "I," rather than generalizing across multiple "ones" or a communal "we": "I am an expert. I am not mean" (*SHJ*, 36). The pairing of simple, declarative, first person statements following the evaluative statement "you could be very good at it, you could be mean" imply a syllogistic relation: "I am an expert [capable of evaluating "you"]" *because* or *therefore* "I am not mean." But the syllogism strains across what is suppressed: "expert" at what? what further information do we need to accept the truth value of these "I am" and "I am not" statements? A set of first person plural statements follows, exhibiting a similar toggling between declarations not quite opposed enough to represent stable oppositions, but not logically contiguous, either: "We are making a proposal, we are making a careful vow, we are not knowing, we are knowing everything. We are not weeding out we are full of desire, we are pending" (*SHJ*, 36). The present continuous tense produces "pending" states of being suggested by the series of participles— making, knowing, weeding, pending—that resist stability in favor of states of response and refinement; making a proposal, in the parlance of marriage rites, also entails making a careful vow, not knowing implies a specificity that is neither "knowing nothing" nor "knowing everything," and the embedded suggestion that "we are not we" in "we are not weeding out…" makes for a pending "we," subject to the "weeding out" process the divides unit into discarded subunits.

Later in this passage, Mayer positions "you" against "we" and just as quickly, posits an absent "you" and a "confusion of yous" as well as a conflation of "I" and "you":

> …what we perceive you are aware of, a mixing up and you know us by
> now by our perceptions, alike perceptions storing, perceive moving,
> perception motion that's the order I speak of through you, I find it
> intricate, I find it hard, don't overlook this, the words fight among
> themselves….Absence or loss, one by one. I've spent all my money and

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[66] Silliman, "The New Sentence," 77.

I don't need some. I am tuned to your absence: there's no one here, a lingering. I am not sure, not sure I want my watch back, the one that was stolen, I'll let you know, we'll play it by ear. Form of a human part is aware. Is here. There's no telling you point to wanting, we haven't missed at all not wide by designed to the mark, if any, if design is free, he is. I hit you, I meet you, I see you, we were both scared in such a bravery way, it's summer and running open, what? Begin? I sleep I am asleep I had a baby, it's close. I could go on forever this way but you in the confusion of yous for you I must make magic, I must stop and get out of the code beyond the secret code which would have worked it would have worked anyway but since I am you, now, a part of the fusing, the confusion of possible yous, I will milk, impose, I will come out of hiding, it's time, I've already begun.[67]

This passage enacts a continuous repositioning of the subject positions I, you, and we as aligned or at a remove from one another, sharing like positions of perception that enable a fusing of "you" and "I" or multiple "yous" that in their "confusion" dissolve distinctions between subject positions. Mayer achieves this dissolution through a grammatical shift whereby "you" initially serves as direct object ("I hit you, I meet you, I see you") but eventually, "in the confusion of yous," comes to serve as a predicative nominative ("I am you"), effectively "fusing" with the subject.[68] The play between "you" and "I" occurs amid the themes of absence and loss; "Absence or loss, one by one" takes the form of monetary and material losses, but less quantifiable loss as well: "I've spent all my money and I don't need some. I am tuned to your absence: there's no one here, a lingering. I am not sure, not sure I want my watch back, the one that was stolen." The material losses of money spent and a watch stolen bookend the greater loss of "your absence: there's no one here, a lingering" and rehearse in miniature the project's broader survey of different qualities and quantities of loss as a theme and source for Mayer's self-accounting. Parts in relation to wholes figure as well; Mayer foregrounds the metonymic figuration in the idiom to "play it by ear" in her reflection that "Form of a human part is aware. Is here." The deictic "here" operates multiply as a rhyming term for "ear" and as an echo of the "here" where "there's no one…a lingering." The syntax of "Form of a human part is aware" assigns awareness to the conflation of "form of a human" and "a human part," activating the dichotomy of unified, human form and isolated, human part, and leaving unanswered the question of where awareness resides (or from whose consciousness it emerges), other than that it "is here."

      "Part" as synecdoche for whole recurs in the paragraph's concluding, paratactic series of clauses, which in its opening claim that "I could go on forever this way but…I must stop and get out of the code, beyond the secret code…" announces its intentions to break with the "code" governing these expressions: either locally, in terms of this text or this passage, or more broadly, in terms of a Jakobsonian model of language. We see encoding in the triplets of accumulative

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[67] Mayer, *SHJ*, 36-37.
[68] I am indebted to Dan Blanton for this observation.

clauses that illustrate the semiotic principles of combinatory syntax and articulation through minimal difference. In the first triplet, "I hit you, I meet you, I see you," the substitution of one verb for another substantially alters affect and import across identically structured clauses. In the second triplet, "I sleep I am asleep I had a baby," the clausal series introduces syntactic variation and the accumulation of grammatically necessary units through the substitution of adverb for verb, intransitive to transitive verb, and the shift from simple present tense to the simple past. The simple, first person utterances suggest parochial exercises in conjugation, so that the paratactic final series of clauses serves as a grammatical variation and violation that both names and breaks from the code in an inaugural act: "Begin? … it's time, I've already begun." Since "I am you, now" the speaker is both "a part" of and "apart" from the fusing of possible yous, even as the passage's closing clauses—"I will milk, impose, I will come out of hiding"—evoke an emergent "I," distinct from "you" through its threat of imposition.

The passage that follows dramatizes this "I" that imposes itself (or imposes upon), that "milks" (perhaps as a corollary to "I had a baby"), and that adjusts itself in relation to a second person addressee, "you," that is variably a presence as well as an absence for the first person speaker. The utterances are incantatory, mercurial and contradictory, declaring intentions and emotions assigned to both "I" and "you" in a fantasized performance of omniscience, suggestive of the certainty and intimacy between lovers as well as between mother and child:

> It's certain the wind blows unsteady, we are secure, you are my base, you are full. I milk you. I need this time. I am not absent. I am knowing you, you have special feelings, special designs, maybe you are present here now just for an instant in the color I saw first like a light between my legs, a glance, the eyes, the hands. I try to grow. I try too hard to grow. Growing is instant. I see it instantly. You are coming, you're feeling good, you're thinking how easy it is, how hard, I'm too big, it feels good. I was careful, wasn't I? I would've died for you, you warm. You want me. I'm lost where am I, I want to make you just to be sure. But you have bigger plans for me, you feed me. Later I will be your mother.[69]

The imagery suggests the terms and physicality of sex, birth, and nursing, and the declarations give voice variously to a laboring mother, solicitous lover, and, more obliquely, a fetus and child. The impossibility of assigning these statements to one archetypal relationship, whether that of lovers, therapist and patient, or mother and child, shifts the text's site of meaning away from the legible and unified figure and speaking subject around which autobiographical, diaristic works typically organize, and towards the utterances themselves: sites of syntactic, semantic, and sensory relations that operate both within and beyond the thematic relations that govern the text's expressions.

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[69] Mayer, *SHJ*, 37.

The indeterminacy of the relationships Mayer invokes in her address of "you" extends to an indeterminacy around the figures invoked by the second person. Not long after the cited passage, Mayer asks and answers the question that her second person invocations invite: "Who am I speaking to? The marketplace" (39). The prospect of subsuming all other possible you's under the collective third person of "the marketplace" materializes as quickly as it dissolves, just as the moments in which Mayer directly addresses Rubenfine re-register the journals as intended for her therapist, and just as quickly evade any stable characterization as such: "Not you David. I don't mean you" (39). *Studying Hunger Journals*'s manifestation of the linguistic necessity of positing an addressee in speech finds thematic development through Mayer's repeated querying of the identify of these addressees and, by extension, their relation to herself, the speaker. Benveniste's explication of the emergence of both linguistic persons and subjectivity through the pronominal functioning of the I-You relationship provides a template for thinking about the reciprocal relationship of indeterminacy between Mayer's first and second persons:

> Consciousness of self is only possible if it is experienced by contrast. I use *I* only when I am speaking to someone who will be a *you* in my address. It is this condition of dialogue that is constitutive of *person*, for it implies that reciprocally *I* becomes *you* in the address of the one who in his turn designates himself as *I*…. Language is only possible because each speaker sets himself up as a *subject* referring to himself as *I* in his discourse. Because of this, *I* posits another person, the one who, being, as he is, completely exterior to "me," becomes my echo to whom I say *you* and who says *you* to me. This polarity of persons is the fundamental condition in language, of which the process of communication, in which we share, is only a mere pragmatic consequence.[70]

Benveniste's observations map onto the explicit concerns of Mayer's project. In order to carry out a sustained scrutiny of her own "states of consciousness," Mayer has had to posit and address a plethora of "you's" which constitute a fundamental condition of her project ("the necessity for a single human presence, in every hour, becomes the most imminent disaster in the life here" (457)). Identifying these "you"'s becomes integral to her self-reflexive project of manifesting herself as speaker because of the relationship of polarity and "echoing" between "I" and "you" that Benveniste here foregrounds.

But linguistic persons do not refer to or sustain "identities" beyond the instance of discourse—the utterance—in which they are deployed; Benveniste's account of pronominal operations makes this clear:

> *I* cannot be defined except in terms of "locution," not in terms of objects as a nominal sign is. *I* signifies "the person who is uttering the present instance of the discourse containing *I*." This instance is unique

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[70] Benveniste, 224-225.

by definition and has validity only in its uniqueness…. *I* is the "individual who utters the present instance of discourse containing the linguistic instance *I*." Consequently, by introducing the situation of "address," we obtain a symmetrical definition for *you* as the "individual spoken to in the present instance of discourse containing the linguistic instance *you*…. These definitions refer to *I* and *you* as a category of language and are related to their position in language….

…these "pronominal" forms do not refer to "reality" or to "objective" positions in space or time but to the utterance, unique each time, that contains them, and they thus reflect their proper use. The importance of their function will be measured by the nature of the problems they serve to solve, which is none other than that of intersubjective communication. Language has solved this problem by creating an ensemble of "empty" signs that are nonreferential with respect to "reality." These signs are always available and become "full" as soon as a speaker introduces them into each instance of his discourse…. Their role is to provide the instrument of a conversion that one could call the conversion of language into discourse. It is by identifying himself as a unique person pronouncing *I* that each speaker sets himself up in turn as the "subject."[71]

Benveniste offers an understanding of subjectivity that, like Lacan's, aligns its emergence with the speaker's engagement in discourse, through which "'empty' signs that are nonreferential with respect to 'reality'" become momentarily "full," but are unique and limited to each instance of discursive utterance. This process produces two instances of the "I": "the instance of *I* as a referent and the instance of discourse containing *I* as the referee."[72] It follows that this process also produces two instances of the "you": as both a grammatical entity that is codependent with each instance of the grammatical entity "I," and as the addressee who mirrors the "*I* as the referee."

It is on the basis of this splitting of the "I" into both discursive referent and referee that Kaja Silverman, in *The Subject of Semiotics,* develops the categories of the "speaking subject," the "subject of speech," and, as an elaboration on Benveniste's model which she argues cinematic texts demand, the "spoken subject." She describes the first two categories in this way:

The first of these subjects is the individual who participates in discourse, which in the case of language would be the speaker or writer. The second consists of the discursive element with which that discoursing individual identifies, and in so doing finds his or her subjectivity. In the case of language that discursive element would be the pronoun "I".… Although these two subjects can only be

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[71] Benveniste, 218-220.
[72] Benveniste, 218.

apprehended in relation to each other, they can never be collapsed
into one unit. They remain forever irreducible to each other,
separated by the barrier between reality and signification, or what
Lacan would call "being" and "meaning." The speaking subject enjoys
the status of the reference, whereas the subject of speech functions
instead as a signifier.[73]

This split, thus articulated, assists my reading of the disorienting moments of direct
address as well as equally disorienting disjunctions between Mayer's discursive "I"
and its referent, Mayer herself, as the project's expression of its own multiple
orientations: as an extended discursive experiment aware of itself as a linguistically
mediated account of interiority and as a diaristic record conscious of a particular as
well as a broader audience: the intimate and the grammatical "you."

Towards the end of the first notebook of her journals, Mayer narrates an
imagined acrobatic performance in which a pronominal shift produces a speaking
position that moves from first to third person and back to first, and which identifies
the capacity of speech as the consequence and aim of this performance. The passage
invites an (impossible) identification between "speaking subject" and "subject of
speech," while also intervening in this process by orienting the speaking subject into
a third person position through affiliation with an "I" and then a "she":

> Gradually then I began again. It was time for my piece, in an
> auditorium full of friends. No more paper and no flame. I would
> execute this difficult dance and the secret, the resume, the explication
> would remain hidden until the end. I had rehearsed. I had driven
> myself from one moving bar or pole, attached to the wall, hinged there
> at one end, so that they could swing open and closed like a door. I had
> driven myself through rehearsals over these posts these outposts
> these locations of histories of individual ghosts, ghosts that were not
> only haunting me but had ceased to be real. They had come alive but
> were really dead. These points of focus were like swinging doors. Only
> the most acrobatic feats could control their random motion. Only a
> master of equilibrium could navigate the surface of one, much less all
> at once. I had rehearsed. I had worked. Unsure of myself still, I set my
> performance off to the side like a sideshow, like a simple element in a
> complex pattern, a homage to its variety "and all living things." The
> performance was extremely difficult, difficult, she wore black, she had
> no contact with the ground, she rose and descended executing the
> relationships between the horizontal posts which were secured at
> many levels. To get from one to the next, and its chronology was clear,
> she would make use of a turn in air, an impossibility, her arms must
> have had the strength… an impossible strength, her feet could never
> touch the ground, a short performance, in tight black clothes, she
> made use of every muscle, every muscle is tense, every second has

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[73] Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) 45-46.

been dreamed of many times before. The performance is over, she is on the ground. And now its crux, its central point, its purpose: her declaration. And she has kept this secret: it was not a real performance, not a process, not a show. The feat, the feat of movement, this exhibition of strength of study and agility—all this was a lead-in so that I could speak, so that I could say and I saw, listen: now that I have done that, now that I have done it, I will never have to do it again.

It's over and in this recounting I want to be clear, clear about its purpose, about the reason for the existence of this peculiar performance in space, and that reason is this simple statement: I had to do it so that I would never have to do it again. And to those who accept a rose from me, I add this: I am sorry to cover my feelings with images out of fear, but please believe me there are things you cannot write. I had to sop. I had to stop and begin again slowly.[74]

The passage is notable for the relative narrative continuity it offers, in contrast with much of the journals' writing; though here, as elsewhere in the journals, rhyme, assonance, and paratactic clausal chains organized only with commas assert poetic effect and principles of organization as primary routes of meaning that intervene in the higher level of organization manifested in the prose narrative. In terms of Silliman's schema for the new sentence, the unusually smooth surface of this narrative moment produces the secondary syllogistic meaning that organizes part into whole, and away from the new sentence's internalization of poetic effect. Individual descriptions of actions contribute to the paragraph-long account of an acrobatic performance that constitutes the passage's secondary syllogistic meaning: the preparations and execution of the acrobatic feat stand in metaphoric relation to Mayer's labors in writing the journals as an "exhibition of strength of study and agility" that enable her production of poetic speech: "a lead-in so that I could speak, so that I could say…"

At the moment when the first person speaker "unsure of myself still" sets her performance aside and acknowledges its place as one among many elements in a "complex pattern," Mayer provides an account of the performance she/the speaker has rehearsed and prepared for, but in the third person, as if setting herself aside along with the performance and observing herself as a separate entity. As an outside observer, she describes the impossible, acrobatic, and aerial feats with the omniscience of conventional novelistic narration: "she made use of every muscle, every muscle is tense, every second has been dreamed of many times before." At its conclusion, she reveals that the purpose of this "performance," no longer a performance but a "feat, the feat of movement, this exhibition of strength of study and agility," was to permit her to speak; and in this moment, Mayer's first person speaker and third person performer collapse into the first person. The speaker and agent who enable and execute "this peculiar performance in space" are also the

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[74] Mayer, *SHJ*, 54-55.

same speaker and agent who sought the permission and capacity to speak: "And she has kept this secret: it was not a real performance, not a process, not a show…. all this was a lead-in so that I could speak, so that I could say and I say, listen: now that I have done that, now that I have done it, I will never have to do it again." The performance, observed in third person, is a prerequisite for Mayer's speaker (and, it is implied, Mayer's speaking through these journals), but either the preparatory feats or the speaking might serve as the referent for that which "I will never have to do…again." Mayer maintains this ambiguity in the final passage of the section, insisting that "this peculiar performance in space" is "over" and that "I had to do it so that I would never have to do it again," even as she concludes with the implication that she did indeed "do it again": "I had to sop [sic]. I have to stop and begin again slowly."

Mayer's speaker is split into both the performing speaker who "cover[s] my feelings with images out of fear" (suggesting that the acrobatic performance is a metaphoric scene that produces images meant to obscure the "things you cannot write") and the observing speaker who recounts the performance from a distance. Mapping this division onto Silverman's schema of the subject split into referent and signifier, the speaking subject, "Mayer," is the referent for both the "she" who performs and the "I" that more typically serves as the discursive element with which Mayer identifies: the signifier that gestures towards the process of and prerequisites for speech: "all this was…so that I could say and I say." In addition to this plurality of subject relations, Mayer's concluding apologia invites us to consider the readership or audience this narrative addresses: "And to those who accept a rose from me, I add this: I am sorry to cover my feelings with images out of fear, but please believe me there are things you cannot write." In this case, "you" operates as a colloquial proxy for "I" rather than an instance of direct address, and the demonstrative pronoun "those" serves as the signifier for a readership that, by "accepting a rose" from her, must also accept the metaphorical or figurative distortions that accompany her self disclosure in these journals.

If this section dramatizes a split speaking subject on the part of its narrative agent, does the agent the writing addresses—the reader, the implied or directly addressed "you" or "they"—experience a comparable splitting in its discursive constitution as subject? In applying Benveniste's model of subjectivity in language to cinematic discourse, Silverman accounts for a viewing subjectivity that inheres as fully in the discursive process as does the speaking subject (which in film corresponds with the agency responsible for the film's enunciation, expressed through the complex of apparatuses that enable film production: cameras and shot composition, editing, diegetic and extradiegetic sound, the film script, etc.[75]). To the binary model of the speaking subject and subject of speech (in film, the figure or figures who perform the equivalent narrative function of the first-person pronoun in a sentence), Silverman adds the "spoken subject": the subject who is constituted through identification with the discursive element that is the subject of speech, the "I" in literary examples and the character representations of film. Arguing that the spoken subject and the speaking subject are often one and the same in linguistic

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[75] Silverman, 46.

examples, Silverman describes the features particular to cinematic texts that produce the viewer as the distinct, spoken subject:

> …the category of the spoken subject, i.e. the subject who is constituted through identification with the subject of the speech, novel, or film…. encourages us to distinguish between the speaking subject (i.e. the agency of the discourse); the subject of speech (i.e. the discursive element); and the spoken subject (i.e. the subject produced through discourse). The first and third subjects may or may not coincide.
>
> The linguistic example tends to obscure the last of these categories since it projects a protagonist who functions simultaneously as speaking and spoken subjects. (In fact, as we shall see, the autonomy of that speaker is quite limited.) However, within the cinematic instance those subjects are quite sharply differentiated. There can be no possible confusion of the speaking subject of the film text (i.e. the complex of apparatuses responsible for that text's enunciation) with its spoken subject (i.e. the viewer). They remain on opposite sides of the screen….
>
> …Within this semiotic model the viewer does not have a stable and continuous subjectivity, but one which is activated intermittently, within discourse. The cinematic text constitutes the viewer's subjectivity for him or her; it engages the viewer in a discursive exchange during which he or she is spoken as subject. To the degree that a given film conforms to dominant cultural values, it speaks the viewer's subjectivity in familiar ways, and so creates the illusion of stability and continuity. (As I suggested above, this scheme would apply as fully to literary texts as it does to cinematic ones.)"[76]

This account utilizes Benveniste's observation that the signifiers "I" and "you" lose their value outside of discursive instances, carrying only periodic meaning as shifters in determining the transitory roles of speakers and listeners. In Silverman's model of cinematic discourse, the viewer's subjectivity is determined through engagement with the film's enunciation. The subjectivity of the viewer or the "spoken subject" is therefore as particular and distinct to the discursive instance as are the speaking subject and the subject of speech; applied to literary discourse, this would mean that the subjectivity of the addressed reader comes into being as the complementary function of a speaker coming into being through the materialization of speech as writing and as consumed text. An analogy between cinematic constitution of viewer's subjectivities and literary constitution of its readership assumes that a process equivalent to Silverman's model of cinematic suturing[77] occurs in the act of reading a literary text. This discussion does not make this claim categorically, but argues that *Studying Hunger* stages comparable relations between what Silverman would call its speaking subject, subject of speech, and spoken

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[76] Silverman, 47-48.
[77] See Chapter 5, "Suture," in Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, 194-236.

subject through its experiments in direct address of indeterminate second persons, by an indeterminate first person.

　　　The interdependence of these relations recall the title of Hedley's study, "I Made You to Find Me," as well as the second of the three models of lyric address Hedley outlines, in which, in Vendler's words, poems are "scripts for performance *by* their readers" through which readers identify with and are activated by the poem's speaker, the "I." Vendler's model conflates the poem's "script" with the poem's speaker, the "I," and the reader who, in identifying with the "I," permits herself to be spoken by the poem. In Silverman's model, this would entail a conflation of speaking subject, subject of speech, and spoken subject: a collapse that single author literary— and particularly lyric—texts might sustain less problematically than the collaborations that produce filmic texts, particularly in the case of a "readerly or classic text" in which readers are encouraged to "move away from its [the text's] signifiers, which are understood as secondary, toward a privileged and originating signified."[78] In the case of "autobiographical" journaling, the "privileged and originating signified" inheres in the figure of the author and the "reality of a 'private consciousness,' a category which dictates the terms of its own analysis and so escapes any probing scrutiny."[79] As the "transcendental signified,"[80] the author of an autobiographical and self-reflexive text offers a fiction of correspondence and unity: the speaking subject is also the subject of speech, and the more stable and consistent the "voice" of this authoring subject, the more seamlessly the reader may identify that subject as a coherent unity, both permitting identification with the textual subject and self-constitution as a comparable unity.

　　　But as we have seen, Mayer's autobiographical documentation problematizes this process of identification from both poles of the discursive process: by foregrounding disjuncture between speaking subject and subject of speech, and by offering varying pronominal positions—"I," "you," "those"—with which the reader and spoken subject identifies and orients herself. This problem in identification finds a thematic correlate in the psychoanalytic phenomenon of transference[81], to which Mayer makes reference throughout the journals. In a passage addressed to her therapist in Book II, Mayer describes anxieties around transference that have arisen in the process of writing and sharing her journals as part of their therapeutic work:

> When I saw this is or may be a new way of working, I mean I think we have gotten a little beyond analysis, don't laugh yet, because you've

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[78] Silverman*,* 243.

[79] As examples of texts that foreground a "private consciousness," thus cultivating a "self-conscious" orientation, Silverman cites Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* and James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young* Man, texts which "seem to issue from an author who conforms to the paradigm of the Cartesian subject: autonomous, self-knowing, capable of thinking worlds into existence. Reflexive texts feature the author as transcendental signified." Silverman, 244.

[80] *Ibid*.

[81] First described by Freud in *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* (1940), "transference" describes the process by which a patient undergoing therapy transfers emotions associated with a prototypical relationship onto the therapist, viewing their relationship as a reincarnation of that seminal relationship.

made my transference too easy. From the time you began to "read my writing" (euphemism), I committed myself wholly to your terms (the language? the field?). In that sense I put myself in your hands. I did it and lost control, I think I was "supposed" to. Now this may be necessary (to lose control) for psychoanalysis to work but I never thought I was crazy in the first place, Max did (and thought he was) and I mention this now because I understand that some idea of control (power, strength and magic too) that I believed in about myself was (is) not only probably what could be called neurotic but powerful enough to design a whole neurosis (in me). Neurosis, but it worked. (I'm not sure of that). Now the control issue has a double edge: I'm in your hands (my mind) but there is your unavailability which becomes my loss of control…. I'm getting up to this: I find this unbearable, being controlled. Helpless? I don't think that was ever the right word. A feeling of being cheated or even used at times. In my mind, you promised me more; in my mind, so perhaps did Max. Why do I need either of you and who are either of you, outside of me. I want to get out of your language, its forbidden nature, or better, forbidding, this language which to me is also your magic because it is both anathema and gibberish—your power, your control over me, your field, your language which lets you (makes you, forces?) be mother and father and sister and brother because it didn't take me long to get through to the other, as they say.[82]

Mayer's conversational use of these psychoanalytic terms—transference, neurosis, the other— both activates and disarms these terms; qualifications and implicit critiques generate moments of resistance that undermine as well as underscore the mechanics of the therapeutic exchange Mayer describes. If "'read[ing] my writing'" is a euphemism, what function does the writing actually serve? Mayer suggests the solution or answer is solipsistic: "Why do I need either of you and who are either of you, outside of me." That Rubenfine, her addressee, has "made my transference too easy," thus becoming a plethora of "others" for Mayer ("mother and father and sister and brother" because "it didn't take me long to get through to the other, as they say"), answers Mayer's question: in terms of this psychoanalytic work— "in my mind"—both of these men are no one outside of her imagined relation to others and, in the Lacanian sense, the Imaginary other.[83] She qualifies these terms and processes as extrinsic to herself: they are "as they say," and of "your language" which is "forbidden," "forbidding," "both anathema and gibberish." Mayer associates her submission to a language extrinsic to herself—the language of psychoanalysis here, but language as a symbolic system, more generally—with the loss of control.

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[82] Mayer, *SHJ*, 139-140.

[83] The Other is "that which is alien to the as-yet-unspecified subject"; the concept which represents the Symbolic dimension (language, law) in relation to which the subject evolves as a position. This is distinct from "the other," which remains in the realm of the Imaginary order, rather than the Symbolic: an image, another person, one's reflection in a mirror—projections or reflections of the subject's ego. Fink, xi.

In the Lacanian system, this submission and mediated agency are givens, because of language's special status as the locus of the Symbolic order: that which determines, speaks and mediates the subject and, therefore, a correlate to the subject's unconscious. Silverman offers a cogent summation of this Lacanian tenet as expressed in Benveniste's work:

> ...the subject is never autonomous because it is always constrained by what is said in "another scene." Since the discourse which defines the conscious subject must be understood at least in part as a response to that which defines the unconscious subject, and *vice versa*, neither can be conceived exclusively in terms of its capacity to speak; both are simultaneously spoken, are motivated to engage in discourse by an agency beyond themselves.[84]

Mayer's distress over her "loss of control" and her desire to "get out of your language" would seem to demand the impossible: to be exempt from the conditions that determine subjects and speech, as such. To what end does she demand the impossible? She offers a pedestrian explanation that inflects her addresses to Rubenfine with her personal investment in him and their work, and schematically invokes Lacanian relations between desire, lack, and language:[85]

> Now here's the punch line: I'm mad cause you won't fuck, and maybe (I expect too much?) getting out of your language means getting into bed and maybe getting into bed means finding a more human or humane way of working, a way that works, and now you're allowed to laugh. I've never been good at expository prose. When I wrote "analysis" the first time, I wrote "analaysis."
>
> New paragraph? For the sake of sense? Making love has always been the solution to the problem of my hunger for people. What other way is there? Diminish the hunger?[86]

Mayer presents her desire for Rubenfine as one manifestation of her "hunger for people" and hypothesizes that her habitual response to that hunger might also be an avenue "out of your language." As part of Mayer's speculations around escaping "language," her preference for "a more human or humane way of working" over psychoanalytic work that takes the form of written and verbal discourse inflects the euphemism of humanized "work" with futile desires: that sex might constitute an exchange free of the mediations of language, and that one might position oneself

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[84] Silverman, 52.
[85] A Lacanian model of pyschological development holds that an infant's experience of lack in its efforts to have its basic needs met forms the basis of desire, which takes lack as its object, rather than need, and therefore can never be satisfied. The process of experiencing lack, utilizing demand, and recognizing itself as a distinct entity in relation to others culminates in the child's entry into the symbolic order of language and into subjectivity. Lacan, "Signification of the Phallus."
[86] Mayer, *SHJ*, 140.

with sufficient distance from the alienations of language so as to achieve a categorically more "human" form of agency.

Within this system, the desire to escape language and the Symbolic order entails a yearning for the Real. Lacan's Real refers to that which escapes mediation and organization by the Symbolic, and therefore cannot be accounted for in language or any other representational system. External to language and subjectivity, it exists only beyond the limits of signification: moments of tension or limitation in the Symbolic order's correspondence with the world it mediates. Moments in which Mayer explicitly expresses intention to "get out of your language," "get out of the code the secret code," and to "crack the code" (83) mine these points of tension between subject and language, the Real and the Symbolic, the materiality of existence and the mediation of existence. The conditions for subjectivity and agency in representational systems—lack, alienation in language—turn sites of loss into sites of cathectic productivity:

> I get lost in the transference where I'm supposed to be but I find
> myself again. Desire. I look up want. They think I'm destitute or
> impoverished, they think I am lacking! Wander and Wandering Jew
> catch my eye, the eyes, a glance, the hands, a magic wand is flexible, a
> string of white beads, a trade. What is lacking in me, my want, what
> can't be educated or brought up, my want, it grows luxuriantly, is
> extravagant, it swells, runs riot, playful wandering rivers...[87]

Mayer substantiates absence—"what is lacking in me, my want"—assigning it the accumulative impetus of a biological function or natural resource, and placing it in opposition to that which is acquired through acculturation: "what can't be educated or brought up."

"Absence or loss" therefore operate not only as motivating conditions for the text; absence also exists in particular relation to the text's production, as something which is both generative ("what is lacking in me...grows luxuriantly, is extravagant, it swells, runs riot") and which must be generated. "I created your absence" is a recurring phrase in the work; it appears multiply and prominently in a verse segment in Book II, along with the deaths of the "dead ones":

> Again today when
> I created your absence
> today when I created your absence then
> the whole tone of the day
> was like the rest of a day
> pick any one any one that
> any of the dead ones died
> ....
> A day I was spectacularly reminded
> of what you do and how you look

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[87] Mayer, *SHJ*, 42.

> Day any of the dead ones died,
> But not me.
> Before that all weekend I expected to die.[88]

Mayer cites the deaths of her parents as formative for both the hunger in the title of the work and the hunger which she has "felt in the extreme… (there was nobody to feed me)" (p 3). The emphasis, through repetition, on the day(s) of their deaths weighs presentness against an accumulation and chronology of days: "Again today when," "today when…then," "a day / pick any one any one that / any of the dead ones died," "day any of the dead ones died." Creating absence collapses "today" into "any one any one" of the days on which Mayer experienced loss; not just "tuned to your absence," Mayer's writing rehearses absence in the process of generating absence, whether in naming the losses Mayer has suffered—her mother, her father—or in confronting the alienating conditions that enable language but continually reinscribe lack as a first principle for speaking agency.

This verse segment precedes a narrative prose segment that recounts Mayer's seduction of her household's housekeeper that, given certain details, is meant to have happened during Mayer's adolescence or young adulthood. Observing linear development and conventional story structure, the passage initiates as if in direct response to the verse lines preceding it: "Before that all weekend I expected to die…. But instead they got us a housekeeper…" (174). The verse segment collapses all days on which Mayer experienced or (re)created loss into one, emblematic day as an expression of the experience of grief over time, while the narrative prose segment's sequential account of a love affair expands the particularities of one sequence of events as they unfold in time and space, with the interventions of memory:

> …we embraced and we made love and so immediately she took me to
> meet, no not immediately cause that night at the dinner which she
> prepared we giggled a lot and mischief and mystery and so first
> chance we got she sneaked out I mean I sneaked out, no I didn't have
> to sneak out…[89]

The narrative tracks memory's adjustments and oversights so as to capture the "correct" sequence of events, privileging sequence and causation over emotive explication. The verse segment that immediately follows this section initiates with emotive declarations—"I want a woman / I want Lisette"—that operate with an expressive immediacy that the narrative account suppresses in favor of descriptive accuracy, and the verse lines that follow invoke sequence and chronology as theme, rather than framework:

> Sure I go backwards
> Sure I murdered you

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[88] Mayer, *SHJ*, 173-174.
[89] Mayer, *SHJ*, 174.

Sure you can move
                    Sure I don't want to
                    Except to die before –
                    Before what?
                                        Before Cocteau pins me down
                    Before Cocteau pins his beautiful dead body on me,
                    Before I pin that beautiful dead one on you
                            that's something that cannot be done
                    Anymore than I can die
                                        just pure by wanting to
                    Anyway
                    I'd rather die
                    than make that compromise with you
                    Before
                    Before
                    Anymore
                    Anyway
                                        which would involve
                    Beyond the past
                                        issues so trivial

                    As…[90]

Murder as one form of creating absence recurs prominently in the journals, and in
this instance amplifies the other deaths that proliferate in this verse field: Cocteau's
"beautiful dead body," "that beautiful dead one" (echoing the dead ones in the
previous verse segment), "I can die," and "I'd rather die." Each verse line initiates
with modifiers—"before," "anymore," "anyway"—in advance of imagery and subject
matter, foregrounding quality and sequence of declaration as organizing principles.
"Go[ing] backwards" to "before / before" or "beyond the past," Mayer orients the
poem around the passage and expenditure of time:

        And why go on if it's just to use up your
                            time as mine
                                        even for love that can be left
                                        even for love that can't be revenged
        Anyway you can see
        This is yours.[91]

Here, time operates as a resource or value that can be spent and assigned as either
"yours" or "mine." This work has a counterpart in a long poem that appears later in
the journals, in Book V:

        This is chronology:

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[90] Mayer, *SHJ*, 175.
[91] Mayer, *SHJ*, 175.

And the spending
we do a lot of spending
and speeding
in and out of rooms
……………………………
there was no blueprint
there was no plan
so,
this is no working out
as planned
applied logic
is a sin
it's cold outside
and warm as a sin in here
no memory
without
no memory
just chicory
that women like to write about
long…[92]

 The verse segment presents itself as an elaboration on its first line, the declaration that "This is chronology." The long series of short verse lines that follow suggest a few ways in which Mayer might be complicating chronology as an organizing principle. The second verse line's citation of "spending" elaborates on the earlier verse section's rhetorical query "why go on if it's just to use up your / time as mine"; chronology accounts for and tracks the consumption of time and the spending of days. Having "no memory / without / no memory" might enable Mayer to disorder chronology, which the verse meditation on the day the "dead ones" died accomplishes in collapsing multiple days into one, or to reverse chronology, which the verse that follows it accomplishes in "go[ing] backwards" linearly along a chronological axis to "beyond the past": to operate and recount with "no blueprint" and "no plan."

The prose segment that precedes "This is chronology:" takes up memory as a distinguishing characteristic of prose that produces "closed desire":

I planned that you planned the disappearance of my desire, you
planned the recognition of dead desire, and I said no matter what you
want, I won't not want. Simple of her. Now which is poetry and which
is prose? A lot of people think prose is closed desire, due to
remembering (are you there?). At the shop we shopped for
derangement but how can you make a sale to yourself: you can only
steal. Now this is real prose. Stealing, thievery, snatching things,
catching them up in a wind, sailing along, stopping for fuel, snags and

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[92] Mayer, *SHJ*, 313-317.

tie-ups, breezing…. Any derangement of the syntax any extravagance
of the word-in-order to reveal the subject. I could as easily confuse
you or me (two ones at once) with a "piece of paper" is a cruel word
for where you lay up for a while while the self is sucking you off.[93]

Recalling earlier meditations on lack as a font of growth and abundance, this
passage reasserts the persistence of desire—"no matter what you want, I won't not
want"—and revisits Mayer's staged confrontations between first person and second
person subject positions ("two ones at once"), accomplished through "any
derangement of the syntax any extravagance of the word-in-order to reveal the
subject." The implication that this occupation—capturing (or confusing) on a "piece
of paper" the vicissitudes of subject relations might be a solipsistic or self-gratifying
act gestures towards the work's explorations of the interrelation between desire,
hunger, and intimate address.

Mayer assigns to conventional prose a "closed desire, due to remembering"
and offers as a counterexample her version of "real prose" in an expansive, long
term writing project that tracks the vicissitudes of hunger and desire as mediations
of her unconscious.   That Mayer associates "remembering" with "closed desire"
suggests she seeks alternate possibilities—"open" desire, freedom from memory—
in troubling memory-driven, chronologically "accurate" accounts of her personal
history and juxtaposing chronologically conventional narrative segments with verse
segments that thematize temporal sequencing and eschew linear narrative
trajectories. Mayer's "INTRODUCTION to MY JOURNALS and the RECORDING of the
ACTIVITIES of the HUMAN MIND," which closes the journal project, explicitly
describes both a reliance on and resistance to memory, and suggest a solution in
"moving"[94]:

> This is from memory. Then comes later a picture of the human head
> with false areas of the brain, throat, larynx outlines and colored in
> such a way that they cannot be xeroxed.
>
> I must be clear, I must erase certain parts of my personal history from
> memory, or, these parts must cease to be functional like an appendix,
> a collection of supplementary material at the end of a book. That or
> this is why I had to be moving.[95]

The conditions around *Studying Hunger Journals*'s composition offer one
biographically-informed explanation for why Mayer felt compelled to excise parts of
her past from memory. *Studying Hunger* serves in part as an anti-*Memory* work
("This begins where mourning leaves off and I'm the one and I'm the one writing on
lines reduced to writing on lines" (p. 243)) having emerged out of the corrective,
therapeutic body of writing Mayer embarked upon after working on *Memory*. As to

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[93] Mayer, *SHJ*, 312-313.
[94] Here Mayer references *Moving* (1971), the work that precedes *Memory* (1975).
[95] Mayer, *SHJ*, 456.

the "certain parts of my personal history" that must be erased, Mayer revisits and rehearses the deaths and loss of her parents and unnamed others throughout the work while also rehearsing through thematic recurrence the impact of absence and loss upon hunger and desire; we read in these thematic recurrences an anxiety around and an inability to silence these events from her personal history.

As a solution to this "MEMORY mourning" (242) and because "we must not make memories" (329), Mayer moves between mining memory and banishing it. In Book IV, Mayer makes several statements against recording—an act of documentation that operates like memory in its recreation of what has come before—and towards a strategy of composition that resists chronological expansion in favor of present-tenseness:

> ...I'm starving I'm anxious to work out the mechanics of this, someone says that, you come so close to describing at least what is new, no describing there's no describing mechanics, a desire for length, transformed by speed, physiologically in memory, you work in stretches with a desire for length overtaken then by speed, you work fast to get it over with and since you are not creating memory you take no pleasure in it but the sound and sometimes designing of the words, in bulk, you know it could go on forever and sometimes mind hazes over for no reason in the middle of it and since you know it could go on, you also know the ending and the end of it but could never even dream, so later, you dream it right out loud in front of everyone and make a package without images, it's true it's too bulky for what it is, but apprehended all at once, as at the scene of the crime, it's crystal clear, who did what to who and consequence.[96]

A "desire for length, transformed by speed" generates a writing practice attentive to its own process of unfolding and driven by an accumulation of words "in bulk" rather than any larger design or narrative parameter ("it could go on forever.... it's true it's too bulky for what it is..."). The practice prioritizes the volume of writing and its capacity to keep pace with the unfolding details of the present over the act of "creating memory," an ambiguous term for either the conscious effort to remember or the automatic experience of memory. However, length, speed, and a bulk of words do generate a text which, "apprehended all at once," yield the relations that support a narrative—"who did what to who and consequence"—as in the solving of a crime mystery, a theme Mayer develops later in the journals as a resolution to her relationship with Rubenfine. The prohibition against "describing" prefigures a verse segment that follows a few pages later, in which Mayer explicitly "forbids recording" ("But don't record / Forbid recording" (265)) and a prose section in which Mayer draws together the text's conflicted relationship with second person address and its resistance to recording as an inadequate means of
"myth"-making or narrative-building:

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[96] Mayer, *SHJ*, 261.

> Now see that's the trouble with recording. It doesn't work it doesn't myth together. I am working on it. I can't think of anything worse and it's only midnight…it's as if you were just found here and then started out from there, does that make sense, now we have all these antecedents who don't make sense so why should you, there's something about concentration that makes it impossible to be you.[97]

"Recording" captures antecedents. Mayer proposes that in this moment of address, and perhaps built into the project's self-reflexivity, antecedents have limited relation to the construction of agency and subjectivity in the present: "there's something about concentration that makes it impossible to be you." The passage explores the gap between the particularities and newness of the present—"it's as if you were just found here"—and the trace of the past, whether temporally immediate or distant: "and [you] started out from there…now we have all these antecedents who don't make sense…"

Mayer's experimentations have been compared to Gertrude Stein's,[98] and in a talk delivered at the Naropa Institute as a faculty member of the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics, Mayer cites Stein's compositional principles as a source for *Memory*, which Mayer describes as a response to Stein's belief that "you can't write remembering": that one must write in the present moment or in the continuous present, not trying to remember.[99] Stein introduces the concept of the continuous present in her 1925 essay "Composition as Explanation," in which she describes its role in her compositional experiments:

> …it has been these thirty years it was more and more a prolonged present. I created then a prolonged present naturally I knew nothing of a continuous present but it came naturally to me to make one, it was simple it was clear to me and nobody knew why it was done like that, I did not myself although naturally to me it was natural….

> Everything is the same except composition and as the composition is different and always going to be different everything is not the same. So then I as a contemporary creating the composition in the beginning was groping toward a continuous present, a using everything a beginning again and again and then everything being alike then everything very simply everything was naturally simply different and so I as a contemporary was creating everything being alike was

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[97] Mayer, *SHJ*, 285.

[98] Daniel Kane cites Stein as well as James Joyce, the Dadaists, and John Cage as influential to Mayer's interest in collage, stream-of-consciousness, and chance operations. Daniel Kane, *What is Poetry: Conversations with the American Avant-Garde* (New York: T&W Books, a division of Teachers & Writers Collaborative, 2006), 115. Lytle Shaw also names Stein, as well as Herman Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne, in observing that Mayer's influences extend well beyond both Language and New York School writing. Shaw, "Faulting Description," 153.

[99] Mayer, "From: A Lecture," 98-99.

> creating everything naturally being naturally simply different,
> everything being alike.[100]

Stein's "using everything" and "beginning again and again" resemble similar declarations embedded in *Studying Hunger*: "I had to stop and begin again slowly….Gradually I began again….I had to stop and begin again slowly" (54-55); "Begin again, you leave traces" (73); "Someone wants you to let you take them there and someone wants you, to let them take you there, and you find it out, what's there, as a struggle all ready, dying to explore, what's there as a piece, to mesmerize, to suck you in, to leave out to include all" (182). Mayer makes several direct references to Stein in the journals, identifying her as a literary predecessor ("The great thing about Gertrude Stein is she never had to write about anything. Had to. So the free flow of ideas" (179)), and contextualizing her experiments as similarly engaged with the challenge of composition as an act that is engaged with the immediate present: a primary feature, temporal immediacy, that distinguishes an instance of composition from all iterations that precede it.

In exploring temporal manipulations that approach a Steinian "continuous present," Mayer's own "free flow of ideas" destabilizes the temporal structures of past, present and future and the subject positions that dictate the predicative sentences that conventionally aggregate syllogistically as narratives and lyric verse. In a long verse segment in Book III, Mayer composes a poem almost entirely from prepositional phrases, absent the objects or events they're meant to modify and therefore suspended in temporal ambiguity:

> In a car accident.
> Poisoned in a plane.
> In a disaster.
> In a ditch.
> In skydiving.
> In a tent.
> Killed by a bear.
> In a heart attack.
> In sudden death.
> In overtime.
> It's too much for me.
> .   ...
> In poisoned at drinks.
> In poisoned at fucking lemonade
> In stung by a bee.
> In being left I don't give up.
> Do you want me to go outside?
> In being shot.
> In assassination.

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[100] Gertrude Stein, "Composition as Explanation" in *Gertrude Stein: Writings and Lectures 1909-1945*, ed. Patricia Meyerowitz (Baltimore: Penguin, 1967), 21-30.

> In a mistake.
> The wrong woman the wrong man.
> ……………………………………………………
> In earthquakes.
> In buildings collapsing.
> In air.
> But there are some things you desire.
> ……………………………………………………
> And in speed.
> And in smack.
> And in snow.
> And in morphine and ice.
> And in opium and cure.
> And in withdrawal and pain.
> I lose track
> In exhaustion.[101]

The complete clauses that are exceptions to this list of causes for death or injury are notable: "It's too much for me"; "In being left I don't give up"; "Do you want me to go outside?"; "But there are some things you desire"; "I lose track in exhaustion." In the midst of myriad and fantastic ways one might meet violent or accidental death, Mayer intervenes with first person expressions that convey exhaustion and struggle, and requests for affirmation or response from a second person addressee: expressions of solitude that form the emotional ground against which Mayer foregrounds fantasies around avenues of loss.

A complementary verse segment that appears earlier in Book III consists almost entirely of first person statements with limited prepositional modifiers: the structural mirror image to the prepositions poem. The long series of "I" statements culminates in a question and answer that first appears in a prose section that precedes the poem[102] and which invites and immediately bars the work's omnipresent "you" from participation in the scene:

> I get a phone call
> I switch phones
> I try to get the beer
> I take what he finds
> I turn around
> I was supposed to be doing this alone
> I say, "Go away!"
> ………………………
> I was supposed to be doing this alone
> I knock over the bookcase

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[101] Mayer, *SHJ*, 224-226.

[102] "There's a bee in the house, she died. Everyone falls to the floor, should I wait for you? No." Mayer, *SHJ*, 205.

I hold hands with two stars
I'm thinking about communicating
Now I know
Now I know why I am…
Now I know why she is…
I'm in between them
I think about being in between them
…………………………………………………..
He commits a crime
He has to wear criminal blues
I turn and see the police
I hide behind steel
It's wood
Everyone falls to the floor
Should I wait for you?

No.[103]

Engaging the language of a crime mystery, this verse segment employs tense and temporality—remaining mostly in the simple present except for the refrain "I was supposed to be doing this alone"—but as does the poem of prepositions, it relies on one syntactic structure as a means of amplifying the suppression of other elements: modifying clauses that would qualify and link these tangentially related actions into a narrative of cause and consequence ("as at the scene of the crime, it's crystal clear, who did what to who and consequence"). The last three lines repeat a sequence of statements that appears in the pages before this verse segment, but suppresses the statement—"she died" (205)—which initially precedes "Everyone falls to the floor." This suppression decouples Mayer's query—"should I wait for you?"—from a scene of mourning—"she died. Everyone falls to the floor" (205). Recast as verse, these lines name "you" but bar "you" from entry with the closing adverb and forbidding, foreclosing declaration, "no." The verse segment enacts multiple suppressions in the closure against "you," in removing the scene and fact of death that casts all to the ground, and in the absent, syntactic elements that would advance these first person statements towards narrative, causation, and consequence.

Culler's account of the temporal conditions enabled by apostrophe offers another model of the present tense condition particular to verse that resonates with Mayer's distortions of chronology and causation:

> A poem can recount a sequence of events, which acquires the significance lyric requires when read synecdochically or allegorically…. Alternatively, a poem may invoke objects, people, a detemporalized space with forms and forces which have pasts and futures but which are addressed as potential presences. Nothing need happen in an apostrophic poem, as the great Romantic odes amply

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[103] Mayer, *SHJ*, 208-209.

demonstrate. Nothing need happen because the poem itself is to be the happening....

Apostrophe resists narrative because its *now* is not a moment in a temporal sequence but a *now* of discourse, of writing. This temporality of writing is scarcely understood, difficult to think, but it seems to be that toward which the lyric strives. Proverbial definition calls the lyric a monument to immediacy, which presumably means a detemporalized immediacy, an immediacy of fiction...This is, of course, the condition which Keats describes in 'Ode on a Grecian Urn': a fictional time in which nothing happens but which is the essence of happening.[104]

This account suggests that a crucial function of the I-You drama of Mayer's text is to make immediate and present the "event" of subject formation as a consequence of lyrical utterance, whether expressed in verse or in Mayer's stream-of-consciousness prose: as something that only happens in the "now" of discourse. The trailing elisions of the series of lines quoted above that end in ellipses foregrounds incompletion and absence as communicative elements that are as expressive as substantive statements in the immediate present of the poem:

> I'm thinking about communicating
> Now I know
> Now I know why I am...
> Now I know why she is...
> I'm in between them
> I think about being in between them

"Thinking about communicating" differentiates one action from the other as fundamentally distinct, producing incomplete statements that amplify the failures and gaps in translating thought into communication ("Now I know why I am... / Now I know why she is..."), pointing to the imagined space that exists "between them." In "think[ing] about being in between" thought and communication, Mayer attempts to inhabit and voice the unconscious, recalling her efforts to "get out of your language" in order to assert control. As the unspoken and unspeakable condition that motivates both subject and speech, the unconscious, that space "in between," serves as the inaccessible locus of control and autonomous agency. "I was supposed to be doing this alone" therefore serves as a rueful admission of failed efforts to exercise autonomy through multiple suppressions: of "you," of the unconscious and that which is absent from conscious discourse, of loss experienced over time and re-experienced in the present.

Mayer is explicit about her desire to communicate the gaps between thought and communication, or what she calls in the *Studying Hunger* "lectures," the "transitions between thought." *Studying Hunger Journals* offers this statement—

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[104] Culler, 149-152.

"Communicate lapses, lapses are like covers…like the covers that are the lids of your eyes, sometimes, they lie or come in layers and the lid looks like three, like you fucked three times and got tired, didn't know where you were or lost "states of consciousness" for a while. Signed, Bernadette Mayer" (266)—upon which Mayer elaborates in *Studying Hunger*:

> Magic words were a lead-in to the solution of the YOU problem. But the YOU problem & the problem of states of consciousness could never be solved until I had forgotten all about them. These problems began to solve themselves when I became interested only in the transitions between thought. By transitions I mean communicating lapses. Maybe, if you made the work all transitions you could get the mind to shift natively on call. & whose mind. Transitions like the covers that are the lids of your eyes, & sometimes, they come in layers & the lid looks like three, like you fucked three times, got rid of your cold & got tired, you didnt know where you were, you lost states of consciousness for a while & this happened to me because I couldnt do what I thought was really writing & if I could read all of this to you you might have the feeling that I have been shrieking at you for hours & you would finally get a real translation of thought.[105]

Mayer associates "lapses" with "covers" and with eyelids that close over eyes; these figures metonymically suggest the state of being unconscious, as when eyelids cover eyes during sleep. To "communicate lapses" therefore constitutes communicating the unconscious, a task that Mayer claims resolved the "problems" of the "YOU" and "states of consciousness," which both required that she "forget" about them. One possible expression of the act of "forgetting" is the loss of "Signed, Bernadette Mayer" between the *Journals* version and the lectures version of *Studying Hunger*. In suppressing her act of self-naming and self-identification, Mayer textually "forgets" the question of identity, either of the "I" or the "you" and of the task of tracking her, "Bernadette Mayer"'s, (un)conscious states.

I locate other efforts to "communicate lapses" in rare moments in the work that do not feature "I" or "you" statements and instead offer a depersonalized narrative voice:

> Black Holes: if a massive star collapsed to a sufficiently small volume, light could not escape form it. A rotating black hole could account for the radiation of gravitational waves from the center of the galaxy.
>
> A black hole is a region of space into which a star (or a collection of stars or other bodies) has fallen and from which no light, matter or signal of any kind can escape.[106]

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[105] Bernadette Mayer, *Studying Hunger* (Bolinas: Big Sky, 1975).
[106] Mayer, *SHJ,* 248.

In this first example, Mayer borrows the language of scientific description and objectivity. The passage predates and resonates with one of the prompts Mayer lists in her "Writing Experiments": "Write a work that attempts to include the names of all the physical contents of the terrestrial world that you know."[107] *Studying Hunger Journals* primarily features statements that trace back to an "I" or a "you" so that this moment of dispassionate description registers as an attempt to communicate a lapse or a "transition between thought" (or at least, self-conscious thought): to recite knowledge as a way of expressing a "state of consciousness" that might enable the speaking subject to momentarily "forget" or suppress the tyranny of the "I" and the "you" as grammatical and subject states to be inhabited and articulated.

Mayer's struggle to "communicate lapses" recalls the absolute division between thinking and being and reality and signification theorized in Lacan and Benveniste's accounts of the subject split by language and the symbolic. In "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious," Lacan's querying of the status of the subject as both agent and object of linguistic signification describes the role that the "ego," the "I" as speaking subject or discursive reference (to use Silverman's terms), plays in suppressing the subject of speech, the discursive referee or signifier:

> Is the place that I occupy as subject of the signifier concentric or
> eccentric in relation to the place I occupy as subject of the signified?
> That is the question.
>
> The point is not to know whether I speak of myself in a way that
> conforms to what I am, but rather to know whether, when I speak of
> myself, I am the same as the self of whom I speak....
>
> For this ego, distinguished first for the imaginary intertias it
> concentrates against the message of the unconscious, operates only by
> covering over the displacement the subject is with a resistance that is
> essential to discourse as such.[108]

For Lacan, the "place that I occupy as subject of the signifier" does not coincide with the "place I occupy as subject of the signified." The "self of whom I speak" most closely aligns with the "ego," the imaginary construct that is a defense against the "displacement" that constitutes the subject (of the signifier) as a consequence of the displacing operations of the symbolic on the reality of being. This absolute division drives Mayer's efforts to experiment with temporality, direct address, and subject figuration and evacuation as ways of resolving the impossible task of being both agent and object of her study:

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107 Bernadette Mayer, *Writing Experiments*. Electronic Poetry Center Digital Library, http://writing.upenn.edu/library/Mayer-Bernadette_Experiments.html (accessed December 3, 2012).
108 Lacan, "Instance of the Letter," 430.

You set yourself an impossible problem, you have two alternatives,
you either are at a remove from it (consciousness, unconsciousness,
say, as the all-out object or subject of, say, a videotape), or you bait
yourself, quite singly, and alone, and wait, you bait yourself and wait.
It's object, above, not subject.[109]

In the final pages of the journals, Mayer extends the project's parameters and
the values motivating her inquiry into "This "I" thing. And this "you" thing" (356)
and her pursuit of the present through manipulations of memory. Concluding an
entry dated October 29th, Mayer names the most expansive "object" of all—"the
knowledge of the universe"—as among the objects that a project engaged in
memory, recording and recounting might capture:

The spirit of memory lies in continuing like Giordano Bruno to count
the objects in a room and to connect them, to connect with each one
some grouping or category in memory, doing this methodically so that
eventually the room and all its objects will contain and provoke an
impression in the mind of all the knowledge of the universe. I call on
all female...and keeping this knowledge, the knowledge from the room
continuously in mind, not only will you be able to commit the perfect
crime, you will have committed it already, and to memory, and then,
follows, the assertion of memory which is magic, or a forewarning of
crime leading to just beginning again, like, reading minds.[110]

And in the work's final paragraphs, Mayer invokes "the world," "science" and
"poetry" as her objects of inquiry, knowable only in "understand[ing] the people and
the machines with which the work, the eyes, a glance, the hands":

As the idea of being alone began to overtake the acts of unconscious
doings worked through, the necessity for a single human presence,
any one, in every hour, becomes the most imminent disaster in the life
here. I forget to speak of change. For example, I have become a doctor
as I have become fatter, I have learned to rule life with life, we are all
still so envious of an exchange. Change is example yet I have not
changed. I have no private property. Nor are these journals a diary of
change. They are a simple recommendation to be driven to the
present with the chances that may allow to change not one's self but
the world. We cannot begin to know science and poetry until we
understand the people and the machines with which they work, the
eyes, a glance, the hands.

I reveal to you the like-mother and the like-father, we will all
be forgiven. Then, even the you will change, as, you eat with your eyes,

[109] Mayer, *SHJ*, 195.
[110] Mayer, *SHJ*, 451.

as usual. We know everything now, we are spacing more graciously together. Atavistically, in a position of silent rest, I thank you.[111]

The trope of space and the organization of objects in a room as a metonymic proxy for the universe recall Stein's observation that a composition expresses its relationship to temporality in its "quality of distribution and equilibration" of words and things:

> And so now one finds oneself interesting oneself in an equilibration, that of course means words as well as things and distribution as well as between themselves between the words and themselves and the things and themselves, a distribution as distribution. This makes what follows what follows and now there is every reason why there should be an arrangement made. Distribution is interesting and equilibration is interesting when a continuous present and a beginning again and again and using everything and everything alike and everything naturally simply different has been done….

> The time in the composition is a thing that is very troublesome. If the time in the composition is very troublesome it is because there must even if there is no time at all in the composition there must be time in the composition which is in its quality of distribution and equilibration.[112]

Mayer's final invocations of the second person—"as you eat with your eyes, as usual…. I thank you"—more explicitly than in previous instances evokes the reader as the "you": the addressee who "eats" with her eyes through reading as an act of consumption. To "count the objects in a room and to connect them, to connect with each one some grouping or category in memory" generates a space in which one may distribute, equate or, as the case may be, suppress or trouble the materials of the textual mediation of experience: in Stein's terms, "words" and "things," and in the terms and tropes *Studying Hunger* explores, subjectivity, subject and pronominal positions, and syntactic markers of time, tense and chronology.

Mayer proposes that provoking and keeping continuously "an impression in the mind of all the knowledge of the universe" enables one to commit the "perfect crime," while committing it to memory and "beginning again, like, reading minds." Her proposal recasts the work's trope of committing a crime in terms that suggest its alignment with the principles of composition: devising a methodology, executing a plan, resolving the work with the neatness of completion and formal integrity, and offering the work for consumption, which mirrors the acts of consumption integral to composing the world. As early as the third book, Mayer establishes the figurative relationship between crimes and composition:

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[111] Mayer, *SHJ*, 457.
[112] *Ibid.*

And it is in honor of these crimes that I am writing this book and it is
in honor of eyes to see these crimes that I am writing my book and it
is eyes to see that swear to incorporate you that contract to eat as eye
is story is news, my eyes order, they command you and speak some
sound, no words as eyes are a vocable, this unit this sound, an
instruction, a promise, a vow and a contract and so on.

When this you see will he and so will he. A plain case of separation.
Now you know everything. Both-and.[113]

Invoking the terms of "an instruction, a promise, a vow and a contract," Mayer
presents her writing as witness to "these crimes," named variously throughout the
journals in figurative terms that range from theft to murder and cannibalism, and
her readers as both "the eyes" and the "you" that her writing incorporates and
contracts "to eat as eye." In the final book of the journals, Mayer prefaces a climactic,
fantasized account of having killed and eaten Rubenfine with an arch
acknowledgment of her readership and an extension of the metaphor of writing-as-
crime:

Anyway, there's none but a fictional need to worry, since, war-torn,
you are on the outside and I am on the inside now and can speak
freely. You have no need to worry, I'll be here for the rest of my life.
Another thing you won't understand, perhaps, is how liberating the
murder and the eating of the body was. But this must be boring. I've
already given you enough reason in my writing to fit together the
motive and, as artists, you'll understand. You would rather hear the
method I devised. You are used to detective novels.[114]

Mayer's citation of detective novels mobilizes the terms of a genre that unveils
method and motive in order to reconstruct "as at the scene of the crime…who did
what to who and consequence" (261) and thereby draws an analogy between
detective work with the analytical work her writing demands of its readers. The
separation Mayer makes by situating "you…on the outside" and herself "on the
inside" has multiple resonations here. Within the space of authorship and the crime
fiction codes of a concealed and gradually revealed crime, Mayer is indeed "inside"
in relation to her readership: occupying a space in which she "can speak freely" that
is enabled by a "plain case of separation." Mayer reiterates this separation in the
final paragraphs of the work, including "you" and herself, the speaker, among the
accountable "objects in a room": "And the central problem of the belief in the own
existence at all in the room where every object and alignment of the meetings of
space have already been assigned the values of memory's moods, yet you must be
there. And outside that room." Mayer's figurative placement of herself, the "I" who
speaks, inside a room that excludes the "you" she addresses also resonates with
Benveniste's characterization of the "I" and the "you" in similar relation to the

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[113] Mayer, *SHJ*, 217.
[114] Mayer, *SHJ*, 381.

discursive statement: "A special correlation which we call, for want of a better term, the *correlation of subjectivity* belongs to the *I-you* pair in its own right. What differentiates "I" from "you" is first of all the fact of being, in the case of "I," *internal* to the statement and external to "you; but external in a manner that does not suppress the human reality of dialogue."[115]

  This space of isolation or separation revisits the work's explorations into invocations of the "you" as fundamental to determining both a subjective position from which to speak and an addressee to whom speech is oriented: "the necessity for a single human presence, any one, in every hour, becomes the most imminent disaster in the life here." "Disaster" in the form of seeking a human presence suggests both the fundamental experience of lack and its manifestation as desire, but also the necessary conditions for speech and subjectivity. The "missing persons" (456) throughout the work, hailed by proper name—Mayer's mother Marie, most prominently—or by "Proper Name," as in the final pages of Book III[116]—aggregate into a larger expression of both Mayer's personal losses as well as the varying permutations of relations that motivate the project's experiments: Mayer's exchange with Rubenfine, her address of real and fantasized figures in her life, and the pronominal relations and subject positions around which speech is organized. Alongside the vicissitudes of address and interrelation, Mayer investigates the tension that inheres in temporality as captured in language; to be "driven to the present" while resisting and failing to resist memory's reconstructions produces moments of abundance and potentiality: "the chances that may allow to change not one's self but the world." As a record of Mayer's writing in the years after having developed *Memory*, *Moving* (1971) and *Story* (1968), all of which Mayer invokes throughout the journals, *Studying Hunger* tracks an evolving and rigorous attention to the materializations of subject formation through language and language's mediations of the unconscious. In setting for herself the impossible task of "making the unconscious conscious" (456), Mayer never "get[s] out of your language" and never determines "who is the you"; rather, *Studying Hunger* models a sustained and conscious encounter with language as the measure and medium of subjectivity, the materially abundant encoding of the unconscious.

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[115] Benveniste, 201.

[116] "Proper Name to Proper Name with Proper Name n between whose door I also go out by. Proper Name, Proper Name and Proper Name I wish I could, fuck you, through the park, to lay that on there, to lay that on you, lay that one on you and dont wanna use the loaded words wanna come up with the loaded ideas…. dear Proper Name Proper Name Proper Name Proper Name Proper Name and Proper Name and those are the ones I wanted to create one night, who's first." Mayer, *SHJ*, 294.

Chapter Three

Materializing Difference:
Juliana Spahr's *Well Then There Now*

On the threshold between the animate and the inanimate, the physical
and the intelligible, the internal and the external, language is always
also an articulation of power relations inscribed by, within, or upon the
speaker. As such, it can only be studied as rhetoric. Whether one defines
rhetoric as "language that says one thing and means another"…, as "the
study of misunderstanding and its remedies"…, or as "the faculty of
observing in any given case the means of persuasion"…, it is clear that
the study of rhetoric has everything to do with human politics.
Barbara Johnson, *A World of Difference* (1987)

How lovely and how doomed this connection of everyone with lungs.
Juliana Spahr, *This Connection of Everyone With Lungs: Poems* (2005)

Juliana Spahr's *Well Then There Now* collects verse and prose works written and published separately, in print and on-line, in the decade before the collection's publication in 2011. The works range in form from prose poems and loosely structured sonnets to personal essays accompanied by photographs of the sites and scenes that the essays address. Collectively, these works meditate on the cultural, political and ecological impact of colonization and state formation, on encounters with and disruptions of local and global ecosystems, on personal and universalized relationships with geographical sites, plants and wildlife, and on the economic and cultural stratifications of society. The collection foregrounds the importance of site as a determining factor and resource for composition by means of the front matter that precedes each work: facing pages that feature a silhouette of the state or, in the case of Hawaii and Manhattan, the island where Spahr wrote each work, and on the opposing title page for the work, the geographical coordinates for that site. This framing asks readers to consider the interrelation between the material conditions that produced each work—the cities, cultures and ecosystems in which Spahr was living and writing—and the matter each work engages, whether historical, autobiographical, taxonomic, citatory or meditative. This framing also produces an interrelation between these works that suggests broader principles of organization: an autobiographical mapping of the places Spahr has lived and worked as a poet and a geographical mapping of the cultures, languages, histories and ecosystems that have shaped Spahr's poetics.

The collection's title, *Well Then There Now*, operates as a discourse marker that offers neither a grammatical subject nor a predicative assertion, but instead serves as an incipit that defers assertion while perpetuating and advancing discourse. The four single-syllable particles carry nearly equal stress in relation to one another and therefore defy organization into a rhythmic or syntactic hierarchy. We orient equally towards "then," "there," and "now" and understand "well" to be a

prefatory expression that marks a beginning, but one that is contingent upon or relative to that which has come before and that which exists alongside.[1] Conditions of contingency and relativity resonate among the collection's eight works: whether in the map of Dole Street that appears in the work of the same name and which illustrates the points of connection between the schools and names associated with that street and Hawaii's colonial history and post-colonial present, or in the relational work carried out by analogy that "Things of Each Possible Relation Hashing Against One Another" explores. The collection also invites us to consider these works in relation to one another as discrete publications; the collection's "Acknowledgements and Other Information" lists where each work was written, its source texts, if any, and its original sites of publication. Notably, Spahr does not offer publication dates, thereby resisting standard principles of organization whereby collections present work in the order of earliest to most recent date of publication; deprived of a dated chronology, readers must consider other points and principles of connection between proximate works in the collection.

Establishing relations by means of articulating difference or disjunction serves as a point of departure for this study, which will track the materials shared among the collection's works, the orientation and activation of these materials in each work, and the mutual activation of works and readership that these works individually and collectively incite. This activation, I will argue, is a central component of Spahr's critical and literary politics: "politics" because her works critique the phenomena that most determine both the natural and culturally-mediated worlds she inhabits—technology, globalization, and the logic and legacy of a western capitalist empire—and names them as threats to the animate and inanimate world of relations and socially transformative possibilities that Spahr's works evoke as document as well as argument.

In advocating for an active readership to generate expansive relations of connection across boundaries of differentiation—between works of literature, literature and readers, and communities of readers—as a speculative praxis in resistance to the operations of global capitalism and cultural imperialism, Spahr draws most immediately from the critical theory and resistance politics of Language poetry, most visible as a self-identifying movement during the 1970s and early 1980s. Insofar as the works of writers as disparate as Jackson Mac Low, Rae Armantrout and Michael Palmer might be considered part of a single movement, language writing broadly shares an interest in foregrounding and mobilizing the material properties, production and reception of language through poetry and theoretical writing often informed by Marxist and post-structural accounts of ideological determinations of meaning, the social body, and subjectivity. Lyn Hejinian's essay "The Rejection of Closure" exemplifies some of the key concerns of

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[1] Compare Spahr's "well" with Seamus Heaney's "so," his translation for the *hwaet* that begins *Beowulf* and which he justifies in this way: "'so' operates as an expression that obliterates all previous discourse and narrative, and at the same time functions as an exclamation calling for immediate attention." Seamus Heaney, preface to *Beowulf* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), xxvii. Spahr's "well," rather than "obliterat[ing] all previous discourse and narrative" and "calling for immediate attentions," declares her text an act of consideration and qualification, but not of exclusive authority.

language writing, particularly the active role readers take in generating meaning in collaboration with "open" texts, characterized by difficult syntax and textual arrangement that invite multiple, indeterminate, and multiply determinant routes towards meaning. "Closed" texts, characterized by conventional syntax and directive routes towards singular or dominant readings, enforce passive reading or consumption of texts, thereby replicating the hierarchical enforcement of meaning, power and agency by social, political and economic systems.[2] Hejinian affiliates her position with feminist, psychoanalytic theorists Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous through a shared and explicit recognition of the direct relationship between language, power and knowledge, and the promotion of writing and reading practices that disrupt the established symbolic order of conventional linguistic forms and structures.

In "Camp Messianism, or, the Hopes of Poetry in Late-Late Capitalism," Chris Nealon traces language writing's influence on postmodern, post-Language movement writing to this model of participatory readership, crucial to language writing's efforts to decommodify language and to decenter the political subject by generating a "mobile, protean" and "implicated" political subject—a collaborative entity embodying both readers and authors—within an equally mobile and protean social body.[3] Whether acting as a feminist challenge to prevailing, patriarchal systems of knowledge and information or as Nealon's protean and political subject who participates in a "poetics of fluidity,"[4] the active reader sets in motion an open text, all of whose elements are, in Hejinian's terms, "maximally excited…because ideas and things exceed (without deserting) argument that they have taken into the dimension of the work."[5] Nealon understands language writing's "poetics of fluidity" in terms of the particular pressures and conditions of the movement's historicity: the U.S.'s polarizing involvement in the Vietnamese civil war and the radical, international student and worker movements of 1968. Observing that "different political moments [may] breed different structures of political and poetic feeling,"[6] Nealon orients "Camp Messianism" towards identifying the differences in the political affect of an emergent group of "post-Language" writers (so named within the small press communities with which they affiliate) from the preceding generation of Language writers, and the attending formal choices that manifest these differences. The poets whose work he examines—Kevin Davies, Lisa Robertson, Rod Smith, and Joshua Clover—exemplify an affect of neither political apathy nor activist exhortations ("they are not 'movement' poets"[7]), but of expectant waiting:

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[2] Lyn Hejinian, "The Rejection of Closure," in *The Language of Inquiry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 42-43.

[3] Christopher Nealon, "Camp Messianism, or, the Hopes of Poetry in Late-Late Capitalism," *American Literature* 76, no. 3 (September 2004): 585-586.

[4] Nealon, "Camp Messianism," 587.

[5] Hejinian, 43.

[6] Nealon, "Camp Messianism," 587.

[7] By "'movement' poet," I understand Nealon to be referring to poets explicitly writing poetry for the immediate purpose of organizing and mobilizing acts of protest in service of mass, political or social movements. Nealon, "Camp Messianism," 588.

But they do write with an acute knowledge of the susceptibility of their materials to historical change. What I would like to suggest in the rest of this essay is that the recent affective and strategic shift in American poetry can be described as a shift in attitudes toward the character of late capitalist totality. We might say that where the Language poets discovered a reserve of uncapitalized materiality in the lively, "aspectual" character of language—so that the open-endedness of texts might outpace their superscription by languages of power—the post-Language poets, battered by another generation's worth of the encroachments of capital, are not so ready to rely on those aspectual reserves. They can discern them in language, of course, and in material objects, but it's not their focus; instead, as I'll try to show, they expend their considerable talents on making articulate the ways in which, as they look around, they see *waiting.[8]*

Nealon observes in these poets' work an opposition to the culture, language and commodification of late capitalism that eschews proscriptive plans or calls for redemption, and instead cultivates a "stance" of expectancy, refusing to instantiate in either form or content a redemptive aesthetic or politics.[9] Drawing from the strategies and affective orientation of camp, these poets instead register a "rueful astonishment" that the economic and cultural ravages of global capitalism have yet to achieve completion in the form of "wholesale disaster for the United States or Europe," and stage their opposition in terms of a "polemical affection for what's obsolete, misguided, or trivial" aimed at "perform[ing] a relationship to the experience of a materiality that is both desubstantialized and supersaturating, subject to both lightning-swift consolidations and dispersals and to humiliating, vegetally slow decay."[10] Nealon leaves open the question as to whether a political affect of expectancy and a refusal to locate redemption in present forms or models—whether aesthetic or sociopolitical ones—reflects a regression to Weimar era immobilism or an advancement, but finds in these poets' work a sense of the material as both evident and elusive that seems particular to our present moment. In resisting readings that would fix and name the nature of either their form or their content, these works demonstrate a polemics of negative capability:

> And what seems freshly polemical about some of my favorite post-Language writing—what I think we might treat as a model—is its sense that polemic is the element of the negative in affection, or in judgment. A critical or artistic attachment is polemical, dangerous even, not because of which protagonist it has chosen but because it models what it's like not to know the whole story of its object. The dream of a redeemed matter, that is, doesn't entail a positive vision of

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8 Nealon, "Camp Messianism," 588.
9 Nealon, "Camp Messianism," 597.
10 Nealon, "Camp Messianism,". 581.

what that redemption will look like so much as a resistance to the idea that it will look like any one thing we know.

This seems to me the provoking thing about post-Language poetry's polemical affection, or its camp messianism: it is a new and interesting way of writing from within the presumption of totality.[11]

Nealon describes a poetics and critical practice through which poems do not replicate known models of resistance ("anti-globalist activism," "movement poetry"), nor do they make the distinction between their forms and their content entirely legible, which otherwise would fix the works in a dialectical stage of transition or transformation from which one would extrapolate a redemptive outcome. Spahr's body of work expresses some of the affect of the informed non-knowing that Nealon describes, in her cultivation, across multiple works, of a speaking stance that troubles both its statements and its entitlement to speak. *The Transformation*, Spahr's "barely truthful"[12] memoir, documents in part the feeling of political and personal immobilization that she and her partners felt during their time as continental migrants to Hawaii in the years before and around September 11, 2001, aware of their affiliations and complicity with a history of white European and American expansionist interests in the region, as well as their political affinities with local and native communities that actively—and often with great hostility—oppose their presence and the history of militarized and institutionalized imperialism they represent:

> They felt caught between their feeling that the responsible thing to do was to be attentive to the issues that so defined the island and yet at the same time they also worried that they had no right to talk about the island.

> Again and again they felt as if they could not escape, that whatever they did was wrong. They could never sort through the layers of history. They could never feel things in the same way that those who were born on the island might feel them, whether those people had genealogical ties to the island from before the whaling ships arrived or not…. And this feeling of never enough rules, never enough lived knowledge, overwhelmed them into a sort of depressed inaction and they realized that despite their obsessive thinking about and revising of rules they had trouble answering hard yet obvious questions about their work.[13]

In these explicit expressions of struggle with political and personal impasse, Spahr cultivates a stance of transparency that assumes greater stability of subject and object than do the camp messianic evasions and ironies around utopian

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[11] Nealon, "Camp Messianism," 599.

[12] Juliana Spahr, afterword to *The Transformation* (Berkeley: Atelos (a project of Hip's Road), 2007), 217.

[13] Spahr, *Transformation*, 114-115.

possibilities and the material resources of language that Nealon reads in the works of Clover, Davies, Robertson, and Smith. The passage above concludes with Spahr's meditation on her reasons for writing poetry, having been asked this "hard yet obvious question." The answer, offered in the third person plural with which the entire work is narrated, that "they guessed that they wrote for themselves," both admits to and strains beyond a self-oriented practice, towards social and political engagement: "They especially needed poetry to think with others, to think with the traditions of the island, to think beside them and near them but not as part of them…. They wished they could say that they wrote for themselves and for strangers. But it seemed presumptuous to say they wrote for strangers, at least for strangers on the island."[14] The answer contains the implicit question of *The Transformation*: in what capacities might poetry, as practiced by an individual writer, act for and with the social body? What attending practices—reading, criticism, activism—might be necessary corollaries to a poetry conceived of as a political orientation? Spahr shares with the community of writers and critical approaches Nealon describes in "Camp Messianism" a political orientation towards "countering hegemony"[15] and a contemporaneity that as readily registers the pervasive violations and transformations of capital and cultural imperialism. How do her works broaden our current understanding of what experimental poetry's actions in the world might look like, beyond the political work of "movement poetry" or the deferrals of an emergent "camp messianism"?

  In a 2011 roundtable discussion with Nealon and Clover about the intersection of poetry and politics, Spahr directly addresses her investment in "movement poetry," as well as a critical approach to poetry that, like the model Nealon tests, seeks to broaden the scope of what might constitute a poetic intervention beyond acts of "subversion," whether of social, political or aesthetic conventions:

> But I was somewhat joking with [Nealon] that just as much of a
> problem [as finding only subversiveness to admire] might be a sadly
> narrow definition of "movement" poetry. I mean my joke was, who
> doesn't want to be a movement poet? Some days when I get paranoid I
> think that there is a stand off that could maybe be cartoonized as that
> between Adorno and Brecht and that part of the problem with the
> way we study literature in the academy is that Adorno (which I am
> using as a code word for the idea that literature isn't a meaningful
> part of what we seem to be calling "movements") seems to have won.
> He is winning even when he isn't, as Chris notices, in that even when
> we talk with admiration about subversion, we do it in sadly narrow
> ways. We are often talking about the language practices of a poem as
> subversive of the idea of the poem or the subversion of genre within
> the work. But where I might argue with Chris is that I worry more
> about what I think is a much larger tendency: the sadly narrow

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[14] Spahr, *Transformation*, 115.
[15] Nealon, "Camp Messianism," 598.

practice (by poets and critics) of not seeing literature's subversive potential outside of the genre, its abilities to move people to emotion, to action, its potential to cultivate alliance (both through emotions and through the social structures, the lifestyles, that support the genre). And I worry that if we don't look at poetry as something that moves (in the most inclusive sense of that term – here I am thinking not only of what one could obviously call "movement poetry," works like "I am Joaquin" which was written to organize farmworkers but also in Jennifer Moxley's sense that even the love poem is activist in that it desires to move the beloved to action), then I'm not sure why I want to think with or about poetry.[16]

Spahr identifies two problems here that motivate some of the problem solving we can observe in the formal and material choices she makes in her poetic and critical writing. The first problem, which Nealon outlines in "Camp Messianism" and which Spahr reiterates here, resides in academic criticism's privileging of poetry that is experimental only in the sense of challenging literary and linguistic convention: "subversive of the idea of the poem or the subversion of genre within the work." Spahr anticipates this criticism in the form of self-criticism in an early section of *The Transformation* that also addresses the problem of privileging the literatures of hegemonic nations and cultures:

> They knew a lot about forms of writing that used fragmentation, quotation, disjunction, agrammatical syntax, and so on that was written either on the continent and island across the Atlantic or on the continent across the Pacific but not that much about writing that used fragmentation, quotation, disjunction, agrammatical syntax, and so on that was from other places…. They could talk at great length about how this literature that used fragmentation, quotation, disjunction, agrammatical syntax, and so on resists or revolts. But usually when they said these words they meant that the literature resists or revolts against certain literary norms and conventions, not against large political structures like colonialism.
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> They had learned to use the words resistance and revolution and to really mean only resistance and revolution against literary genres in graduate school.[17]

Spahr's identification of "fragmentation, quotation, disjunction, agrammatical syntax, and so on" as the markers of resistant or revolutionary literature speaks to the academic canonization of language writing and the modernist experimental

[16] Spahr, Juliana, Joshua Clover and Chris Nealon, "Poetry & Politics Roundtable with Joshua Clover, Chris Nealon & Juliana Spahr," "Poetry & Politics Roundtable with Joshua Clover, Chris Nealon & Juliana Spahr." *Evening Will Come: A Monthly Journal of Poetics* 6 (June 2011), http:// http://www.eveningwillcome.com/issue6-politicsroundtable-p1.html (accessed July 28, 2012).

[17] Spahr, *Transformation*, 78.

writing of the earlier 20th century as having produced some of the more radical, politicized literary works in recent history: a canonization that makes certain texts visible at the expense of other literatures, and institutionalizes models of reading that contribute to the containment of these texts' political relevance—"They had learned…to really mean only resistance and revolution against literary genres in graduate school." Spahr's anxiety that these linguistic innovations and modes of reading serve only to disrupt literary conventions and fail to disrupt political structures, and that the canonization of certain radical literatures over others itself fortifies those political structures, speaks to criticisms leveled against these radical literatures as ineffective at changing either people's political consciousness or actual political structures, and to which she responds in her major work of criticism, *Everybody's Autonomy: Connective Reading and Collective Identity*:

> While it is often said that these works are inaccessible because they are too experimental or too avant-garde and thus dissolve subjectivity, I maintain that these writers instead directly engage the complicated claims around identity that come to the forefront of large social concerns in the late 1960s. But rather than the clear, singular voice and narrative of much of the literature that gets categorized as consciousness-raising, these works propose group identities with room for individualistic response. Thus my concentration in this study has been on the tension in these works between collectivity and individualism. For, in a crucial move, these works repeatedly relate reader autonomy to social, political and cultural autonomy.[18]

Here, Spahr's investment in drawing out the ways that certain poems[19] may encourage collective identification as well as autonomous, individual response points to the second problem Spahr identifies in the above passage from *The Transformation*: the limitation in critical thinking about poetry to questions of form and genre, and not of the potential emotive or mobilizing impact poetry may have, or of the communities of readers that form around the practice and sharing of poetry. Spahr advocates for greater attention to the communities and practices that poetry mobilizes; this is the basis for the critical orientation of *Everybody's Autonomy* and the realization she documents in *The Transformation* that reorients the "graduate student" understanding of ways literature might be resistant or revolutionary:

> It had taken them so long to see this because when they looked at poetry they tended to look at how it was made, not what it made, not its resonances in the world. But suddenly seeing the waves that resonated out of poetry on the island focused their vision. Where

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[18] Juliana Spahr, *Everybody's Autonomy: Connective Reading and Collective Identity* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001) 6.

[19] *Everybody's Autonomy* examines the work of Gertrude Stein, Lyn Hejinian, Bruce Andrews, Harryette Mullen, and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha.

before they had seen amateurish chaos and a lack of formal allegiance, they now saw a concentrated effort to try all the tools in order to achieve a singular goal. They had been looking, they realized, through the wrong end of the telescope and now, once they had learned to look through the end with the eyepiece, they were able to focus and see.[20]

In this passage, Spahr speaks about poetry written in "places of activist anticolonialism," and in this instance, the poetry she witnessed in Hawaii as a participant in anticolonialist protests, where "the genre's assumed shortness, its lack of rules and structures, and its links to orality made it a genre of populist protest."[21] Shifting her focus from "how it was made" to "what it made… its resonances in the world" introduces new terms and values for understanding the radical matter of poetry: seeking radicality not just in the foregrounding and mining of language's materiality, but also in the material conditions, the economies and social structures out of which these poetries emerge and which in turn, might emerge from the practices around radical poetry.

If the autonomous reading that the language writing movement sought to encourage constitutes one principle of Spahr's poetics, the principles the inform the practice of ecopoetry constitute another important facet: the interconnectivity between people, the cultures and institutions that produce them and which they in turn reproduce, and the environment that sustains these relations and conditions of life. Accounts of ecopoetry such as Linda Russo's "Writing Within: Notes on Ecopoetics as Spatial Practice," and Jonathan Skinner's "Why Eco-poetics?" in the inaugural issue of the journal *Ecopoetics* emphasize its adaptation of ecological thinking beyond narrowly defined ecological or environmental stakes or themes towards writing that investigates sites and systems as the manifestation of real and conceptual boundaries: between "nature" and "culture," urban and rural, private and public, self and other, etc. Russo's account characterizes ecopoetry as "emplaced or environed writing" that not only attends to geographical place but treats both the constructs of "nature" and poetic language as framing devices that determine our capacity to attend to that place:

> …emplaced or environed writing requires attending to bioregions and regions of thought that lie beyond my immediate scope – to use a visual metaphor…. From where the writer is, she must attempt to complicate that place: understand what it was, how it got to be, how it is being actuated, and what it might be. To my mind, an ecopoetics of writing within is concerned equally with engaging these things and with *poesis*: with making poetry. Thus it operates through an awareness of language as a framing device, which accompanies a more basic awareness of the potential abuse of "nature" as a framing device that identifies and isolates an "other" onto which is cast human

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[20] Spahr, *Transformation*, 82.
[21] *Ibid.*, 81.

fears, ideals, desires, etc. – sometimes as the "voice of nature." In an ecopoetical practice that considers material *and* linguistic emplacement (or how we situate language as a framing "tool," to use Buell's term), environment *and* language *and* poet are ineluctable presences.[22]

Russo presents ecopoetic writing as a reflection upon our existence within natural and constructed systems, and understands language as a "presence" alongside the material presences of environment and living beings. I would argue that Lisa Robertson's account of her interest in a "postpastoral" form demonstrates an affinity with ecopoetics through her critique of the construct of "nature" and the historical uses nature has served in literature:

> I wanted a form as obsolete yet necessary as the weather. I begin with the premise that pastoral, as a literary genre, is obsolete—originally obsolete. Once a hokey territory sussed out by hayseed diction, now the mawkish artificiality of the pastoral poem's constructed surface has settled down to a backyard expressivity. In the postpastoral poem (in evidence since the English romantics and their modernist successors) the evocation of "feeling" in poet or reader obeys a parallel planting of "nature" in the poem. Translate backyard utopia as political mythology. Appearing to serve a personally expressive function, the vocabulary of nature screens a symbolic appropriation of the Land. Her cut sublimity grafts to the Human. I'd call pastoral the nation-making genre: within a hothouse language we force the myth of the Land to act as both political resource and mystic origin.[23]

Robertson is explicit in naming the uses to which pastoral's appropriation of "the Land" by way of the vocabulary and construct of "nature" have been put: as "political resource and mystic origin" for nation-building endeavors and as utopian fictions that have "efficiently aestheticized and naturalized the political practices of genocide, misogyny, and class and race oppression." Due to this history, the genre now presents, for Robertson, a "hybrid discursive potential to those who have been traditionally excluded from Utopia" and a form with which she may "gloss [her] ancestress's complicity with a socially expedient code, to invade [her] own illusions of historical innocence." Her call to "deny [pastoral] the natural and hegemonic

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[22] Russo cites Lawrence Buell's account of "place" as "multifaceted," oriented toward "environmental materiality, toward social perception or construction, and toward individual affect or bond" and language as a "perceiving and constructing tool" with which to consider the material placement and environment of the writer. Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism*. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 63. Linda Russo, "Writing Within: Notes on Ecopoetics as Spatial Practice," *How2* 3, no 2, http://www.asu.edu/pipercwcenter/how2journal/vol_3_no_2/ecopoetics/essays/russo.html (accessed July 31, 2012).

[23] Lisa Robertson, "How Pastoral: A Manifesto," *Telling It Slant: Avant-Garde Poetics of the 1990s*, ed. Mark Wallace and Steven Marks (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002) 22-23.

position of political ideology"[24] echoes an ecopoetic skepticism of "nature" as a frame or site for constructing an "other" (another time, place, race, class, etc.) and contextualizes this skepticism within a history of literary forms engaging with "nature." Robertson's attention to her historical complicity in the oppressions that pastoral poetry represent echo Spahr's attention to individual and cultural complicity in hierarchical or destructive relations and histories, as articulated in the excerpt from *The Transformation*, above, and as we will see in *Well Then There Now*.

Skinner, founder and publisher of the journal *Ecopoetics* emphasizes site-specificity as the starting principle for an ecopoetics practice:

> Rather than locate a "kind" of writing as "ecopoetic," it may be more helpful to think of ecopoetics as a form of site-specificity—to shift the focus from themes to topoi, tropes and entropologies, to institutional critique of "green" discourse itself, and to an array of practices converging on the *oikos*, the planet earth that is the only home our species currently knows.[25]

In an essay that follows "Things of Each Possible Relation Hashing Against One Another," the fourth section of *Well Then There Now*, Spahr describes the limitations of a certain kind of "nature poetry," and identifies Skinner's journal and the "tradition of ecopoetics" as representative of the kind of work that might address nature poetry's conceptual limitations:

> *I was more suspicious of nature poetry because even when it got the birds and the plants and the animals right it tended to show the beautiful bird but not so often the bulldozer off to the side that was destroying the bird's habitat. And it wasn't talking about how the bird, often a bird which had arrived recently from somewhere else, interacted with and changed the larger system of this small part of the world we live in and on….*

> *…Around the time I was working on this, Jonathan Skinner started publishing his journal* Ecopoetics. *And then I realized that what I was looking for all along was in the tradition of ecopoetics—a poetics full of systemic analysis that questions the divisions between nature and culture[26] – instead of a nature poetry.[27]*

Spahr's emphasis on "systems"—"the larger system of this small part of the world" and "a poetics full of systemic analysis"—expands upon site and site-specificity

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[24] Robertson*,* 23.
[25] Jonathan Skinner, "Commentary on Ecopoetics," *Jacket2*, http://jacket2.org/commentary/jonathan-skinner (accessed September 7, 2012).
[26] The version of this essay in the 2003 chapbook of *Thing of Each Possible Relation Hashing Against One Another* adds here "while also acknowledging that humans use up too much of the world." Juliana Spahr, *Things of Each Possible Relation Hashing Against One Another* (Newfield: Palm Press, 2003), 26.
[27] Spahr, *Well Then There Now*, 69-71.

towards a poetics that considers ways that the world is bounded by systems: both epistemological and material structures. Through an attention to the eco- and other-systems that poetry might participate in, Spahr's work demonstrates an equally relevant grounding in the tradition of research or investigative poetics,[28] in which poetic meditation on a theme incorporates extensive scholarly research into its history and documentation as a way of properly accounting for the systems of knowledge—representations, suppressions, material documentation, immaterial traces—through which that theme becomes accessible as an object of study. We see some of this is the prose essays of *Well Then There Now* which list Spahr's secondary sources and research methodologies, as well as the front matter of the collection which list source texts for the botanical and zoological facts that populate her works.

In naming movements or methodologies with which Spahr's work affiliates, one risks complicity in the critical practice that Spahr has critiqued in her analysis of the critical reception of the last few decades of American poetry: a practice that fragments the field of poetry into disparate movements and schools, often segregated by geography or ethnicity, and which therefore overlooks struggles, identification and values shared among these "balkanized" works and writers.[29] In "spiderwasp or literary criticism," a work that is part prose poem and part critical essay, Spahr, citing Marjorie Perloff's study of the impact of poetry anthologies in the 1990s, traces this "rhetoric of categorization and separation" to Donald Allen's 1960 anthology *The New American Poetry* and the 1990s collections that it influenced. Spahr concedes that these divisions have some validity, but highlights this "model of contemporary avant-garde poetry as a series of disconnected and separate concerns" in order to examine the ways that recent works are offering a counter-narrative to these segregations through joining themes, forms and aesthetics that had previously been read as distinct. Her examination of works by Lisa Jarnot, Jena Osman and Joan Retallack seeks to demonstrate ways "these writers are taking their own social space and refiguring it as one that crosses into others, retaining the differences of both spaces yet bringing each into dialogue with the other," thereby perhaps providing "a model for how to configure other defining boundaries" and "how individuals can control definitions of their social spaces without being subsumed."[30]

Spahr's reading of Retallack's "THE BLUE STARES" concludes with her observations on the homophonic and semantic shift between the "stairs" that recur in the work and the "stares" of visual engagement that the work invites between reader, author and text:

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[28] "Investigative poetics" in the context of Spahr's work is meant to align her practice with the work Williams carried out in composing *Paterson*, or the research-based works of Susan Howe (*My Emily Dickinson, The Midnight*), rather than with Ed Sanders's manifesto, "Investigative Poetry: The Content of History Will Be Poetry"(1975).

[29] In "The 90's," Spahr's essay on works from the 1990s written in and in resistance to standard English, she observes the contradiction between an increasing understanding of the mechanisms and impact of globalization, and the trend towards balkanization of contemporary literatures. Juliana Spahr, "The 90s," *Boundary 2* 36, no. 3 (2009): 173.

[30] Juliana Spahr, "spiderwasp or literary criticism," in *Telling It Slant: Avant-Garde Poetics of the 1990s*, ed. Mark Wallace and Steven Marks (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002) 405-426.

...the poem is about how we stare sideways, how the poem looks back: "as a writer of BLUE essays into *the problem of gradualness* STARES *with a heavy* THE *and pure logic* too BLUE such a blue takes hold of STARES the viewer at THE *the master builder acknowledges* BLUE that blue precisely *this* side of STARES of or beyond" (206). The line of sight in this passage is wonderfully joined and askew at the same time: the writer of the essay stares at the viewer (reader) who stares at the writer ("master builder") who both stare at both sides of the stair.[31]

Spahr identifies a "sideways" staring in Retallack's simultaneously "joined and askew," interwoven syntactic lines that Spahr's own writing also demands through its own divergent structure. The transgressions and potential in the joinings she reads in Retallack, Osman and Jarnot's works find metaphoric expression in the prose poem that accompanies her own critical essay; the former unfolds on the verso pages, and the critical essay, along with a separate column for annotations, unfolds on the facing, recto pages. The prose poem analogizes the act of writing literary criticism through the sometimes transgressive and promiscuous and often difficult exchanges within complex, intimate relations, themselves analogized through an account of a predatory wasp and its victim, a tarantula spider.

He or she wants to make this complexity of relation – the complexity where one thing has dominion and understanding over another thing all in one moment but in another moment the another thing has dominion and understanding over the thing—into a metaphor for how we encounter works and worlds. He or she wants to explain the recent events in his or her life as a comparison for what happens when one writes literary criticism....

...In the story of the tarantula and the wasp, the literary criticism is the connection this story has with his or her life, with how he or she is forced to wonder a lot about who is the tarantula and who is the wasp.[32]

In tracking both the figurative prose-poem-essay that unfolds on one side of each set of facing pages and the more conventional critical essay and annotations that unfold on the opposite pages, Spahr's readers, as in her reading of Retallack's "THE BLUE STARES," have the option of "sideways" reading: tracking multiple lines of thought, imagery and argumentation simultaneously or, since truly simultaneous reading is impossible to execute, through a kind of reticulated reading practice in which discrete moments of reading are networked together through points of both divergence and convergence between the polyvalent text's multiple threads.

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[31] Spahr, "spiderwasp," 425.
[32] *Ibid.*, 418-422.

Spahr's readers also have the option of following more conventional paths through this work: reading only the prose poem to follow it to completion, then returning to the beginning of the critical essay and reading it to completion. Readers might also treat recto and verso pages as if reading a conventionally structured text, reading facing pages in their given order. Reading through transitions between the left-side "spiderwasp" tale and the right-side essay yield rich moments of divergent-convergence, such as when the prose-poem, verso page concludes mid-sentence with "In writing about another person and his or her relation to / him or her, in writing about a book and his or her relation," and the critical essay's recto page initiates with "…the chance joining of poetic words. Thus the poem itself is a machine for joining and creating new poems."[33] In this transition, Spahr's own text serves as a "machine for joining and creating new poems" through the "chance joining of poetic words," and expresses through poetic form the same discursive content that the critical prose explores: new modes of joining divergent writing practices as a way of countering conventional, canonical ways of reading and writing (and writing about what one has read).

I have adopted "spiderwasp or literary criticism" as a tutor text for reading *Well Then There Now*. Both works ask readers to move between disparate textual and literary modes— narrative and lyric, verse and prose, critical essay and prose poem—and to forge the analogies and practices that align these works as interrelated and interdependent. Drawing points of connection between the experimental practices of Gertrude Stein and of language writing in *Everybody's Autonomy*, Spahr notes that the "inversion of hierarchical models of reading" signal in both bodies of work that readers and "reading's autonomous possibility" matter more than authors: that "language writing valorizes multiple and individual response. It tends to emphasize reading's social function and optimistically argue for its reconstructive possibilities."[34] Reading works by Stein, Language poets Hejinian and Andrews and experimental writers of color Harryette Mullen and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Spahr mines moments in which their poetry offers readers points of entry or exchange, whether through ambivalence in meaning, textual "blanks" or suppressions, or other challenges to authorial privilege and dominant models of subjectivity and the subject.

As I've noted, the multiple points of entry and exchange for readers in "spiderwasp or literary criticism" invite a sideways or reticulated reading practice that holds aloft and interweaves multiple narratives: the parable of the predatory spider, the analogue of the promiscuous lover and reader, the critical, close readings of Retallack, Jarnot and Osman's works. "The Incinerator," the text that closes *Well Then There Now*, describes Spahr's own "multi-eyed perspective" in relation to a text written by Hannah Weiner to which the poem responds, as well as the multiple considerations on class and gender that emerge from the poem's meditation on Chillicothe, the Appalachian town where Spahr spent her childhood. In the poem's third section and at the conclusion of a litany of statements that begin with "I was trying to think about…" and that describe a telescoping range of topics concerning

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[33] Spahr, "spiderwasp," 420-421.
[34] Spahr, *Everybody's Autonomy*, 52-53.

the female labor and multi-national institutions of globalization—"the World Trade Organization," "women sewing garments in Liberia," "the North American Free Trade Agreement," "women selling shrimp in Honduras"—Spahr writes: "I was trying to think about Hannah Weiner's "Radcliffe and / Guatemalan Women." / Weiner keeps one eye on herself, one eye on her neighborhood / and one eye on another place as she puts statements about / Radcliffe Women and Guatemalan women side by side"[35] (144-145). A series of speculations follows that begin with "She might have been thinking about…", mirroring the "I was trying to think about…" series and imagining what Weiner meant to explore in "Radcliffe and Guatemalan Women": from violent, repressive actions on the part of the Guatemalan state taken against political protesters at the opening and closing of the 1980s, to the U.S.'s material support of these actions through its funding of the Guatemalan government's security forces (145). Offering critical analysis of Weiner's text, the poem cites both Weiner's formal choices and their import: "Weiner's piece is full of juxtaposition, fragmentation and lack / of attribution as if to suggest that there is nothing easy / to say about this relationship between Radcliffe women and / Guatemalan women…. / This relationship is the multi-eyed aspect of "Radcliffe and / Guatemalan Women" (146).

Drawing together the terrain the poem crosses—Spahr's understanding of her family's socioeconomic class in the economically depressed region of Appalachia, the economic impact globalization has had on women in poorer nations of the world—Spahr's poem expands upon the multi-eyed perspective it had attributed to Weiner:

> …I was trying to think about what sort of vision one
> needed to have in order to keep one eye on the
> neighborhood
> and then one eye on the nation and then yet one more
> eye
> on the world.
>
> I was trying to think, in other words.[36]

"I was trying to think" gets restated in the segments that follow as "I was trying to grow some other eyes" and "I tried to develop a multi-eyed focus" (148). The conflation between thinking and seeing describes the multi-modal activity that characterize both Spahr's writing process and her reading of Weiner's text; she models writing and reading as similarly productive acts that enable new strategies of seeing which, in turn, enable new paths of thinking. Spahr cultivates a stance of transparency in describing the reading and thinking that inform the poem at hand; in section two and four of "The Incinerator," Spahr generates a series of alternate

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[35] Hannah Weiner attended Radcliffe College, the women's college affiliated with and eventually fully integrated with Harvard University; "Radcliffe Women" therefore refers to students and graduates of that school.
[36] Spahr, *Well Then There Now*, 147-148.

narratives her poem might have pursued, in the same listing format of the "I was trying to think about…" and "She might have been trying to think about…" series: "As I write this other stories keep popping up and I keep abandoning them…" (139-140, 151- 153). The gerunds that characterize her activities—"thinking," "attempting," stories that keep "popping up,"—present her speculative and interpretive activities as ongoing and resistant to closure or conclusion; we do not have access to the "other stories" that were abandoned, but we understand that they are part of this poem's "thinking" and therefore represent sites of potential that lie beyond the poem's bounds. "I was trying to think, in other words" has two implications: that "trying to think" is another way of characterizing ("in other words") the activity of moving through the topics she names and which appear to suggest one another (her mother's assertion of her family's socioeconomic class, the economic status of women in nations impacted by U.S. trade policies, the challenge of conceiving of one's immediate environment alongside remote environments, etc.); but also that Spahr is modeling thinking *through* or *by means of* "other words": the "other words" of Weiner's poem, the "other words" produced and encountered through the ongoing process of writing (and reading) poetry, and the "other words" of the different modes of discourse—descriptive language, impersonal listing, personal essays, verse sonnets—that Spahr engages within in individual works or that *Well Then There Now* as a collection asks readers to synthesize.

"Sonnets," the second section of *Well Then There Now,* expands the literary form of its title into a series of ten fourteen line lyrics that eschew the typical first person speaker for the collective and plural "we" and "us" (or avoids a pronominal speaking position altogether), and that includes four verso pages that list, in sonnet form, the quantities and types of compounds found in a sample of blood. Structurally, the work foregrounds the pairing of "other" discourses; as with the facing pages of "spiderwasp, or literary criticism," the pages facing these blood sample sonnets feature a different vocabulary and type of catalogue: not the declarations of the sonnets that open and close the section and which describe the arrival of an unnamed "we" to a place and environment—Hawaii—with which they exist in uneasy relation, but a series of grammatical components—compound subjects, fragments of questions, prepositional phrases—that only occasionally coalesce into predication:

> A catalogue of the individual and a catalogue of us with all.
> A catalogue of full thought.
> A house where we with all our complexities lie.
> A catalogue of blood.
>
> A catalogue of us with all our complexities
> A catalogue of how we are all full of thought and connection
> The house where we are from and the house where we live.
> All things to be said more largely than the personal way.[37]

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[37] Spahr, *Well Then There Now*, 25.

The opposing sets of lyrics therefore form their own symmetry through their disparate cataloguing; one set lists the vital components of the complex medium that sustains human life, and the other utilizes the components that constitute units of English grammar that carry out the syntactic functions of naming ("A catalogue of blood"), modifying ("…where we with all our complexities lie"), and conjoining ("the house where we are from and the house where we live"). Framed by the declarative accounts of migration and integration of and into a foreign space, the central lyric dialogue between statistical, quantitative data and naming, modifying, predicative deferrals carries out an experiment in saying things "more largely than the personal way." If the opening and closing lyrics provide a subject and speaking position that is particular even through the barest of biographical details—"we arrived by air, by 747 and DC10 and L1011…. We arrived and everything was interconnected: / as twining green maile shrub, / as huehue haole. / Our response was to uproot and to bunker:" (19-28)—the central lyrics posit a pluralized subject containing all "complexities" and "identifications," and a form of dictation that might permit identification and expression "more largely than the personal way":

> monocyte percent at 8.6
> eosinophil percent at 1.4
>
> As intricate systems we are.
> We with all our complexities.
> We with all our identifications.
> We with all our homes and our irregularities live.
>
> We are full of thought and we live.
> We live with things several.
> We are full of thought and we are different
> For which things so several.[38]

Spahr's repetitions and syntactic accumulations model the generative potential of joining "things so several" so that unified, collective forms—"we"—contain and are contained by differentiated multiplicities: "as intricate systems we are…. We live with things several." Spahr's "we" seeks collective identification through the shared condition of being different, of each representing an intricate system, of having many homes, irregularities, identifications, and thoughts.

Charles Altieri describes Spahr's inclusivity as building "Whitmanian expansiveness out of Steinian repetition"[39]; I argue that Spahr's expansions extend not to a utopian containing of multitudes, but to the way that these opposing lyric modes—statistical data in sonnet form and accumulating linguistic and syntactic components—might account for one another by failing to contain one another. The significance in their pairing lies in their incommensurable differences. Just as the

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[38] Spahr, *Well Then There Now*, 20-21.
[39] Charles Altieri, "The Place of Rhetoric in Contemporary American Poetics: Jennifer Moxley and Juliana Spahr," *Chicago Review* 56, no. 2/3 (Autumn 2011), 34.

opaque catalogue of quantities and types of organic compounds operates with a specificity that, through its degree of focus, resists our capacity to unify and visualize what's being described—"mean corpuscular hemoglobin at 36.3 picograms per cell…. Red blood cell distribution width at 13.5%"—so the generalizations of the "we" that operate in the facing lyrics exploit their own opacity: refusing to totalize a stable account of "we with all our complexities":

> And the difference between those that took and those that remained.
> As the qualities of blood are considered remains undocumentable.
> .   As the quantities of blood are considered remains unquantifiable.[40]

As Spahr wrestles with identifying the differences between "those that took" from Hawaii—European and continental American explorers and imperialists—and "those that remained"—colonizers who stayed to appropriate, integrate and adapt—she confronts the limits of what might be quantified and documented. The framing thesis—that "The difference between those that took and those that remained…remains undocumentable…remains unquantifiable"— contains within its framing the consideration of the qualities and quantities of blood: "as the qualities of blood are considered remains undocumentable." The range of focus here deliberately strains against the boundaries of cohesive argumentation: from literally microscopic analysis of blood work to broad, historical analysis of the agents and mediators of imperial exploration and colonization of Hawaii.

And yet the microscopic and the broadly historical do not act at opposing ends of a focal spectrum or towards opposing degrees of focalization; in this dialogue, both carry out the larger project of focusing "more largely than the personal way":

> Things should be said more largely than the personal way.
> Things are larger than the personal way of telling.
> Intimate confession is a project.
> Confession's structured plan of percents and regulations.[41]

The impersonal statistics of the blood work nearly obscure the fact that this data acts as a form of highly intimate confession; the blood was drawn at a particular time—"time drawn at 1819"—and registers personal biostatistics: "hepatitis c antibody at negative / gonnococcal/chlamydia at negative" (24-26).[42] Spahr adapts the sonnet form, conventionally the occasion for a sustained expression of interiority, towards a sustained accounting of the literally internal, expanding what the project of "intimate confession" might entail. On the facing pages, Spahr's catalogue of questions-as-statements both acknowledges and challenges how real

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[40] Spahr, *Well Then There Now*, 23.

[41] *Ibid.*

[42] This section recalls Spahr's earlier work, "Witness," in which a prose section describes a blood drawing that generates the occasion for "witness": "The needle pricks the person's arm. Two vials of blood are filled. The blood is deep red. It contains within it the information that will provide witness." Juliana Spahr, *Response* (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1996), 78.

and spectral persons, broadly conceived, limit, authorize, permit and expand the generalized "we" that she imagines might enable speaking and identification beyond a narrowly conceived mode of the personal:

> Who authorizes so one is not what individual one says one is
> Who authorizes so one is not single.
> Who empowers so one is not alone.
> Who is expert of confession.
>
> Who one is situated with and not with others.
> Who one lies with and not with others.
> Who is characterized how by some and not by others
> Who is various.[43]

The list considers the conflicts between self-identification—"what individual one says one is"—and the inescapability of connection to and, thus, identification by and through others – "who one is situated with and not with others…Who is characterized how by some and not by others." The intimately personal—"who one lies with and not with others" —is inseparable from the larger than personal, at the same time that we are always registering the boundaries between personal and public, intimate and social. Questions of how one defines the personal in terms of the social and transpersonal ("more largely than…personal way") subtend the themes "Sonnets" shares with the collection as whole, whether in a work like "The Incinerator" which considers economic class in local, national, and global contexts, or in the essay "2199 Kalia Road," which examines the demarcation between public and private spaces in areas of Waikiki that have been developed for tourism.

The thematics of boundaries between the personal and that which is typically larger than the personal—the cultural or environmental, for instance—find discursive expression and analogue in the mixed discourses that, in "Sonnets," pair a microscopic focus with a naming and modifying inclusivity that expands its range by emphasizing and accounting for difference, variation, and multiple identifications. In "Unnamed Dragonfly Species," the fifth work in *Well Then There Now,* disparate discourses are embedded in one another, promoting competing modes of reading and qualities of attention that thematically and structurally explore the material impact of trying to "keep one eye" on oneself—the personal—and "then yet one more eye on the world" (*WTTN*, 147-148). Rather than encouraging a "sideways" or reticulated reading practice across multiple texts, the two modalities weave together a prose narrative describing the impact of global warming on the earth's glacial bodies and sea levels, as observed and considered by a third person plural collective "they," with an alphabetized list in bold text of the names of "endangered, threatened and special concern plant, fish, and wildlife species of New York State" ("Acknowledgments and Other Information"). The alphabetical list resonates across the collection with Spahr's internal critique, in "The Incinerator," that the device is one that "falsely suggests / there might be a place for everything" (140). As a device

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[43] Spahr*, Well Then There Now*, 27.

that interrupts and redirects mode and quality of attention in this narrative account of "their" rising awareness of the global warming crisis, the alphabetized list introduces names of species that indeed register each creature as displaced: textually external to and graphically distinct from the narrative—Spahr credits the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's website for the text – and representative of the wealth of life that may no longer have a place in the ecosystems altered by global warming:

> The connected relationship between water and land seemed deeply damaged, perhaps beyond repair in numerous places. **Vesper Sparrow** The systems of relation between living things of all sorts seemed to have become in recent centuries so hierarchically human that things not human were dying at an unprecedented rate. **Wavy-rayed Lampmussel** And the systems of human governments and corporations felt so large and unchangeable and so distant from them yet the effects of their actions felt so connected and so immediate to what was happening. **Whip-poor-will** They knew this but didn't know what else to do. **Wood Turtle** And so they just went on living while talking loudly. **Worm Snake** Living and watching on a screen things far away from them melting. **Yellow-breasted Chat**.[44]

"Their" awareness of the unprecedented rate of species extinction caused by mass consumption made devastatingly efficient through the complicity of governments and corporations—the "hierarchically human" system of relations between living things—frames each introduction of a species name such that the competing texts—staccato intrusions on an otherwise smooth narrative surface—register the disjunction they feel at being aware of their complicity, as individuals and a species, and helpless to reverse these conditions.

The prose moves between simple constructions—"They tried to balance out all their anxieties with loud attempts at celebrations of life" (*WTTN*, 92)—to accumulative, syntactic excesses that manifest their attempts to divert their attention from disaster; in these moments, the endangered species list falls silent, only to resume its dirge as soon as the sentence has come to a close:

> …**Timber Rattlesnake** They might make out in
> public while standing in line at the grocery or just drink too much
> with friends and stay out late chatting happily in a dark
> smoky room where there was no evidence of any glacier or any
> rising ocean level or even any air really or maybe they would just go
> home and smoke some pot and lie on their bed watching shows
> about nature on the television with the sound off and think about
> how soft the bed can feel at such moments, how deep it could let
> them enter at such moments, or they might talk loudly and excitedly
> with friends about the latest blockbuster summer movie as if that

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[44] Spahr, *Well Then There Now*, 93.

> really mattered to them and they could live with the changing
> landscape because they had things like movies and books and
> friends and drugs, things that were common in cities and when in
> the cities they liked to tell themselves that this was enough,
> that these things were good enough so that the melting didn't
> matter. **Tomah Mayfly** They were anxious and were covering things
> over. **Unnamed Dragonfly Species**...[45]

In this passage, an account of the diversions and anxious "covering things over" the protagonists carry out against their awareness of environmental disasters accumulates length and complexity through inelegant conjunctions—"movies and books and friends and drugs"—and iterative modifications—"things that were common in cities and when in the cities they liked to tell themselves that this was enough, that these things were good enough"—that communicate compulsion and the deferral of closure. The citation of an "unnamed dragonfly species" reminds us that the list is an act of naming that manifests and materializes things that, unnamed, might otherwise remain as remote and unseen as the environmental changes that only come to the protagonists' attention through the news, internet, and the report of a friend who had hiked on a glacier. These multimodal avenues of information resonate with the work's graphic and structural differentiation between two sets of words: the narrative of "They" and the impersonal alphabetized names in bold, which acquire the affective weight of poignancy, especially in the case of the "unnamed" dragonfly, through momentarily manifesting, if in name only, a collection of species on the brink of extinction. These names are the "other words" that operate alongside the descriptive narration, modeling the process of "thinking in other words" that lead the protagonists to their meditations on remote environmental shifts and, at the level of the text itself, lead readers to read multi-modally, traversing the two different modes of discourse.

"Unnamed Dragonfly Species" shares with many of the texts in *Well Then There Now* a plural, pronominal speaker—we, they—that positions the speakers as part of a plural, rather than individual lyric voice. Moments when the plural voice conveys insights which approach a sense of interiority—individuated motivations and memories—complicate their aggregation as a group through foregrounding differentiation:

> They had been alive in 1988. **Eskimo Curlew** They could not even
> remember thinking at all about the weather that year. **Extra
> Striped Snaketail** When they really thought about it, they had no
> memory of any year being any hotter than any other year in general.
> **Fat Pocketbook** They remembered a few hot summers and a
> few mild winters but they were more likely to remember certain
> specific storms like the blizzard of 1976. **Fence Lizard** They did not
> remember heat as glaciers remember heat, deep in the center,
> causing cracking or erupting. **Finback Whale** They had spent 1988

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[45] Spahr, *Well Then There Now,* 92.

living in various parts of the country. **Fringed Valvata** None of them knew each other in 1988…[46]

1988 designates a time period prior to the formation of "their" association, but qualifications that follow this passage—"several of them," "some of them"—render ambiguous the number of people included and the affiliations that bind them in the present. The broadness of their concerns—"the systems of relation between living things of all sorts" (93)—expands the scope of their association so that even as readers are given information which places the plural protagonist in a specific time, place, culture and biographical arc, the expansiveness of the systems of relations and complicity suggests ever widening communities of people whom "they" might include:

> …they had to say that they knew that they were in part responsible for it, whatever it was that was causing this, because they lived in the place that used the largest amount of the stuff most likely to cause this warming. **Northern Wild Monk's-hood** They lived among those who used the most stuff up, who burned the most stuff, who produced the most stuff, and other things like that. **Olympia Marble** And even if they tried to live their lives with less stuff than others, they still benefited and were a part of the system that produced all this stuff and because of this they had a hard time figuring out how to move beyond their own personal renewed commitment to denial of stuff and yet their awareness of how they benefited daily from being a part of the system that used up the most stuff. **Osprey**[47]

For readers identifying as beneficiaries of or participants in western, industrialized systems of commerce and consumption, passages such as these generate a collective "they" that threatens and invites inclusion and complicity. "They" comes to designate "we" as the boundaries that distinguish self and other are remapped into the relations that connect self with other. The only instance in the work in which "they" refers directly to a named referent occurs during a moment when the plural protagonist considers the physical and dynamic properties of glaciers:

> …That is how they thought of glaciers.
> **Sedge Wren Sei Whale** They move and no one can stop them whichever way they go. **Sharp-shinned Hawk** You can't pin them down and hold them in place. **Short-eared Owl** Nor can you deter them when they start moving. **Shortnose Sturgeon** And they have history. **Silver Chub** They have water in layers sort of like a tree's yearly cycles. **Small-footed Bat** As they melt, things embedded in them are uncovered. [48]

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[46] Spahr, *Well Then There Now,* 80.

[47] *Ibid.*, 86-87.

[48] Spahr, *Well Then There Now*, 90.

Here and elsewhere in the text, the plural protagonist considers the remoteness of glaciers against their fundamental relevance: "So glaciers were not near them but they obsessed them" (88). The iterations of "they" and "them" in this excerpt and the above passage exploit the referential ambiguity of designating subjects and objects through pronominal reference. Readers understand from syntax and context when "they" shifts from referring to the plural protagonists to glacial bodies. But in the process of parsing these operations, readers experience the leveling, inclusive function of the plural pronoun as a linguistic analogue to the protagonists' evolution from a limited "they" to a hypothetical "everyone" through their "relationship with things big and cold and full of fresh water" that interrelates "them" with "everyone": "this thing that was about their life, about everyone's life" (88-89).

Spahr's plural speaking subject therefore generates a point of entry for readers by amplifying potential identifications with speaking positions that operate "more largely than the personal way." When "personal" figuration occurs through the accumulation of details that locate the plural protagonist of "Unnamed Dragonfly Species" in a certain time period and cultural space, Spahr troubles the boundaries that delimit "them" from others, the linguistic demarcations that distinguish one body of third person plural referents –human agents—from another body of referents—glaciers—and interrupts an affective narrative with a catalogue of species names that takes on affective weight through its inclusion in an account of how this community of people comes to understand the causes and impacts of climate change. Spahr foregrounds the parameters that differentiate persons or groups of people, linguistic subjects, and modes of affective discourse not to advocate for an unexamined, universal inclusivity around shared concerns or shared discourses, but to examine the moment and mechanics of differentiation. Her critical interest in writing that encourages "communal readings" seeks "identificatory" as well as "non-identificatory" moments: "moments when one realizes the limits of one's knowledge; moments of partial or qualified identification; moments when one realizes and respects unlikeness; moments when one connects with other readers (instead of characters)."[49] This inclusion of a broad range of exclusionary experiences extends the site of identification and non-identification beyond the relationship between reader and speaking subject or protagonist to speculative relations between readers, and between readers and authors as mediators of differing banks of knowledge. In Spahr's own work, we might therefore seek comparable moments in which readerly inclusions and exclusions, and competing and collaborative discourses mobilize a multi-eyed focus that is crucial to a politicized orientation and self-organization of social bodies.

I focus on Spahr's use of the plural speaking subjects "we" and "they" because these pronominal subjects produce complicated moments of identification through and across difference: at the level of the protagonists grouped under a "we" or "they" and at the level of engaging readers in acts of identifying these protagonists and locating themselves in relation to these pronominal speakers. Spahr has cited the relational aspect of pronouns in accounting for their prominent role in her work

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[49] Spahr, *Everybody's Autonomy*, 5.

and the "problem" that differentiation into "distinct and disconnected" individuals presents. Commenting on "Gentle Now, Don't Add to Heartache," the penultimate work in *Well Then There Now*, Spahr ascribes dual function to that work's pronominal use: as a performative voicing of a subjective state or affective quality and as the conduit for her own accountability as author and speaking subject, distinct from her readers:

> I started with "we" because I wanted to start with together. It is the idyll part of the poem. "We" is humans and animals and plants. It is also knowledge when you are a child. You learn with and through others. And I wanted everyone to be there in the poem. I wanted "we" to include those who read it. And then I wanted when I turn to "I" to talk about how that moment of becoming individuals, becoming distinct and disconnected, is part of the problem. And I wanted more specifically to talk about my own complicity with this…. I guess I felt I had to stand up and take responsibility and be there in the poem at some point. That I couldn't hide in the "we." And I also wanted the reader to think about their individualism with me.[50]

Pronouns surpass simple deictic function in constructing speculative relations and referents that do not adhere to existing or quantifiable referents. The "we" of "Gentle Now" entails "humans and animals and plants…knowledge when you are a child… [and] those who read [the poem]," and the "I" encompasses a reduction to individuality from the state of being "we," the author's inhabiting of the poem and the embodiment of the "problem" of the distinction and disconnection attending individuation from shared speaking position. In this sense, the often unidentifiable or unquantifiable referents for Spahr's many plural, pronominal speakers matter less than the speculative space these pronominal subjects generate as a way of testing mechanisms determining inclusion and exclusion.

In this commentary, Spahr considers the processes of personal identification that attend her use of personal pronouns. In the previous chapter, I refer to Émile Benveniste's work on pronominal function and subjectivity in order to point out the absolute distinction between the "ego" (imagined "identity") often attached to the use of grammatical figures "I" and "you" and the transitory, discursive subjects that these figures actually (and can only) designate, at the linguistic level. In regards to the pluralization of singular grammatical figures "I," "you," and "he/she," I now refer to Benveniste's observation that a "true plural" is only possible in the third person form—"they"—while the plural "we" conveys only an amplification of "I." The reason for this is because the expression of the verbal person "I" (and the person "you" implied by "we") is organized by a "correlation of subjectivity," whereby "I" designates the "subjective person" (speaking agent) and "you" designates the "non-

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[50] Michael Boyko, "A Brief Q&A with Juliana Spahr," *Tarpaulin Sky* 3, no. 2 (Summer 2005), http://www.tarpaulinsky.com/Summer05/Spahr/Juliana_Spahr_Q-n-A.html (accessed July 28, 2012).

subjective person" (addressee). A "correlation of personality" organizes the "I" and "you" in opposition to the "'non-person' form (= he)":

> … "I" is always *transcendent* with respect to "you." When I get out of "myself" in order to establish a living relationship with a being, of necessity I encounter or I posit a "you," who is the only imaginable "person" outside of me. These qualities of internality and transcendence properly belong to "I" and are reversed in "you." One could thus define "you" as the *non-subjective person*, in contrast to the *subjective person* that "I" represents; and these two "persons" are together opposed to the "non-person" form (=he). [51]

An "I" can only conceive of and speak of a singular "I" in relation to its polar opposite, the "non-subjective" person, "you." The "I" is therefore the "transcendent" person that permits and defines a "we" construction:

> It is clear, in effect, that the oneness and the subjectivity inherent in "I" contradict the possibility of a pluralization. If there cannot be several "I"'s conceived of by an actual "I" who is speaking, it is because "we" is not a multiplication of identical objects but a *junction* between "I" and the "non-I," no matter what the content of this "non-I" may be. This junction forms a new totality which is of a very special type whose components are not equivalent: in "we" it is always "I" which predominates since there cannot be "we" except by starting with "I," and this "I" dominates the "non-I" element by means of it transcendent quality. The presence of "I" is constitutive of "we."[52]

The dominance of the singular subject "I" in the linguistic figure "we," means, for Benveniste, that "'we' is not a quantified or multiplied 'I'; it is an 'I' expanded beyond the strict limits of the person, enlarged and at the same time amorphous…. 'We' annexes an indistinct mass of other persons to 'I.'"[53] In contrast, the "non-person" form of "he/she" permits a "true plural" because as a form, it does not rely upon the positing of person (subject): "…It is this non-person which, extended and unlimited by its expression, expresses an indefinite set of non-personal beings. In the verb, as in the personal pronoun, the plural is a factor of limitlessness, not multiplication."[54] I am interested in the ramifications of Benveniste's characterization of "we" and "they" on Spahr's use of these grammatical forms, particularly in light of the stance of transparency she cultivates (regardless of whether an "I," "we," or "they" organizes her statements) in the various works of *Well Then There Now*. Benveniste's argument that plural first person forms produce an amplification, not a

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[51] Émile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meeks (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1971), 201.
[52] *Ibid*.
[53] *Ibid*., 203.
[54] *Ibid*., 204.

multiplication, of the subjective person, "I," and serve as juncture points between the "I" and the "you" in which the "I" predominates suggests a way of reading Spahr's "we" that, counter to her expressed interest in using it to evoke inclusivity of "everyone" (including her readers), actually enforces the differences between "I" and "you," and poetic speaker and addressees. "We" as the designation of "an 'I' expanded beyond the strict limits of the person, enlarged and at the same time amorphous," may permit Spahr to voice a subject position "more largely than the personal way," but does it hail and invite the reader towards an inclusive and collective identification with the speaker?

"Some of We and the Land That Was Never Ours," the work that opens *Well Then There Now*, foregrounds collective identification's attending inclusions and exclusions as a problematic for the collection, and materially locates these struggles in the history and logic of claiming and drawing resources from commonly held land. The prose poem works within a narrow economy of images and clauses, so that as phrases repeat and recombine, complex meanings and relations emerge from the accumulating inflections of circulating imagery and clausal relation. The plural speaking subject is in constant flux between figurations grounded in "some of we," "some of us," "we," "us," and "we of all the small ones," and in relation to the land, the ground, the eating of grapes and, most broadly, "this world." As with the plural protagonist "they" elsewhere in Spahr's work, the "we" of this text contracts and expands with each clausal modification so that locating the speaker becomes an exercise in tracking the actions and affiliations with which it is associated:

> We are all. We of all the small ones are. We are all. We of all the
> small ones are. We are in this world. We are in this world. We are
> together. We are together. And some of we are eating grapes. Some
> of we are all eating grapes. Some of we are all eating. We are all in
> this world today. Some of we are eating grapes today in this world.
> And some of we let ourselves eat grapes. In the eating of grapes. We
> of all the small ones are what eats grapes. In the world of grapes.
> Eating grapes. We of all the small ones are what eats. Some of we
> are all together in the grapes. We of all the small ones are today
> in this world. In this world. By eating grapes. To eat grapes. Some
> of we let ourselves eat grapes today in this world. Some of we let
> ourselves be all together in the grapes. In taste. In the taste.[55]

The passage's inaugural declaration—"we are all"—establishes tension between a collective identification that includes "all" and the qualifications that form parameters for what "all" might entail, necessarily delimiting "all" into groups of "some." Clausal sorting and resorting draw attention to the echoes of grammatical constructions; "We of all the small ones are" recurs as "We of all the small ones are what eats grapes," thereby establishing parity between "we of all the small ones" and "what eats grapes." The list of modifying clauses that follow "We of all the small ones are today in this world" exemplifies the ways that grammatical modification

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[55] Spahr, *Well Then There Now*, 11.

orients subjects in relation to actions, states of being and causal relations: "In this world. By eating grapes. To eat grapes…. In taste. In the taste." And the introduction of the act of self-reflexively granting permission suggest that "we" retain the agency to self-organize and identify as "all together" through these actions and states of being: "Some of we let ourselves eat grapes today in this world. Some of we let ourselves be all together in the grapes."

The second passage of the work cites the title's "land that was never ours," and its permutations of the work's circulating imagery of grapes, eating, and expanding and contracting collectives of subjects acquires inflections informed by generalized references to historically real struggles around land ownership, tenancy, and use:

> Some of we and the land that was never ours while we were the
> land's. Started from us and of the ground which was never with we
> while we were the ground. Some of we wore the land. Some of we
> carried the ground. Some of we planted grapes. We ate the sheets of
> the ground. But we were made by the ground, by the grapes. Grapes
> of the ground. Some of we planted grapes. Green of the ground.
> Some of we were to settle. Some of we were to arrange. And the
> land was never ours. And the ground was never with us. And yet we
> were made by the land, by the grapes. We were eating the leaves of
> the land. The grapes of the land. The green of the land. The leaves.
> Sheets. And we were the land's because we were eating and the
> land let some of us eat. And we were the ground because we eat
> and the ground let some among us eat.[56]

As the configurations between land, ground, grapes, and "we" proliferate, so do the figural inflections and the potential divisions that might separate "we" into varying groups of "some of we." At some moments, "we" might seem to speak for Depression-era dust bowl tenant farmers—"We ate the sheets of the ground"—and at other moments, undocumented farmworkers engaged in more recent struggle: "Some of we were to settle. Some of we were to arrange. And the land was never ours. And the ground was never with us. And yet we were made by the land, by the grapes." And in still other moments, the incantatory quality of these iterative declarations invokes the land-based spiritualism of traditional, agrarian cultures: "And we were the land's because we were eating and the land let some of us eat. And we were the ground because we eat and the ground let some among us eat." Whereas permission was self-reflexive in the first passage, in this passage, permission extends from the land and the ground, and only to "some of us" and "some among us." The mediating agency of private ownership remains unnamed but spectral in the language of rights, possession, and ownership:

> …But the ground was never sure with us. Is never some
> of ours. Be never certain with us. Never will be rightly some of ours.

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56 Spahr, *Well Then There Now*, 12.

> Be correctly never certain with us. Never to be owned. Never to be
> had. And the land's green is the land's owning of us. And the green
> of the ground is the possession of the ground of us.[57]

This passage tests for the qualitative differences between designating possession through ownership as opposed to a more ambiguous relation of affiliation or feature: "the land's green" versus "the green of the ground." The passage's awkwardly constructed, concluding sentence capitalizes on the ambiguity of these grammatical relations, so that "possession" stands in ambiguous relationship to the ground: equivalent to "the green" of the ground, but a feature or property that relies upon an interrelation with "us." In its consideration of ownership's multiple determinations – as a feature, an action, and a relation of exchange – this passage resonates across the collection with the concluding meditation in "Sonnets" on owning and being owned through one's relationship to land, as well as with "Dole Street" and "2199 Kalia Road," the collection's essays that consider the history and legacy of colonization and capitalization of Hawaiian land and resources.

The note that accompanies "Some of We and the Land That Was Never Ours" discloses circumstances around the work's composition, describing the occasion from which Spahr drew some of the work's imagery and language, the "translation machine" she used to manipulate the text, and some of the considerations that informed the work: "I thought about the vines that grew in France, then came as cuttings to California, then went back to France after a blight. I thought about who owned what. And divisions" (15). Spahr's commentary attributes sources for the work's matter, as does "Dole Street"'s list of textual sources, and the pairing of a poem and an essay that suggests theoretical considerations against which to understand the poem's concerns in "Things of Each Possible Relation Hashing Against One Another." This textual self-reflexivity serves a supportive, rather than authoritative, function in Spahr's works; rather than designating an authorial figure or act from which meaning originates, Spahr makes transparent the resources, questions and bodies of information with which her work interfaces, inviting readers to understand her work as participating in broader conversations and inquiries. In the case of "Some of We and the Land That Was Never Ours," Spahr's description of her authorial process avoids making definitive or large claims: "I sat outside and took notes…. I was thinking about a story I had heard…. I was just trying to figure out this day. I came home and used a translation machine to push my notes back and forth between French and English until a different sort of English came out: this poem" (15).

These disclosures include among possible authorial acts the deferral of action, or action conceived of as thought. The final passage of "Some of We and the Land That Was Never Ours" accrues meaning through similar, iterative accumulations as in earlier passages, but takes as its central linguistic unit the infinitive verb form:

> To eat the grapes and not to plant the seed. To eat the grapes

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[57] Spahr, *Well Then There Now,* 12.

and not to plant seed. To hold on too tight. To be too strongly held in
the function. To change. To change. To make the change. To make
the change. To change the land. To change the ground. To throw out
the seed. To throw out of seed. To we are all in this world together
yet still some of we are eating grapes, others pecking at the hand.[58]

This catalogue of infinitives suspends action in states of potentiality and suggests
that complex relations and behaviors might themselves constitute cohesive,
organized actions. The difficult to parse fragment—"to we are all in this world
together yet still some of we are eating grapes, others pecking at the hand"—makes
its embedded predication "we are all in this world…others pecking at the hand"
equivalent in function to the infinitive verb form of the passage's "to – "
constructions. "To change" and "To change the land" share the same construction as
the more complicated construction, thereby asking readers to consider what might
constitute and complicate action, when understood as a complex of agents and
relations: we, some of we, and others.

 The inflections carried by eating and pecking in the work multiply here in
figurative accounts of the hierarchy between humans—"some of we are eating
grapes"—and the sparrows that recur throughout the work—"others pecking at the
hand" as well as among humans themselves: "We all the small ones are together in
this world always however that some of us eat grapes, others which picotent with
the hand." The work makes the inequities in these hierarchies explicit in its closing
lines, which join the interrogative "how" to the infinitive constructions in a series of
questions-as-statements that posit actions as potentialities:

> …How to move. How to move from settle on top to inside. How
> to move stabilization in the top inside. To embrace, not to settle. To
> embrace, not to arrange. To speak. To speak. To spoke. With the
> spoke. To poke away at what it is that is wrong in this world we are
> all in together. To push for what is with it is incorrect in this world
> which all the small ones are us in the unit.

The prepositional and pronominal constructions "what it is that is wrong in this
world" and "what is with it is incorrect in this world" carry out the functions of
referral and deixis, stopping short of naming their referents. Rather, they gesture
towards an immeasurable catalogue of "what it is that is wrong in this world" as
well as the proliferating differences among the subjects who populate the work and
which constitute "what is it that is wrong": the division between "some of we"
versus "all the small ones," those who eat versus those who do not, and those who
are of the land versus those who claim no land. These circuitous, deictic
constructions, as with the plural, pronominal subjects that simultaneously court and
defer stable identification, point to the relations of difference and affiliation—
relationships of proximity or distance, of shared or disparate relationship to
property and resources—that determine both real and imagined subjective states.

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[58] Spahr, *Well Then There Now*, 14.

Recalling Benveniste's designation of the "we" as an amplified "I" that "annexes an indistinct mass of other persons" to itself, I read both the "we" of this poem and the "I" as sites of opacity and exclusion in relation to other persons—"you," and readers—rather than moments of inclusion. The poem's various configurations and reconfigurations of "we" and "us" foreground divisions and differences rather than unification or collectivization, and the poem's concluding prose commentary features an autobiographical transparency that presents the speaking subject, "I," as a position only inhabitable by the figure of the author, Spahr. The figures to whom the poem's "we" refers remain absent referents: hypothetical "you's" annexed to the "I" that continuously reorganizes and dissolves this collation of persons. The opacity of "we" and the transparency of "I" both produce gestures of exclusion or difference; readers understand themselves to be neither included in the "we" nor affiliated with the "I," and thus occupying an ambiguous position of address. We can also read in the amorphous "some of we" a deferral of referentiality that is a consequence of the work's accumulating reconstitutions of this phrasal unit; this constitutes a second order of exclusion, through the exclusion of stable referentiality. My attention to exclusion and difference is informed by both the Derridean concept of *différance* (which evokes both the deferrals which characterize the signification process by virtue of the interdependence of signifiers, and the differentiation—between objects, concepts, figures, etc.—upon which meaning depends) and Barbara Johnson's pursuit of "difference" as a site for textual production of meaning in "Thresholds of Difference: Structures of Address in Zora Neale Hurston," Johnson observes that Hurston's texts foreground the interlocutionary context of any expression of difference, so that Hurston's analysis of "difference" in racial or socioeconomic designations (black and white, "insider" and "outsider," educated and non-educated) actually produces an exposure of identity *as difference* (or "self-difference"):

> What Hurston shows is that questions of difference and identity are always a function of a specific interlocutionary situation—and the answers, matters of strategy rather than truth. In its rapid passage from image to image and from formula to formula, Hurston's *text* enacts the question of identity as a process of *self*-difference that Hurston's *persona* often explicitly denies.[59]

This account resonates with my reading of Spahr's catalogues of paradoxical junctures presented by a collective and plural speaker as a related gesture of grounding meaning, value, and identity on the condition of difference. As in the previously quoted sections of "Sonnets" ("We with all our complexities. / We with all our identifications…. / We are full of thought and we are different / For which things so several.[60]) and in the negotiations between "some of we" and "we of all the

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[59] Barbara Johnson, "Thresholds of Difference: Structures of Address in Zora Neale Hurston," in *A World of Difference* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987),178.

[60] Spahr, *Well Then There Now*, 20-21.

small ones" in "Some of We and the Land That Was Never Ours," Spahr advances a collective speaker that foregrounds its internal disjunctures and divisions, thereby modeling a collectivity founded on difference and exclusions, rather than uniformity and inclusion.

The question of where and how readers or addressees locate themselves in relation to Spahr's multiply-determined "we" and "they" is a way of querying the interlocutionary context of these works. We see Spahr modeling this process at the level of descriptive narration, when she describes her third person plural protagonists measuring their complicity with large scale environmental shifts against different scales of reference and bodies of information, and at the level of readerly address, when Spahr moves between the use of "we" and "I" in "Some of We…", both of which tacitly hail a "you." Johnson qualifies an attention to the "interlocutionary situation" of discourse with the recognition that language's articulations in speech must be understood as acts that are fundamentally both rhetorical and political:

> On the threshold between the animate and the inanimate, the physical and the intelligible, the internal and the external, language is always also an articulation of power relations inscribed by, within, or upon the speaker. As such, it can only be studied as rhetoric. Whether one defines rhetoric as "language that says one thing and means another"…,as "the study of misunderstanding and its remedies"…, or as "the faculty of observing in any given case the means of persuasion" (as Aristotle and most teachers of composition do), it is clear that the study of rhetoric has everything to do with human politics.[61]

It is clear that Spahr's works engage political content by explicitly addressing issues related to globalization, environmental change, and cultural and economic imperialism, among others. I am interested in the way that her distinctive plural pronominal speakers and protagonists, in conjunction with Spahr's "transparent" first person speaker, manifest a political orientation, in pursuing the productive potential of difference and exclusion across the multimodal discourses of the works that *Well Then There Now* collates. Comprehensively, these works cultivate an orientation outwards—towards who or what has been excluded or escapes articulation—as well as inwards, towards the incompatibilities and disjunctures upon which relations, from the most intimate to the most expansive, depend. I am informed in my reading by Altieri's argument for a rhetorical turn in contemporary American poetry that prioritizes poetry's investment in producing social impact through activating a readership, and by Ellen Rooney and Sianne Ngai's theorizations of an anti-pluralist politics and poetics as crucial responses to the lie of inclusivity upon which the liberal pluralism of modern Western democracies depend.

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[61] Barbara Johnson, introduction to *A World of Difference* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 5-6.

In "The Place of Rhetoric in Contemporary American Poetics: Jennifer Moxley and Juliana Spahr," Altieri presents Spahr's speaking subject as an inclusive and permeable "'thin' subjectivity" that constitutes her adaptation of the traditional lyric voice to meet the rhetorical needs of a poetry carrying out "more overt social responsibilities" than are typically associated with experimental works emerging from Modernist and language writing traditions.[62] Altieri positions Spahr, among other poets including Jennifer Moxley, Lisa Robertson, Geoffrey O'Brien, and Karen Volkman, against a poetic tradition of anti-discursive aestheticization that he traces through Modernism's alignment of verse innovation with strategies and principles drawn from the plastic arts and music, through language writing's "sharpening and hardening" of these principles into a poetics that conceives of poems as internally-cohesive systems presenting as anti-absorptive objects that enable experience rather than understanding through readerly investment, rather than authorial acts or intentions.[63] For Altieri, language writing's resistance to the absorptive effects of conventionally discursive language may be partly traced to the Modernist adoption of the ideal of the "aesthetic free play" of a work of art that is an "individual structure of sensations trying to establish its own authority by the sublimity it could produce rather than the sense of common humanity it could reproduce in new ways": ideals that emerge out of post-Enlightenment, philosophical aesthetics and literary Symbolism, and which necessitated a devaluation of "any common human nature to which a discursive art like that of rhetoric could appeal:"[64]

> By the second half of the nineteenth century, rhetoric in poetry had come to seem an embarrassing mark of relying on old authorities and conventional agreements rather than forging new constellations of sensation that emphasized the suggestiveness of shifting internal relationships. Ideals of establishing rhetorical purposes for texts were replaced by a conception of art that treated language as a medium which, as in the other arts, had the power to achieve an independent existence or end in itself, apart from any cognitive or moral function.[65]

The high Modernist response was to seek "verbal equivalents for the sensuous materials basic to the expressive purposes of the other arts"; Altieri cites Ezra Pound, Mina Loy, Gertrude Stein and William Carlos Williams's investment in conceiving of the syntactic and aural effects of their written work as comparable to the visual effects of avant-garde painting. This led to the minimization of the "discursive components" of poetry that might "disfigure the fullness of immediate experience" and which would detract from "presentational immediacy."[66]

Language writing's motivations more explicitly voice a resistance to "old authorities and conventional agreements" and an argument should be made that

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[62] Altieri, "The Place of Rhetoric," 127.

[63] Charles Altieri, "What Theory Can Learn from New Directions in Contemporary American Poetry," *New Literary History* 43, no 1 (Winter 2012), 68-70.

[64] Altieri, "What Theory Can Learn," 66-67.

[65] *Ibid.*, 67

[66] *Ibid.*, 67-68.

language writing's experimentations constitute in some ways a counter-rhetoric, rather than an anti-rhetoric. Simply because language writing interrupts the processes of conventional referentiality and absorptive effect does not remove the question of the quality and rigor of engagement that this writing requires of its audiences. An argument for language writing as anti-rhetorical would prioritize models of engagement based on conventional modes of discourse (identification or empathy with the figure of the speaker or the content of the speech) at the expense of considering how literary effects operate in a rhetorical capacity outside of conventional paths of identification, agreement, or even pleasure. Spahr's account of language writing's development of an alternative grammatical economy foregrounds its utility in situating individual encounters with language within a social and political frame—a rhetorical tactic at the level of linguistic operations:

> The rhetoric of language writing points again and again to how language is bound up with a repressive governmental apparatus and also with capitalism in general….
>
> Western languages support and are supported by the mercantile tendencies of society, which valorize that which can be counted: the grammatical subject/object. The subject of the sentence is always an object – a person, place, or thing – and is given hierarchical priority. Subserviently, the verb gives action to this subject. Its conjugation is dependent on the subject/object's numerical quality, and the adjective bestows qualities on this subject. These objects are represented in grammar as fixed, locatable, and countable. Even uncountable subjects, abstract nouns such as "freedom" or "love," for example, appear to be quantitatively manageable in the sentence. The emphasis on disjunction and the nonstandard grammatical economy that accompanies much language writing challenges the assumption that language is an individual affair, a segregated mode of expressive correspondence that is unconnected to larger social apparatuses.[67]

The operations of a grammatical economy serve a rhetorical function insofar as the quantification and hierarchical ordering of actions and objects are acts of persuasion carried out by expressions of the social apparatus that determines shared grammars. In Spahr's account, language writing disrupts conventional, linguistic relations between people, places, things and actions in order to expose the lie of "individual" expression, free of ideological determination. For Altieri, the rhetorical turn in contemporary American poetry demonstrates a significant gesture of differentiation from language writing strategies because it organizes its linguistic interventions around a rhetorical figure, the act of persuasion, and the quality of sincerity: all devices and functions dependent on the figuration of a speaking subject and the assumption of an authorial act or intention.

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[67] Spahr, *Everybody's Autonomy*, 56.

Arguing that Spahr's work participates in this rhetorical turn that is recovering for experimental writing the discursive resources that have been banished through Modernist privileging of poetry's non-discursive capacities, Altieri observes in her subjects an effort to develop a speaking position that avoids the totalizing and interpellating trap of aiming to represent or speak for a community, in favor of the more powerful capacity of inviting participation through identification as well as disagreement.[68] Referring to a classical understanding of rhetoric as "the art of combining persuasive argument with demonstrative acts in order to shape distinctive attitudes," Altieri suggests that Spahr and other "poets brought up on the discourses of indeterminacy and readerly freedom want a more dialectical view of the rhetor's task"; rather than aiming to manipulate through persuasion, these poets seek to describe compelling or urgent emotional situations that will provoke response and participation:

> What binds author to audience is not so much the product composed by the rhetorician as the rendered situation, where complete agreement is far less important than the kinds of responsive participation that may in fact provoke various degrees of disagreement or withdrawal. The "I" in other words, is a rhetorical figure that solicits participation. With this change in the figure of the author or speaker, the figure of the audience also shifts substantially. The "you" and the "we" are not created by agreement about some conclusion but as projected positions for participation. The work comprises an effort to clarify the forces to which author and audience both must respond. Successful rhetoric, in these terms, does not necessarily persuade, but makes it possible to see what identification might consist of.[69]

Identification, in this account, depends upon speakers and readers mutually participating in a shared, affective experience, though with potentially divergent responses of disagreement or withdrawal. Authors do not presuppose or prefigure audiences through the presentation of conclusive beliefs or situations; they render situations that invite readerly participation, witness and a consideration of the responsibilities that attend this mode of witness:

> ...the new ideals of rhetoric also transform what they inherit: there is a desire to align rhetoric with conversation rather than with oratory, with participation and witness rather than masterful eloquence, and with the power to build communities rather than to construct perfect isolated works of exemplary craft. The rhetor idealized in the new poetry is no longer a master persuader or master craftsperson, but someone willing to risk renouncing an emphasis on "artefactuality" or

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[68] Altieri, "The Place of Rhetoric," 130-131.
[69] *Ibid.*, 130.

aesthetic finish in favor of speaking positions that invite the audience
to take responsibility for such witness.[70]

Altieri observes in Spahr's work a conversational deferral of mastery that invites identification through a "thin" subjectivity: an "elemental" and "generic subject position that could be inhabited by anyone" and which seeks community in its audience through offering "momentary subject positions" which it may share. Experiences of shared identifications are deliberately momentary or incomplete, which Altieri reads as variously reflective of Spahr's registration of the condition of modern sociality,[71] the failure either to participate fully or believe in movements for social justice[72] and poetry's capacity and prerogative to hold aloft oppositions and disjunctions, rather than resolve them.[73]

      The ideal of a subject position that "could be inhabited by anyone" therefore haunts Altieri's account of Spahr's subject, even as he acknowledges that these inhabitations might be partial or fleeting or might provoke withdrawal or disagreement. I read Spahr's interest in pronouns as "the most loaded parts of language"[74] as an investment in the referential figure of the speaking subject as the site for examining modes of identification and social organization, but not for inviting readerly inhabitation of these positions, as Altieri suggests when he claims that "Spahr offers…a "thin" subjectivity that reduces boundaries among agents and elicits direct participation in the political situations she dramatizes."[75] That Spahr's speaking subjects often take form through exclusions and differentiations suggests strategies towards readerly engagement that, rather than orienting the reader towards the speaking subject as a position to share, inhabit, or react against, orients the reader towards precisely those boundaries that the poem activates in order to calibrate proximity and distance: among speakers, between speaker and readers, and among readers themselves.[76] A position that anyone might inhabit and the reduction of boundaries aim for a pluralist inclusivity; Spahr's speaking subjects, as frequently as they might take the form of a plural "we" or a broadly permeable "they," reject the totalizing or universalizing gestures of pluralism for the sake of dramatizing the mechanics and consequences of differentiation.

      The problem with a pluralist speaking subject lies in the assumption of consensus towards a majority or dominant position, which necessarily excludes forms of organizing or recognizing difference or marginal positions. Spahr's account of the historical conditions which language writing registers directly links its

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[70] Altieri, "What Theory Can Learn," 65.

[71] Altieri, "The Place of Rhetoric," 133.

[72] *Ibid.*, 135.

[73] *Ibid.*, 137.

[74] Boykin, "A Brief Q&A"

[75] Altieri, "The Place of Rhetoric," 127-128

[76] In her discussion of identity and subject position in the work of Language poets Lyn Hejinian and Bruce Andrews, Spahr describes Hejinian's work in very similar terms: "Instead of establishing a series of full, coherent identities, Hejinian turns to mapping the networks of power and meaning that link her inner life to a politically suspect outer world of representational authority." Spahr, *Everybody's Autonomy*, 78.

disruption of the conventional poetic speaking subject to the civil rights, feminist, and black nationalist movements which increasingly inform U.S. political discourse from the late 1960s through the 1970s, posing a direct challenge to prevailing models and assumptions of an American democratic pluralism:

> The difference between the New American poetry (loosely individualistic and ego-centered) and language writing (loosely anti-individualistic and anti-ego-centered) resemble the differences between early 1960s politics and late 1970s politics. Basically by the mid-1960s the possibility of a pluralist "I" has come under critique. Race and gender separatism more or less begins to dominate American politics in the second half of the 1960s. Pluralism becomes suspect because it leaves the dominant subject and all its privileges intact, reinforces hierarchy with its individualism, and gives no credence to a multitude of power differentials. Or, in other words, while the pluralist "I" claims to be everyone's, it does not allow room for the "I" of the separatist or the nationalist. Nor is it the "I" of those who merely want to drop out of affiliation altogether.[77]

Responding to the criticism that language writing directed the efforts of primarily white-identified, educated poets towards eradicating individualism in poetry through anti-subjective modes at a time when alternative poetries of previously marginalized communities became deeply invested in voicing gendered and ethnically-identified subjects, Spahr contends that these practices applied their differing resources towards the same goal of challenging the forms and operations of a dominant poetics and subject position. Spahr posits an "autonomous turn" in American poetry at this time which accounts for the simultaneous emergence of the vastly different modes of language writing and literatures emerging from ethnic and race studies, and which mobilizes a rejection of theories of identification based on sameness:

> This desire to have it all, to be both autonomous and related (also a central concern of anarchism), is a useful one for discussions of identity. In current debates on the topic, identity is generally framed as either essentialist or constructivist…. Many critics assume that language writing has disavowed absolutes of identity. But it is, I think, more productive to see this writing as a dialogue that negotiates between these positions of pluralistic inclusion and respectful, categorical separation. And to continue the dialogue with Altieri, I think language writing often does demand, as he wishes it would, that "we try out identification;" but the nature of this identification is not formulated in a conventional manner ("Some Problems about Agency"

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[77] Spahr, *Everybody's Autonomy*, 73-74.

215). The identities proposed by these works are ones that reject theories of identification based on sameness.[78]

Spahr observes in language writing identification processes that do not depend upon "sameness" but which mediate between "pluralistic inclusion and respectful, categorical separation." The assumptions around what it means to identify with a subject position in a poem or an individual in society are themselves subject to the conventions of social or political apparatuses; accordingly, literatures invested in resisting dominant, hierarchical modes of representation also resist conventional principles governing and organizing relations between the politicized bodies of readers, authors or speaking subjects, and texts.

Spahr's critical orientation places her work in opposition to two theories of reading and literary production that are themselves opposed. Against one of these oppositional poles, Spahr challenges the "balkanization" of literary practice in the U.S. in the second half of the twentieth century, in which literatures are organized by ethnicity, race or "school," as in the New York or Language schools, and which, she argues, overlooks the shared critiques against hegemonic language and representations of subject central to these practices. Rather than seeking difference along lines of ethnicity, race or geography, Spahr distinguishes between literatures that uphold standard English and the cultural imperialism and curtailment that a conventional language enacts, and literatures that turn away from standard English in resistance to these curtailments, and in active exploration of the ways in which multiple languages and a transnational sensibility might be necessary to fully account for contemporaneity. Speaking specifically about anti-colonial poetry of the 1990s that incorporated, along with English, languages in which its authors were not fluent, Spahr argues that practices that resist standard English confront the ways that languages produce knowledge and identity, and intervene with acts that allow for non-identification with language:

> ...writers from current and former empires and various current and former colonies all write against standard English…. [it] is part of a long discussion about what is the public business of literature, but these works are having to wrestle with the debts of contemporary relationality in a time of forced and dramatic globalization, with how humans are together in the same room. They are insistent that literature is not merely for individual self-expression. And they also assume that writing can be separated from its ties to the national. They suggest that the ways that we talk about things do not belong only to us or only to the United States. That we need, at moments, the languages of others, languages we might or might not identify with. And not only that: it might be the only way we can think with any complexity about the contemporary moment…. I read this not as appropriative but rather as an awareness that we are all defined by others, or by other languages, without our consent, and that part of

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[78] Spahr, *Everybody's Autonomy*, 71-72.

thinking with others, and with literature, means thinking about how
one negotiates this, means risking error.[79]

By describing literary practices that emphasize relationality in the context of
globalization, and language's capacity to unilaterally determine identity, Spahr
organizes anti-colonial literary practices that experiment with non-identification
and transnational or anti-state orientations alongside literatures typically classified
as "experimental" (and often less overtly engaged in politics of identity or
decolonization). Spahr's alignment of "anti-colonial" literatures with "experimental"
literatures is invested in the delineation of a new, literary commons founded on the
principle of "a universalism with room for particularities," which would suggest
grounds for affiliation with modes of political resistance exemplified by two major
political movements that emerged in the 1990s: the anti-state, Zapatista movement
in Mexico, and anti-globalization protests in the U.S. organized against the World
Trade Organization.[80]

Spahr contrasts this model of a literary commons against the post-9/11
resurgence in "lyric and 'plain speech' poetries" which effectively reclaim the poetic
commons in service of a nationalist literature written in standard English,
supported by governmental and privately funded institutions: a curtailment of "the
public business of literature" to serve private and state-based interests.[81] In the
establishment of a literary commons meant to unite a public under the monolithic
imaginary of the state or the nation and its attending values of democratic
representation, Spahr observes the assertion of hegemonic modes of representation
and subject that modernist, Language, anti-colonial and contemporary,
"experimental" literatures seek to disrupt. The broad representation that "plain
speech" poetry claims to offer relies upon strategic exclusions of peoples and
literary practices that demonstrate the limits of such representation. Spahr's
investment in a "universalism with room for particularities" therefore speaks to her
resistance to literary balkanization's oppositional pole: literary and critical practices
that subsume difference, rather than segregating difference, in the service of
political pluralism.

Spahr's dual resistances to literary balkanization as well as literary
pluralism, both overtly political positions in their organization of subjects and their
investments in either unified or essentialist, segregated identifications, suggests that
her work might productively be understood in terms of an anti-pluralist theory and
practice that rejects the principle of community building through unilateral acts of
rhetorical persuasion in favor of mapping relations and terrains of knowledge that
enable autonomous acts of identification and self-organization. In *Seductive
Reasoning: Pluralism as the Problematic of Contemporary Literary Theory,* Ellen
Rooney pursues of a critique of pluralism as an ideological system that has been
under-theorized and which has structured political and cultural thinking around the
principle of a universal community in which every member has the potential to

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[79] Spahr, "The 90s," 177-178.
[80] *Ibid.*, 173.
[81] *Ibid.*, 179.

contribute to a consensus through mechanisms of persuasion. Arguing that pluralism in critical communities and political discourse was revived in the U.S. following the emergence of deconstruction theory and correlating movements to theorize and politicize subjectivity along lines of race, ethnicity, class and gender,[82] Rooney identifies the reader as the figure most troubling for pluralist discourse, which posits a generalized audience which inscribes and justifies its rhetorical acts:

> Pluralist forms of discourse first imagine a universal community in which every individual (reader) is a potential convert, vulnerable to persuasion, and then require that each critical utterance aim at the successful persuasion of this community in general, that is, in its entirety…. Pluralism, then, is not a practical commitment to methodological eclecticism, but an ensemble of discursive practices constituted and bounded by the problematic of general persuasion…. The symptomatic moment of pluralist discourse arrives when the theoretical problem of the position of the reader is displaced, rewritten as a question of logic, ethics, or rhetoric. To interrogate the status of the general audience is to risk discovering the interests of readers as a theoretical limit to persuasion, and this is a possibility pluralists must consistently evade, whatever their other critical commitments.[83]

In Rooney's account, pluralism assumes and thereby constructs a generalized audience as a corrective to the threat of the "impossibility of reading" or "anxieties of interpretation" posed by deconstruction, which delegitimizes singular lines of meaning and places the act of reading and the figure of the reader at the center of the work of textual interpretation. The "interests of readers" pose a "theoretical limit to persuasion" because an interested or partial reader represents a figure potentially excluded from that general audience: a figure who cannot be persuaded or whose interests cannot be represented by existing frameworks, and who therefore delegitimizes a pluralist claim to universality and inclusivity. Citing Louis Althusser's theory of ideological interpellation, Rooney links theories of identification of subjects to the practices of ideological persuasion: "In the case of pluralism, as we shall see, this process of ideological 'interpellation,' whereby pluralist 'ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects' (*Lenin and Philosophy* 173), produces a particular kind of reading and writing subject. The subject of pluralism assumes an infinitely persuadable (general) audience..."[84]

That persuasion, Rooney argues, takes the form of a "seductive reasoning," a term whose redundancy is evident in her account of pluralism's production of "reason as a universal seduction":

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[82] Ellen Rooney, *Seductive Reasoning: Pluralism as the Problematic of Contemporary Literary Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 36.
[83]Rooney, 1-2.
[84] Rooney, 53.

> Seductive reasoning is the practice of pluralism: the problematic of
> general persuasion imposes a regime of general seduction or
> seductive reasoning…. pluralism *produces* seductive reasoning, that is,
> produces reason as a universal seduction. Pluralism defines reason
> itself as the assumption of the theoretical possibility of general
> persuasion, that is, of the possibility of absolute seduction, seduction
> without exclusions, without contingencies. To refuse the seductive, to
> decline attempts to persuade a universal audience, to assume veils, is
> thus the unmistakable sign of irrationality…. Within the problematic
> of general persuasion, reasoning is always seductive, seductive
> without exception. An unseductive reason is a contradiction in
> terms.[85]

Rooney understands pluralist practice as founded on a conflation of seduction with reasoning, and a definition of reason as a logical expression of the possibility of general persuasion. Her activation of these terms recalls Altieri's observation of Spahr's rhetorical poetics as itself a qualified act of seduction; he argues that, rather than relying on the internal relations and sensually-motivating capacities of the poem as a self-contained artifact, Spahr "idealizes the rhetor careful to find available means of persuasion that will *seduce* an audience" (emphasis mine) so that poetry may "call attention to itself as a mode of labor that pursues the capacity to delight, move, and instruct the audience."[86] Rooney's characterization of a pluralist invocation of reason and rhetorical persuasion as a "seduction" challenges the argument Altieri makes for the "'thin' subjectivity"[87] or a "thin psychology" [88] Spahr develops through her indeterminate speaking subjects, which need only "articulate why, in a given situation, the roles of reporting or describing seem insufficient for the emotional life that is being invoked" in order to establish "common grounds with an audience… toward[s] testing what social bonds can be activated." [89] Altieri assumes a "common ground" toward which Spahr's speakers may "*seduce* an audience," (or "delight, move, and instruct the audience") approaches the pluralist investment in the possibility of general persuasion, as described in Rooney's work:

> This is the meaning of the claim that the pluralist may be a member of
> any faction in the critical field, so long as she practices a contentious
> criticism founded on the theoretical possibility of general or universal
> persuasion. Thus, marxism can be a pluralism or an anti-pluralism,
> depending on its relationship to the problematic of general
> persuasion. Feminism can be a pluralism or an anti-pluralism; indeed,

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[85] Rooney, 57-58.
[86] Altieri, "What Theory Can Learn," 74.
[87] Altieri, "The Place of Rhetoric," 128.
[88] Altieri, "What Theory Can Learn," 74.
[89] *Ibid*.

in the United States today, it is both. *Any* discourse can take up a place within the problematic of general persuasion.[90]

Anti-pluralist practices, in contrast, posit interested or partial (as opposed to impartial, disinterested and therefore persuadable) readers and reading practices, and theorize exclusion and struggle, rather than inclusion and consensus, as a necessary function of subject formation and mobilization. Locating antagonism between pluralist and anti-pluralist thought in historically material, political struggles in recent U.S. history, Rooney names some of the bodies of thinking (Marxist and feminist) that pluralism's tacit exclusions exclude and which offer the greatest potential for resisting the pluralism of liberal democratic social and political structuring. Marxism carries this resistive potential because it is "a discourse that privileges exclusions; class is one of the limits to general persuasion,"[91] and Rooney provides an excellent account of how "the colloquial discourse of democratic capitalism," in absorbing and repressing the colloquial understanding of pluralism as "sheer freedom"[92] (and "totalitarianism" as its opposition) relieves itself of the necessity to define its own, real limits organized against the problem and threats posed by marxist theory.[93] Feminism exhibits this resistive potential because of the "special status of the concept of difference" within its practices that "may act as a brake on its assimilation to the hegemonic pluralist problematic"[94] and, citing Gayatri Spivak, feminist criticism's "effort to expose the phallocentric movement by which 'all explanations…claim their centrality in terms of an excluded margin.'"[95] Rooney argues that regardless of the particular critical discourse—Marxist, ethnic minority-based, feminist—anti-pluralist theory and practices share the qualities of historical necessity, resistant, and interested reading,[96] deferral of claims to universality and truth, and "the recognition of the irreducibility of the margin in all explanations, the foregrounding of *interests*, with *exclusions* as the inevitable and clearly articulated consequence."[97]

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[90] Rooney*,* 249.

[91] *Ibid*., 63.

[92] *Ibid*., 25.

[93] "The elision of the relation established between marxism and pluralism by the colloquial discourse of democratic capitalism, which is effected by the wholesale repression of the colloquial, allows critical pluralists to evade the problem of marxist theory and with it the urgent question it asks, the question of exclusion. The world-historical opponent of pluralism is often named totalitarianism, but figures such as Jeanne Kirkpatrick (an academic and a diplomat), Elliott Abrams, and Ronald Reagan have recently clarified the series of substitutions whereby "totalitarian," instead of referring to a range of state practices from Nazism to apartheid to Stalinism, has come to signify any "marxist" state – and only marxist states. This reduction of heterogeneous marxisms to a monolithic stalinism is always achieved in the name of pluralism…. This "pluralist" rhetoric accuses its opponents (the Sandinistas and Castro and Stalin) of a monolithic totalitarianism – the exclusion of pluralism – precisely in order to exclude them…" Rooney, 26-27.

[94] *Ibid*., 244.

[95] *Ibid*., 243.

[96] *Ibid*., 240.

[97] *Ibid*., p. 63.

Sianne Ngai's essay, "Raw Matter: A Poetics of Disgust," offers an analysis of the way deictic constructions in poetries of "negative potentiality"[98] materialize an exclusion of referents in service of what she terms a "poetics of disgust" that directly challenges a literary and ideological framework of pluralism. Ngai activates the term and affect of "disgust" in order to demonstrate that the prolific theorizing around and mobilization of its affectively opposed term, "desire," as "polysemic, polymorphous, eclectic and all-inclusive," has elevated the logic of pluralism as a "contemporary cultural norm." While recognizing the utility of the "libidinal as theoretical paradigm" in generating critique in the fields of experimental poetry and literary theory in recent decades, Ngai argues that the pluralistic form that the libidinal currently assumes warrants scrutiny into the privileged role of "desire" in literary practice and theory.[99] Ngai suggests, in other words, that "desire" conceptualized as the expression of inclusivity and absorptive eclecticism, serves a pluralist politics of reading and analysis. Citing Rooney's work on the literary critical problematic of pluralism, Ngai suggests that a "poetics of disgust" would perform the anti-pluralist function of exposing and articulating the exclusions upon which a pluralist, libidinally-oriented discourse relies. Such a poetics could thereby introduce new, previously inarticulable positions from which to critique the language and ideology of late capitalist, consumer culture:

> The fact that there are fewer ways of "being disgusted" than ways of "desiring," which is to say fewer ways of *articulating* disgust, fewer terms available in the language of consumer culture to give it agency or voice, should foreground the question of the role it might play in a contemporary poetics committed to ideology critique. All the more so because the power of this affective response still manages to undermine attempts to curtail its expression. In its specificity, certainty, and force, the expression of disgust maintains a negative insistence that cannot be recuperated by the "seductive reasoning" of global capitalism and its pluralist dynamics, in spite of all efforts to neutralize such utterances. In resistance to all-inclusive strategies, a poetics of disgust would thus take the form of a poetics of both exclusion and radical externality, based on outwardness and excess.[100]

"Disgust" offers "specificity, certainty and force" where desire does not because instances of repulsion are highly specified in the linguistic economy of consumer culture, which features "more ostensible definitions for desire because it must accommodate so many permutations of this relation to persons and things.... at the same time [that] middle-class morality imposes a limit on ways of expressing outrage against the dominant power structure that *has the effect of curbing our*

[98] Sianne Ngai, "Raw Matter: A Poetics of Disgust," in *Telling it Slant: Avant-Garde Poetics of the 1990s*, ed. Mark Wallace and Steven Marks (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001), 171.
[99] Ngai, 164-165.
[100] Ngai, 164.

potential to articulate our abhorrence to it, and thus the additional effect of curbing our potential to fully comprehend or theorize our response."[101] Whereas desire takes on plural forms and an expansive reach, disgust assumes a singular form and force against, typically, a specified object.

For Ngai, a "poetics of exclusion and radical externality, based on outwardness and excess" accomplishes these externalities and exclusions through materializations enabled by the "discursive raw matter" of language. Ngai locates this "raw matter" in words that approach "formlessness" by resisting conventional evaluation (and formation) through metaphoric or metonymic means: the metaphoric relation between words and their meanings that gives form to thought, and the metonymic relation between words that links word forms with other word forms.[102] Ngai describes a process of giving "form to what is formless" that utilizes the "negative potentiality" of language to express the condition or quality of inexpressivity or the inarticulable; this process intervenes in the dematerialization of language effected through semantic and syntactic recuperations: an inscription of capitalism's abstraction of all material things and relations into commodities determined by exchange value. Identifying expletives and onomatopoetic words as examples of linguistic "raw matter" with "an irreducible materiality… that cannot be found in language that refers vertically (metaphorically) or horizontally (metonymically)" due to their resistance to substitution or deferral and inseparability from "their insistence—the affects they convey or the noises they make,"[103] Ngai observes a grammatical correlate in particular kinds of deictic constructions which similarly articulate a representational lack and refer only to their material instance and insistence: in the case of deixis, the insistence of pointing or referral. Citing Seymore Chatman's work on the "almost empty words" of deixis in the late writing of Henry James, Ngai makes explicit the work of exclusion and evacuation that deixis has the potential to carry out:

> The emptiness thus attributed to deixis recalls the role played by expletives and onomatopoeia in the rhetoric of disgust, as discursive formations in which a similar representational lack is articulated. Again, to say that utterances of disgust are nonrepresentational or formless is really to say that they are paradoxical representations of their nonrepresentationality, formations of the formlessness within language that threatens the stability of semantic fixation as well as word-to-word slippage. The gesture of pointing also constitutes part of disgust's rhetoric for similar reasons, particularly when *the object implicated by deixis is excluded or negated*. In other words, when grammatical pointers are dutifully pointing, presumably to an object, but the identity of this object is deliberately obscured or withdrawn; when the object is purposely made difficult to find, paradoxically, by

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[101] Ngai, 163-164.
[102] *Ibid.*, 172.
[103] *Ibid.*, 174.

the very condition of its being pointed at; or when it can't be found at all.[104]

Ngai includes pointing at an absent, withdrawing, or obscured object as part of an anti-pluralist rhetoric of disgust because in disgust's exclusions and negations, such a rhetoric defies the inclusivity and articulations of a rhetoric of polysemous, all-inclusive desire. The emptiness that deixis generates through gestures of referral that fail to secure or name an object (or subject) by "always pointing beyond themselves"[105] manifests an "outwardness (the exteriority of a sign to itself) [which] *is precisely where the materiality of the sign is preserved and resides.* The deictic, the expletive or onomatopoeic phrase, @#$%!!id?!s, brackets containing nothing: these forms of formlessness are strategically utilized by the writer against the dematerialization of language occurring daily in the communicative circuits of capital"[106] with a "materiality…based on nonidentity."[107] Ngai's "materiality" of formlessness advances a negative figuration that calls into question the substance of a "formless materiality." A positive figuration of the model of referentiality Ngai describes would point to deferral or difference as the substantive outcome of these "brackets containing nothing." Ngai's investment in "nonidentity" recalls Rooney's citation of feminist critic Elizabeth Berg's proposal for an "iconoclastic" writing and reading practice that would reject identity as its basis for engagement with readers: "'a writing project based on identity sets up one of two possible relationships to the reader: one of seduction or one of confrontation…. In either case, the relationship is one of specularity, where the reader can only mirror the writer.'"[108]

In manifesting nonidentity rather than identity, deictic rhetorical acts in service of an anti-pluralist mode of exclusion generate a bracketed space "containing nothing" and turn away from the figure of a generalized reader and the possibility of general persuasion. Ngai, like Rooney, politicizes a critique of pluralist rhetoric and principles in the realm of literary criticism by aligning its exclusions with a Western, liberal democratic investment in excluding Marxist theory and forms of social organization that take exclusion – its own exclusion from the dominant subject body, or exclusions within the field it organizes – as a first principle:

> Because pluralism in its all-inclusive ideology excludes exclusions, as Rooney argues, the exclusion of Marxisms becomes theoretically essential to a pluralist conception of liberal democracy. This exclusion of Marxisms bears directly on the relationship between disgust and desire; there's no coincidence that among other political theories, Marxism stands out as the one in which disgust is most explicitly and forcefully articulated. Disgust is intrinsically exclusionary; in its

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[104] Ngai, 176.
[105] *Ibid.*, 180.
[106] *Ibid.*,
[107] Ngai, *Ibid.*, 181.
[108] Rooney, *Seductive Reasoning*, 58-89.

function of articulating a profound disgust with capitalism, the rhetoric of Marxism is also exclusionary, and thus neither Marxism nor the disgust it expresses can be recuperated by pluralism.

Thus the poetry of disgust, I would argue, again making an analogy with Marxist theory, *deliberately excludes* "the general reader" in order to make the space for the devil, or a reader *willing* to occupy the externalized place of radically other.[109]

The outwardness and formless forms of "empty" deictic constructions operating under the logic of an anti-pluralist poetics of disgust rather than desire aim to materialize lack or, as I have argued, a materialization of referentiality as an act of deferral that, having excluded the "general reader," permits the formation or activation of a subject who is "radically other" and neither the reflection nor opposition of the identity fixed in an author's embodied speaking position. By withdrawing from identification, texts of exclusion create a space that a "radically other" subject might occupy: "paradoxically, in the economy of disgust, it is by means of an originary exclusion that the textual encounter is made intersubjective."[110]

We might now consider the excessive deictic constructions of "Some of We" as moments in which the text achieves acute states of "intersubjectivity" rather than Altieri's model of a "thin subjectivity" of reduced boundaries between subjects. "Some of we" who consider "what it is that is wrong in this world" and "what is with it is incorrect in this world" represent linguistic invitations to a "radically other" reader who might recognize in the deferral of quantifiable, qualified subjects and nameable diagnoses for the world's injustices the conditions for engagement enabled by an anti-pluralist poetics. These include, in Ngai's terms, an "externalizing exclusion [that] suggests a form of textual engagement other than what is ordinarily described as "close" reading" and an interference with "a reading practice based on the principle that what is at stake in every textual encounter is a hidden object, one that can be discovered by the reader only if he or she reads deeply enough."[111] The "radically other" reader confronted with the externalizing gestures of Spahr's deictic constructions neither engages in the absorptive and prescriptive act of "close reading" nor identifies herself as the text's "model" audience; she remains outside the collation voiced by Spahr's "we," and resists partial or transitory identification with Spahr's first person speaking subject.

Turning again to Ngai's citation of Henry James's "excessive deixis" as a measure of the social and political conditions that textual subjectivities might register, we find that these social and political relations are among the "intangibles" that a text committed to articulating the conditions and experience of subjectivity would struggle to materialize, particularly in resistance to the operations of a pluralist, democratic capitalist discourse in which all relations are transformed by a

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[109] Ngai, 186.
[110] *Ibid.*, 185.
[111] *Ibid.*, 184-185.

dematerializing system of commodified value. Here, Ngai demonstrates the portability of an expansive, Jamesian commitment to textual registrations of the interrelation between individual, society, and history to a contemporary critique of capitalist ideology:

> …what's at stake for James in his excessive deixis is his preoccupation with relations. The writer's awareness that "behind every petty individual circumstance there ramifies an endless network of general, moral, social, and historical relations" is what motivates his efforts to "relate *every* event and *every* moment of life to the full complexity of circumambient conditions" (Chatman 78). This overwhelming task is none other than that of describing what informs the subject's individual consciousness and is simultaneously radically beyond it. The dilemma becomes that of being a small subject inscribed by a big System, say "capitalism," a subject who tries to put herself against the System yet being fully aware of how it defines her. One is easily threatened by terror and paralysis in the face of this vast interconnectedness of relations, a network so complex it seems ungraspable in its entirety. But then one runs the risk of approaching capitalism as sublime, when its effects are all too unsublime in daily life. The writer's strategy in interrogating this network of relations, without being subsumed by them in their enormity, is to refuse them as abstraction. In order to foreground the social and political spaces *between* subjects in a discursive network, the writer finds herself relying on rhetorical devices that materialize these "intangibles" without simply objectifying them. Discursive matter with the ability to designate the particular form of formlessness: as [ ], a constitutive lack or structural void.[112]

Ngai turns to the deictic, "*this/that/it*" constructions in Kevin Davies's poem, *Pause Button*, to illustrate poetic materializations of abstract relations, but her description of the "terror and paralysis in the face of this vast interconnectedness of [capitalism's] relations" which can confront writers tasked with accounting for the "network of relations" that both informs and is "radically beyond" the individual consciousness of the contemporary subject of capitalism comes close to describing both explicit affective states and implicit, linguistic materializations in Spahr's work. For example, Ngai's characterization echoes the anxieties Spahr's plural protagonist expresses in "Unnamed Dragonfly Species"—"They were anxious and they were paralyzed by the largeness and the connectedness of systems, a largeness of relations that they liked to think about and often celebrated but now seemed unbearably tragic" (92-93)—and the rhetorically excessive constructions Spahr develops in order to materialize both the intimacy and the great distances that characterize the "social and political spaces between subjects": "who authorizes so one is not what individual one says one is… who is characterized how by some and

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[112] Ngai, 178-179.

not by others. / who is various" (27). These expressions speak to Spahr's vigilance in navigating the experience of the immediately experienced social relations that determine who "some of we" are and that simultaneously separate and interrelate "we" from "they"; but in her refusal to invite easy identification of or with the referents that escape her deictic gestures, Spahr's project privileges orientation over identification, and organization—of self in relation to text or, even, self in relation to relation—over persuasion.

Given the stylistic and linguistic prominence of Spahr's plural, pronominal subjects in her work, the near absence of this device in a work that names "relation" in its title, "Things of Each Possible Relation Hashing Against One Another," suggests that Spahr's strategies for figuring exclusion and difference and enacting externalizing rather than internalizing gestures extend beyond her use of pronominal figures. "Things of Each Possible Relation" consists of several poems and a short essay describing the provenance of the poems: the history, research, source texts, process and personal concerns that produced these works. From one source text, a history of the Marquesas islands, Spahr adopts the inaugural and concluding orientations of the poems: "a view from the sea (the view of those who arrived from elsewhere) and the view from the land (those who were already there)." From another text, a study of traditional Hawaiian botany, Spahr adopts language that recurs as a phrasal theme with variations throughout the works: "The introduction of exotic (alien) plants and animals as well as Western concepts of government, trade, money, and taxation began a series of large and extremely rapid changes." (71). The essay also problematizes the genre of "nature poetry" for the project, critiquing as narrow and irresponsible the purview of a certain type of nature poem Spahr encountered upon moving to Hawai'i,[113] and concluding with Spahr's advocacy of the practice and tradition of ecopoetics. Citing the theoretical work of Jonathan Skinner and others, she describes it as "a poetics full of systemic analysis that questions the divisions between nature and culture"(71).

But the poems conspicuously eschew declarative predications that would delineate a hierarchy of concerns or relations towards a "systemic analysis" of the impact of colonization and commercial and industrial development on natural environments and indigenous cultures, which emerge as the thematic concern for the works. The opening poem is a list of complex and compound noun phrases existing in relation to verbs primarily in the infinitive form:

> the arrival to someplace else
> the arrival to someplace differently
> the greenness of the ground
> the calmness of the compartments
> the constant movement to claim, to gather, to change, and to
>   consider sea
> ....
> the cause, the modifies, and the sea stops considering

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[113] She specifically cites "747 poems," which refers to poems "written by those who vacation there and…often full of errors." Spahr, *Well Then There Now*, 69.

> the requirement in the meeting
> the entrance with this someplace differently
> things in constant movement
> and from the green of the earth which it magnifies for coolness
> considering from calmness and from ventilation
> and the sea is modified[114]

Without verbs or agents to determine causation, the accumulating noun phrases stand in relation of correlation and contingency to one another. Conjunctions permit correlation but stop short of describing causation, as in the final poem's "view from the land," in which the "difficulties of the regularity of the soil and all their factories / and all the units of fresh water" emphasize the inflections that the language of industry—"regularity," "factories," "units"—impose by transforming the first section's "green of the ground" into the "difficulties….of soil," and ask readers to consider the chronology and impact of these transformations as historical, systematic practices. But without agents or actions linking actor to acted upon, the narrative of causation remains, exterior to the poem's catalogue of things which variously register their indifference or adjustments to the spectres and spectacle of change: "the constant motion of claiming, collecting, changing, and taking" and "The constant movement to claim, to gather, to change, and to / consider sea."

The poems that follow take up relations of correlation and proximity as a literary problematic for the series, citing in multiple instances "the problems of analogy" and more explicitly generating relations of correlation through a series of "like" and "as" constructions":

> like the language of the human being and hummingbird of the
>   language
> as newt the wing under the amphibians and the lizard under
>   reptiles has taste of the eyes of the lizard and the eyes of
>   the human being
> slipping the analogy of the opening of things
> join the night of doubled ramification
> ……………………………………………………
> as the wings of the butterfly and of the bird
> as sucking hummingbird and sucking butterfly
> as the tongue of humans and the tongue of hummingbird
> as the eyes of the lizard and the eyes of humans
> as newt the wing under amphibians and the lizard under reptiles
> night gliding from analogy[115]

Spahr attributes some of the work's linguistic patterning to a process of word manipulation similar to that which she describes in her endnote to "Some of We." Using an on-line translation engine, Spahr translated drafts of these poems in

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[114] Spahr, *Well Then There Now*, 55.
[115] *Ibid.*, 61-62.

English between the Romance and Germanic languages of cultures that have colonized territories in the Pacific, then incorporated the translations as linguistic liminalities—"full of flaws and…some sort of language that only alludes to sense because it is so connected with another language"—into "complicated, unrecognizable patterns" that reference "the math that shows up in plants" and "the shapes of the things" Spahr observed, having recently moved to Hawaii at that time (71). The "slipping" and "gliding" of analogy therefore might refer to the slippage in sense and between semantic units that translation of words from one language to another entails, but also the richness of relations that analogy as a principle of relation permits. Each verse line in the series that begins with "like" or "as" presents itself in relation of likeness to something else, whether the verse lines that precede and follow it or the series as a whole, and embeds within itself its own pair of analogues. "The wings and the butterfly and of the bird" and the "eyes of the lizard and the eyes of humans" suggest simple relations of like function and like appearance, but "The language of the human being and the hummingbird of the language" suggests a metonymically linked pair, in which "the language of the human being" might constitute a whole system, of which the "hummingbird of language" exists as a part; alternatively, the "hummingbird" of language also operates as a metaphor for the first term, and phonetically, "human being" and hummingbird" are consonant analogues for one another.

The second poem in the series names the problematic of the analog, and thus, of translation, in its first two lines—"analogy from analogy / analogy of analogy"—and features a series of short variations on a genitive construction whereby one subject serves as the possessor of another through relations of metonymy or biological association:

> grub of the grasshopper
> connection from connection
> pinworm of the fly
> connection of the connection
> egg of the bird
> link of the link
> life from life
> connection of connection
> life from the life
> life of the lifespan[116]

Here Spahr exploits the shared function of the prepositions "from" and "of" in describing relations of geniture—"grub" and "grasshopper," "pinworm" and "fly," "egg" and "bird"—and exploring the boundary between relations of possession that "of" might suggest and relations of metonymy, proximity and origination that "from" suggests. Collectively these lines foreground the interrelation of species and of life processes as relational structures for the work's unattributed causations, wherein life produces life and connections between living things proliferate under scrutiny.

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[116] Spahr, *Well Then There Now*, 58.

Spahr observes in the work's penultimate segment that "if one forms nature to convert something into structure / then the problems of the analogy of nature also convert" (65). The final section of the series ("the view from the land") bears this out; it introduces the language of human industry and technology ("the trunk of a boat... / the network of a boat... / ...all their factories" (67)) and compares the rich permutations of the "analogy of nature" that the work explores (possession, geniture, origination, attribution, metonymic proximity) against the relations brought about by the interventions of industry, or "western concepts of government, trade, money and / imposition" (57). The work's final section names the work's lists as "things of different proportion," "things of any relation differently transformed," and "things of each possible relation" that, in "hashing against one another," materialize the relations of correlation and causation whose agents and impacts lie just beyond the named sites, species and abstractions of the poem. The refrain that appears midway through the work, "we are consequently / we are consequently," embodies this deferral of causation; acknowledging only the phenomenon of consequence, the text introduces a rare instance in which a plural protagonist orients speaker and reader towards the expansive causal relations that determine collective life, yet remain unbounded and unnamed.

The other prominent instance of a plural "we" in "Things of Each Possible Relation" occurs in the second segment, in the form of the declaration that "what we know is like and unalike" (56). Spahr emphasizes the opposition between "like and unalike" knowledge that metonymically evokes the broader conditions of difference and exclusion that I have been tracking in her work. In the collection's endnotes and her source text attributions, Spahr advances a model of knowledge as the collective product of sharing and exchange between different authors and texts: "what we know is like and unalike." In this way, knowledge evolves as the consequence of interpersonal and intertextual relations between disparate persons, communities, and practices; poems register and organize these bodies of knowledge, and in this way, serve as nexus points for these relations. [117] But rather than sites for the dissolution of boundaries between subjects towards a pluralist inclusivity, Spahr's works emphasize the distinctions upon which "we" and "they" operate, and the different bodies of knowledge from which her work draws. It is notable, then, that the two prose essays collected in *Well Then There Now* that engage in analysis and anecdotal documentation of Hawaii's history of cultural imperialism, colonization, resource appropriation, and the encroachments of private interests in the form of property rights and commercial development are also the only works in the collection exclusively voiced through a first person singular speaker, one that most transparently indicates Spahr's own voice and subjectivity. How might these essays participate in the collection's larger project of generating externalized relational spaces for a readership's self-organization, and resisting a specular relation of

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[117] Spahr has described the lists of species names in "Gently Now, Don't Add to Heartache" as repositories of knowledge: "I especially like the list as lament. As a sort of recognizing or call out of what is becoming lost. In these poems with lists of plants and animals in them I am thinking of poetry as a place for storing information. I am thinking of the age old uses of the list poem as a way of keeping knowledge that needs to be kept." Boyko, "A Brief Q&A."

identification between speaker and a reader by means of persuasion or a pluralist position of inclusion and subsumption?

In some ways, these essays cannot contribute, in the way that Spahr's verse does, to a poetics of strategic exclusions. Instead, these essays explicitly name the conditions of contemporary subjectivity that motivate these poetics:

> …what I have learned from walking up and down Dole Street
> is that one cannot just celebrate syncretism. It comes with
> a complicated history. For syncretism to matter as a way out of
> all the separations that define us and their potential turns to
> absolutes, it can't be simple. Simple syncretism has been used
> again and again in Hawai'i to erase the power dynamics that
> make it a colonial state. The fact that certain people had to meet
> the values, languages, and desires of certain others who
> suddenly arrived because they could not survive otherwise while
> those who arrived had a choice about whether they would
> meet the values, languages, and desires of those who were
> present often gets overlooked.[118]

A simple celebration of syncretism would cite "things of each possible relation" without gesturing towards or materializing those relations; Spahr's deictic constructions and lists of analogous, like and unlike things refer outwards towards unnamed agents and relations that make implicit the larger systems and relationships that determine immediate, subjective experience. But in this excerpt we recognize Spahr's preference for deictic, pronominal subjects which defer naming so as to activate readers in orienting themselves within the relationship of colonized and colonizer and between "certain people" and "certain others" that she outlines. Though Spahr populates the essay with the western names of historic figures of Hawaiian annexation and its provisional governments, as well as the broad populations that constitute "those who arrived [who] had a choice"—"haole and asian settlers… settlers who came mainly from the continent" (43-49)—in this statement, the closest "Dole Street" comes to an argument and advocation of personal, political responsibility, Spahr's complex pronominal constructions confer responsibility for naming, identification and affiliation onto her readers.

In another gesture of deferral of authority and referral to sources, narratives, and actions external to herself and her text, Spahr includes a "confession" as an endnote to "2199 Kalia Road" that qualifies her study of the private development of the beaches and wetlands of Waikīkī as necessarily limited: by the parameters of her considerations, because she is "nowhere smart enough to tell this story," and because the narrative "is a long complicated story that requires pages of attention" (121). Her "confession" begins with these qualifications:

> I've only told a small story. There are layers on top of layers to this
> story. I am only beginning to understand them. My understanding of

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[118] Spahr, *Well Then There Now*, 48.

> Waikīkī is only six years old and based on brief forays into the place.
> I have only skimmed the surface. And even though I now live right
> on the edge of it, I tend to drive through Waikīkī. I have not worked in
> Waikīkī, which is what I think is takes to really know it.[119]

Notable here is the repetition of place name—Waikīkī—that stands in conspicuous contrast to suppressions like the one examined above, wherein readers must infer who the terms "certain people" and "certain others" designate. Spahr's insistence upon the name of this "weird and hard to figure out place" (113) suggests that the activity of site-specific scrutiny, rather than moving the author towards authority and the reader towards a comprehensive narrative, necessarily ramifies into other narratives and other authorities:

> I tried to think some about public and private in this essay. But I
> could come up with nothing profound to say about it. It is obvious
> that private interests are always encroaching on public ones and
> that tourism just makes this worse. Then tourism combined with
> colonialism is a lethal stew.[120]
>
> ...
>
> But Ida looked at my essay and she pointed out that I had left
> out the military. She is right. This is a long and complicated story that
> requires pages of attention. I am nowhere near smart enough to tell
> this story.[121]

The subjectivity Spahr performs through the first person speaker of these essays should not, obviously, be mistaken for her own. But more than with the first person or plural speakers of her verse, the first person speaker of these essays limits the readerly engagement to a mirroring of the author through either shared identification or rejection. But by expressing an absent or displaced authority and organizing the essays around her ambulations up Dole Street and in the area of one of Waikīkī's luxury hotels and the beach access points and public access corridors that it curtails, Spahr models an intent towards documenting knowledge: both documenting other people's knowledge, and documenting knowledge as a process whereby one moves towards what is or can be known through research and visceral encounters with one's objects of inquiry. Physical sites, access points, and place names determine the avenues of local history Spahr pursues, and displace the author as an organizing intelligence onto an ever-ramifying network of relations, sites, and histories which present both a responsibility and a challenge to individual agents:

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[119] Spahr, *Well Then There Now*, 121
[120] *Ibid.*, 116
[121] *Ibid.*, 121.

I need to think about Dole Street's history because I am a part
of Dole Street as I walk up and down it. I came to it as part of this
history. As the stereotypical continental schoolteacher, I need to
think about how to respect the water that is there, how not to suck it
all up with my root system, how to make a syncretism that matters,
how to allow fresh water to flow through it, how to acknowledge and
how to change in various unpredictable ways.[122]

Describing the condition of being an individual agent within a larger system through a lens of self-scrutiny, Spahr identifies her responsibilities and complicities as a continental American teaching at a Hawaiian university, living in Hawaii and therefore "a part of this history" of cultural and political imperialism. The passage's concluding declaration that she will think about "how to not suck it all up… how to make a syncretism that matters, how to allow fresh water… how to acknowledge and how to change…" recalls the litany of "how to"s that concludes "Some of We": "How to move. How to move. How to move from settle on top to inside. How to move stabilization on the top inside" (14). In framing directives for action and intention in the form of "how to" questions-as-statements, Spahr's rhetoric eschews authoritative acts of instruction, persuasion or singular narration, and instead posits the questions and ever-ramifying relations that decentralize both author and reader into a network of shared relation and shared responsibility.

 In this sense, Spahr's poetics engages the principles of self-organizing developed by the social justice movements that she cites as models for the "universality with room for particulars" she seeks in contemporary, North American poetry, but through the political and rhetorical orientation of an ecopoetics that displaces human subjectivity from the center of the systems that determine the world and takes the relations on which these systems are built as the central unit of importance. Resisting the "pluralist social logic in which the production of knowledge is seen as consensual,"[123] Spahr's plural speakers, deictic referrals to referents beyond the margins of her text and her encouragement of a multi-eyed, multi-focus reading practice all foreground the relations that determine not only access to knowledge but the production of subjects within those bodies of knowledge. Knowledge, in Spahr's works, evolves as an intentional activity in which "what we know is like and unalike" and permits the possibility of subjects and bodies of knowledge that may stand apart from her own, neither identifying with nor diametrically opposed to her orientation, but "radically other." Neither courting her readers' identification through rhetorical persuasions based on reason, authority or directives to action, nor averting her focus from crises of interrelation and the weight of collective responsibility for the world, Spahr's work more often activates a negative potentiality; in refusing to definitively name "what it is that it wrong in this world" but constructing the relations that structure both her own pleasures—manifestations of the richness of nature, the compensations of intimate

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[122] Spahr, *Well Then There Now*, 49.
[123] Ngai cites Rosemary Hennessey's *Materialist Feminism and the Politics of Discourse* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 15. Ngai, 187.

affiliations— and her sense of the world's sprawling tragedies—environmental catastrophes, economic exploitation—her work materializes a discursive system against and with which readers must determine their own personal and social orientation; these orientations constitute the externality towards which her works turn.

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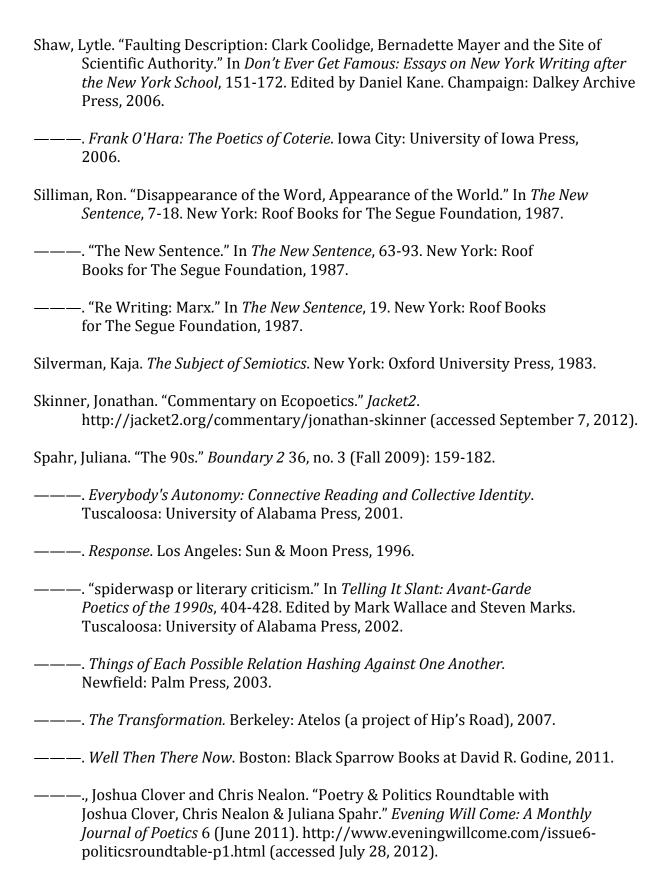
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