

Abstraction in Contemporary Poetry: An Apprenticeship in Reading

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Declaration

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Sweet or salted is an exemplary paradigm in the sense of associated poles mistaken as opposites...

(Daisy Lafarge 2018)

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List of Abbreviations

Charles Altieri

ATC	<i>The Art of 20th Century American Poetry</i>
ET	<i>Enlarging the Temple</i>
PA	<i>Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry</i>
PN	<i>Postmodernisms Now: Essays on Contemporaneity in the Arts</i>
POR	<i>The Particulars of Rapture</i>
RI	<i>Reckoning with the Imagination</i>
SS	<i>Self and Sensibility in Contemporary American Poetry</i>
SA	<i>Subjective Agency</i>
WS	<i>Wallace Stevens and the Demands of Modernity</i>

Gilles Deleuze

DR	<i>Difference and Repetition</i>
ECC	<i>Essays Critical and Clinical</i>
F	<i>Foucault</i>
FB	<i>Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation</i>
LL	<i>'Language and Life'</i>
LOS	<i>The Logic of Sense</i>
TP	<i>(with Félix Guattari) A Thousand Plateaus</i>

Peter Gizzi

AH	<i>Artificial Heart</i>
Out	<i>The Outernational</i>
SVLW	<i>Some Values of Landscape and Weather</i>
TS	<i>Threshold Songs</i>

Peter Manson

BCL	<i>Between Cup and Lip</i>
FTGOL	<i>For the Good of Liars</i>
MG	<i>me generation</i>
PFR	<i>Poems of Frank Rapture</i>

Abstract

Ellen Dillon

Abstraction in Contemporary Poetry: An Apprenticeship in Reading

This project considers the use of the term ‘abstract’ in the context of poetry, starting from the concept of ‘painterly abstraction’ outlined by Charles Altieri in his 1989 book *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry* which posits a model of abstraction based on writings on abstraction in the visual arts. This thesis will contend that Altieri’s mode of abstraction, particularly its use of exemplarity, places limitations on its own readings, and it sets out to uncover the nature of these limitations and explore their ethical and heuristic consequences.

It will draw on writing on abstraction by Gilles Deleuze to develop a theoretical framework that will put pressure on the key principles of Altieri’s abstraction in order to formulate a mode of reading that can engage responsively with a range of modern and contemporary poetry. This involves a close reading of Altieri’s texts, attending to the structure and evolution of the central concepts of agency and meaning. It situates his model of abstraction in the context of ideas about abstraction in poetry that preceded or were contemporaneous with its initial elaboration, while also considering his work in dialogue with writings on abstraction in contemporary poetics, art and philosophy that offer alternatives to his understanding of the concept, in an attempt to elaborate a supple and adaptable praxis of reading that is responsive to a range of contemporary poetry.

This mode of reading will then guide studies of contemporary poetry by the American poet Peter Gizzi and the Scottish poet and translator Peter Manson, adapting its guiding abstractions in response to the materials and modes of meaning it finds in their work. Its praxis of reading will be guided throughout by an emphasis on abstractions as adaptable heuristic strategies rather than fixed conceptual frameworks.

Introduction: Thinking with Abstractions

'You cannot think without abstractions; accordingly, it is of the utmost importance to be vigilant in critically revising your modes of abstraction' (Whitehead 1948, p.59)

Charles Bernstein has written that 'either everything is abstract or nothing is' (2013, p.492); this thesis is determined to work through the possibilities of this apparent impasse. The project originated in a desire to understand the modes and functions of abstraction in modern and contemporary poetry, seeking to distinguish between painterly and philosophical modes of abstraction and to classify the different ways poetic language can be abstract. Bernstein's claim reveals a tension inherent in the definition of the term 'abstraction' itself that has been central to Western philosophy from its origins. Aristotle's concept of *aphareisis* involves two distinct processes of abstraction: the gathering together of examples to provide an abstracted 'universal', and the conceptual stripping away or removal of attributes in order to arrive at an 'essence' (Mendell 2017, n.p.). Thus, even prior to considering abstraction in relation to such apparent antonyms as concreteness and figuration it is essential to note, as Bernstein does here, that the term is always already in tension with itself.

In an attempt to narrow and centre this focus, attention necessarily turned to Charles Altieri's *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry: The Contemporaneity of Modernism*. This text is central to the canon of critical writing upon poetic and painterly abstraction, which is otherwise relatively sparsely-populated, making it a text that had to be worked through in order to find other modes of abstraction to explore and affirm. It was useful both for its detailed linking of abstract art and modernist poetry, and for its commitment to establishing the contemporary relevance of poetic ideals derived from modernist visual abstraction. However, close reading of the text also generated a sense of scepticism about the status and indeed relevance of Altieri's arguments that is centred on the abstraction of Altieri's own prose and the nature of its resulting challenges to the reader and the complex work of relating abstraction to politics.

Altieri's book adopted a relatively uncritical stance towards modernist claims for progress, as evidenced by a tendency to elide problematic political positions. Ezra Pound's fascism was described as a 'turn to increasingly abstract models of order' (PA, p.318), with the critic and his reader placed in a position where 'we must...grant that ethic a certain amount of interpretive generosity, if we are not to make ourselves appear more tyrannical and shrill than Pound at his worst' (p.315). It is worth asking what 'abstract' means in this context. Pound supported Social Credit in opposition to the abstraction of the international banking system, for which 'only the surgeon's knife of Fascism' (Pound 1935, p.8) offered a cure. It is difficult to reconcile this position with 'abstract models of order,' unless the granting of 'interpretive generosity' on the part of critic and reader is, itself, a way of abstracting an ethical rationale from the 'disastrous consequences' of Pound's political alliances (PA, p.420).

Altieri's work often explicitly sets itself 'against the dream that one's own work could help produce significant political change' (PA, p.420). In earlier books this takes the form of expressing scepticism towards the current political regime while refusing any explicitly political dimension for his own writing, such as championing '[m]odernist alternatives to a public political order all too easy to fit into misanthropic visions' on the eve of the Bush/Quayle inauguration (PA, p.11), with Bernstein noting that Altieri was 'appalled by the [political] claims made by, and on behalf of innovative poetry (1992, p.155). As early as 1994, the preface to *Subjective Agency* outlines a critique of 'identity politics' (p.3) and proposes that its own version of agency 'defend[s] the values basic to liberal politics' (p.11) without clarifying what, other than individualism, defines these values. Dorothy Wang has written perceptively on Altieri's glossing over the overtly ethnic aspects of John Yau's poetry in an effort to have this work exemplify 'formally sophisticated' poetry with which to contrast 'the "usual" clumsy ethnic autobiographical poem' (2014, p.234). Wang identifies Altieri as an 'internalized' provider of 'oppositional arguments' (p.xiv) in her work on spurious critiques of 'identity politics' within the 'fraught terrain' of 'post-racial' American poetics (p.8), but his own interventions that take the form of just such critiques are not mentioned and the substance of his

opposition to Wang's argument is never spelled out. Altieri returns to the critique of identity politics in *Reckoning with the Imagination* (2015), associating political commitments derived from gender, race or class concerns with resentment (p.210), and proposing a politics with a small 'p' based on literary appreciation as an alternative to the 'waste of spirit in a flourish of idealistic fantasy simply unwilling to recognize the limitations of political life in mass society' (p.196).

Such a perspective would appear not to consider the possibility that one's individual position with regard to politics may be shaped by factors that limit the potential of literary appreciation to ameliorate one's lived reality. That is not to negate the potential of attentive reading as a training for or a support to social or political commitments. But to present it as a universal alternative to political action is only possible when one's identity is so politically frictionless that it can be taken for a neutral standpoint. This universalising tendency also shapes the stance towards canon formation outlined in Altieri's *Canons and Consequences*, which extolls the virtues of a 'traditional canon' in the face of what is presented as 'the pressure to come to terms with the various cultural groups that each demand a canon for their own perceived interests' (1990, p.59). Throughout his work, Altieri's frequent recourse to a highly individualised personal canon undermines claims regarding the universal interest or exemplarity of the chosen works. In answer to his question '[h]ow do we teach reading and, through that, create hierarchies for the uses of criticism?' (1990, p. 45), this thesis will propose that the creation of hierarchies is not necessary, but that one of the key uses of criticism is providing opportunities for learning how and what to read.

This thesis will make an initial original contribution to knowledge by taking the mode of 'careful, attentive reading' (RI, p.180) that Altieri proposes as central to literary value and applying it to his own writing from the 1970s to the present day. This reading will take the form of an apprenticeship, charting one reader's process of learning to pay attention to modes of abstraction in critical writing, before drawing on the concepts and movements of this apprenticeship in its own reading of contemporary poetry.

Sam Ladkin's work has engaged closely with Altieri's thinking, drawing on *Painterly Abstraction* in his study of Clark Coolidge (2009) and adapting ideas on autonomy, abstraction and rhetoric from a range of Altieri's work to consider Frank O'Hara's 'In Memory of my Feelings' as elegy (2013). By applying Altieri's concepts in new readings and contexts, Ladkin's 2013 essay performs the kind of work this project had initially envisaged. In doing so, it demonstrates some Altierian tropes that will be discussed in chapter one: an intensely individualist conception of modernist autonomy (2013, pp.7-8), subject to what Stephen Collis critiques as abstraction's 'depoliticizing force' (2007, p.158); and a tendency to claim particular works or readings as 'exemplary' of an abstract mode or concept. However, it also outlines a mode of abstraction that will be central to this project: in describing O'Hara's line 'form gulping after formlessness' as 'the force of abstraction eating itself,' Ladkin claims that '[t]his abstraction cannot be represented, only performed by us, the reader...' (2013, p.24). While Ladkin's reading still has its reader perform abstraction in the mode of Altieri's concepts of rhetoric and autonomy, his insistence on abstraction as a readerly action aligns with this project's concern with abstraction as conceptual and textual movement. In tracking the shift from high modernism's individualist autonomy to the turn towards 'love's autonomy' in O'Hara's late modernism (p.34) and recuperating the poetic force of rhetoric and sensibility from the condemnation of commentators from the Romantics to Altieri via Pound (p.29-30), Ladkin also demonstrates a commitment to 'critically revising...modes of abstraction' (Whitehead 1948, p59) that will be central to this project's methodology.

So while the project looked to Altieri's *Painterly Abstraction* to derive terms via which to read contemporary poetry, close attention to that book suggested that to proceed with this method would require unsatisfactorily partial or selective readings, whether of his own work or of contemporary poetry, with choices regarding which poems to read dictated by the terms of an argument elaborated in his version of the abstract. Altieri's method seeks exemplary poems to illustrate pre-existing arguments, rather than taking as its starting point the texts themselves; the abstraction is therefore imposed, rather than derived. It was decided at this point to focus closely

on precisely what Altieri does in his criticism, which tends to perform its thinking about poetry by means of concepts defined in highly abstract terms, which are then supported by exemplary texts, and attempt to follow and understand the gestures of the mode of reading his criticism enacts.

The work of Gilles Deleuze was drawn into the project fortuitously: his book *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* was initially approached for its complicating of the concept of abstraction in visual art ('...no art is figurative,' p.41), before revealing points of intersection and divergence with Altieri's thinking that lead the project in new directions. His claim, drawing on Paul Klee, that painting's task is 'the attempt to render visible forces that are not themselves visible' (FB, p.40) appears on the face of it to support Altieri's position that art's concern is not 'what is represented, what stands before the eye, but...how the eye can move in the world. This is an art, not of the visible but of the *conditions* of visibility...' (PA, p.396). While both writers share a concern with visibility, and art's capacity to make visible what had not previously been so, there is a critical divergence in focus between these positions. Deleuze seeks to account for the genesis of real experience rather than seeking the conditions for possible experience, and his 'transcendental empiricism' is centred on 'finding and fostering,' rather than explicating, 'the conditions of creative production' (Smith and Protevi 2018, n.p.). Deleuze's site of concern at all times remains the painting itself: even when he goes on to consider *how* the eye moves, tracing how Bacon's use of the diagram transforms the eye into an organ of touch ('it introduces a properly haptic world and gives the eye a haptic function,' FB, p.96), this movement remains at all times immanent to the painting within which it takes place. While Carrie Noland has critiqued what she refers to as Deleuze's focus on movement as an abstract concept, (2009, p.63) it is at least movement in reaction to the artwork or text with which it is engaged. Altieri's movement, on the other hand, achieves a further level of abstraction by switching focus almost immediately from what can be seen to how it can be seen, from the artwork itself to what can be abstracted from the act of viewing it and used in one's own engagement with the world. If Deleuze's 'visible forces' are abstract, Altieri's 'conditions of visibility' are exponentially so. So just as this project will attend

closely to Altieri's mode of abstraction, it will be mediated and critiqued by concepts and gestures adapted from Deleuze.

The next section of this introduction will review the intertwined concepts of abstraction as they are conventionally understood and deployed in poetics, visual art, politics and as problem-solving or heuristic strategies. It will situate Altieri and Deleuze's thinking in relation to these contexts and concepts and underline the elements that will be central to this project. The final section of this chapter will provide an outline and rationale for each of the thesis's four chapters, identifying their claims to original contributions to knowledge and linking them to the project's overall guiding principles.

Modes of Abstraction: Poetic/ Visual/ Political / Heuristic

Poetic Abstraction

It is tempting to begin any study of abstraction in contemporary poetry with reference to the fear of Ezra Pound. The single most resonant and lingering comment on the topic remains the stern warning to 'go in fear of abstractions' of his 1912 manifesto *A Few Do not's by an Imagiste* (2005, p. 95). Nearly a hundred years later, in an interview with David Clippinger, Marjorie Perloff suggested that this fear had not dissipated in the intervening century:

"Abstraction" in language is a very different thing from abstract painting. I take it by abstract poetry you mean non-sensical? [...] I think the hostility to such poetry has to do with the simple fact that words (unlike paint strokes or dabs of color) inevitably have meanings, and so the reader inevitably wants to "make sense" of a poem and is frustrated when he/she cannot. (Perloff and Clippinger, 2006)

As will become clearer over the course of this chapter, there is more than one kind of abstraction, and the object of Pound's warning is not the same concept as the one frustrating Perloff's imagined reader. Pound's dictum warns against abstraction *in* language, with the example given ('dim lands *of peace*' 2005, p.95, emphasis original) making it clear that it is abstract nouns that are being warned

against. This is in keeping with what Terry Eagleton has described as an Anglo-Saxon mistrust of abstraction, based on the misapprehension that the concrete is simple and the abstract complex, and he in his turn warns that the idea of the concrete has ‘done far more harm than good’ in modern poetics (Eagleton 2007, p.142). Eagleton notes that the Imagist preference for the single isolated image, detached from the world, is also a form of abstraction, demonstrating that even this initial example of abstraction as idea is already complicated with abstraction as act of detachment or removal.

Perloff, on the other hand, is referring to abstract poetry, or abstraction *of* language, that uses language in a non-referential way that thwarts the reader’s desire for semantic meaning. Stephen Scobie, in a 1983 essay whose subtitle, ‘The Problem of Abstraction in Poetry,’ indicates its stance towards this type of poetry, dismisses the possibility of replicating musical or visual abstraction in poetry, and posits a failure to distinguish between the two kinds of abstraction as the underlying cause of this misunderstanding (1983, p.76). He draws on Harold Osborne’s distinction between ‘semantic abstraction,’ which gives an incomplete picture of the world it seeks to represent, and ‘non-iconic abstraction’ which does not seek to represent anything but itself (p.77). Scobie makes the case that attempts such as those of Hugo Ball to replicate ‘non-iconic abstraction’ in language are doomed to failure, but that ‘semantic abstraction,’ incomplete representation of the world, is possible, supporting his case with Gertrude Stein’s portraits (p.83), John Cage’s ‘textual treatments’ (p.84), and especially ‘sound poetry,’ ranging from Kurt Schwitters (p.85) to Steve McCaffery (p.88). It is not fully clear that the ‘problem of abstraction’ has been sufficiently disentangled to clarify how these examples of sound poetry are more or less semantically abstract than the problematic opening example from Hugo Ball, but Scobie does emphasise abstract poetry’s role in revealing the precariousness of meaning in human language (p.89)

It is instructive to read this in conjunction with Samuel Beckett’s 1929 essay ‘Dante...Bruno...Vico...Joyce,’ which initially takes a more playful view of abstraction (‘here am

I, with my handful of abstractions, among which notably: a mountain, the coincidence of contraries, the inevitability of cyclic evolution, a system of Poetics...’ 1972, p.3). Not only is a mountain slipped in among the abstract concepts, abstraction itself is portrayed as a pinnacle of human achievement (p.9). Beckett suggests that the oldest poetry was figurative because it was yet to achieve the possibility of abstraction (‘evidence of a poverty stricken vocabulary and of a disability to achieve abstraction,’ p.10) but insists that poetry should, as well as being abstract, be animate and concerned with particulars. This conception of abstraction in poetry troubles any attempts to isolate the abstract from the embodied and the particular. It also presages Charles Olson and Robert Creeley’s form and content spectrum (‘Here, form is content and content is form,’ p.14), while describing early drafts of *Finnegan’s Wake* in terms that seem to correspond entirely with Scobie’s description of Osborne’s non-iconic abstraction (‘It is not to be read — or rather it is not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to. His writing is not *about* something; *it is that something itself*’ (p.14), emphasis original). Beckett’s essay would suggest that the ‘problem with abstraction’ is not reducible to a failure to distinguish between two different models but is a feature of abstraction’s own multiplicity. The clearest example of this is that the abstraction of Joyce’s text is the result of his attempt to ‘desophisticate’ the English language: movement away from the abstraction *of* language leads to abstraction *in* language.

Natalie Ferris has identified a similarly complex engagement in the mid-century abstract poetry of Herbert Read, which originated as verbal imitation of visual forms but came, over time, to concern itself more with ‘the mental processes that enable abstract figuration’ (2015, p.371). Ferris identifies a ‘peculiar, reflexive candour’ to Read’s abstraction, with language calling attention to the shortcomings of its own materials (linguistic, visual and sonic) and meanings (p.371). What Ferris, Beckett and Scobie’s studies share is a recognition of the irreducibility of abstraction to fixed polarities or staged oppositions. They also share an understanding of the wrestling with particularities that is at the heart of the most abstract linguistic forms. If *Finnegan’s Wake* resulted from Joyce’s efforts to make English unsophisticated, Herbert Read’s ‘Vocal Avowals’ were

inspired in part by his efforts to answer Susanne Langer's repeated question 'what is a poem?'¹ leading him to consider the volatile, mobile relationship between material and feeling that is the 'manifestation of being' of a poem (p.363). Although Beckett's starting point is philosophical abstraction and Ferris's is visual, they both emphasise the complex interweaving of material and meaning, general and particular, at play in abstract language, emphasising the inadequacy of abstract/concrete binaries or dual models of abstraction for understanding the variable manifestations of abstraction in language.

Ron Silliman's attempt to come up with a satisfactory definition of the 'abstract lyric' also locates it at a threshold, emphasising qualities of variability and permeability with the potential to productively trouble lyric's claims to self-sufficiency (2002, n.p.). While his initial proposed definition ('a poem that functions *as a lyric*, bounded by modest scale and focused on the elements within') suggests hermetic self-containment as the lyric's defining characteristic, through subsequent discussion he elaborates a more liminal mode of abstract lyric whose 'intersections with the social' centre on 'the poem's own sense of its permeability vis-à-vis the world' (2002, n.p.). It is not clear that Silliman's readings of poems by Larry Eigner and Jackson Mac Low find sufficient textual support for the claim that 'the world is traveling through [these poems] like so much Port Authority traffic at rush hour' (2002, n.p.), and this, along with a lack of focus on the particular qualities that render this mode of lyric any more abstract than other modes, somewhat weakens the heuristic possibilities of the 'abstract lyric.' However, Silliman's emphasis on the importance of close reading ('the process of bean-counting [...] predicated on the reality that *beans exist*' 2002, n.p. emphasis original) supports this project's reading practice. His attention to the interactions between language and constraint support this thesis's reading of similar interactions in Peter Manson's work, although the examples drawn from Eigner's poems, founded on

¹ Langer's own work on abstraction is relevant in this context, with her *Feeling and Form* developing a theory of aesthetics grounded in abstraction that considers 'the fallacy of "deeper meanings"' with relation to poesis (1953, pp.208-36).

biographical rather than textual detail, are not necessarily supportive of claims to represent ‘the most materialist critical practice available’ (2002, n.p).

Two recent studies of American poetry centre on the guiding concept of abstraction: Edward Ragg’s *Wallace Stevens and the Aesthetics of Abstraction* (2010), and Maggie Nelson’s *Women, the New York School and other True Abstractions* (2007). While the focus and scope of these books differ greatly, it is notable that they also emphasise that abstraction is not one single concept (Ragg, p.20; Nelson, p.5) and that focusing on modes or practices of abstraction has more exploratory potential than using the idea of abstraction as an explicatory term (Ragg, p. 95; Nelson p.4). It is also notable that both books tacitly posit Wallace Stevens and Frank O’Hara as twin poles of 20th Century American poetic abstraction, with Ragg’s study of Stevens opening with an analysis of the ‘true abstraction’ of O’Hara’s ‘Personism’ manifesto (2010, p.2), and Nelson’s study of the New York school starting by contrasting the practices of Stevens’ ‘it must be abstract’ with William Carlos Williams’ ‘no ideas but in things’ (2007, p.4). This emphasises that the abstract can never be considered in isolation but always in relation to another concept: the concrete, the representational or the real. This study will suggest that the relation between the abstract and its other is one of reciprocal generation rather than opposition, a perspective supported by several aspects of both Ragg and Nelson’s studies.

Ragg begins by distinguishing between the ‘abstractness’ of Stevens’s style and the ‘question of abstraction’ as a concern of his poetry (p.3). From the outset it is clear that, prior to even considering the relationship between abstraction and its others, it is necessary to clarify the relationship between abstraction as poetic form and concern or what Nelson, drawing on Creeley, distinguishes as the difference between abstraction as idea and as practice (Nelson 2007, p.4). Several other aspects of Ragg’s position are important for the current study. He outlines critiques of Stevens’ abstraction from such diverse quarters as R.P. Blackmur (pp.14-15), Randall Jarrell (p.18), Fredric Jameson (p.21) and Marjorie Perloff (p.173) but suggests that readers who are critical of a perceived lack of content in Stevens are expressing their own poetic preference rather

than any intrinsic opposition between poetry and abstraction (p.21). He also distinguishes between ‘warm’ and ‘cool’ modes of abstraction, drawing from French visual art criticism (p.2), and traces the oscillation between these modes throughout Stevens’ career. Not only will the distinction between ‘warm’ and ‘cool’ abstractions prove to be a feature of political and philosophical modes that will be explored later on, but the gesture of oscillating between modes will be a central movement of the practice of abstraction. This is further developed in Ragg’s analogy between Stevens’ practice and that of Francis Bacon, whose abstract thought translated itself into an artistic process that was itself not at all abstract (p.95).

While Ragg contrasts Bacon’s mode of translating mental images into entirely different visual forms with Stevens’ mode of translating the invisible into something hard to visualise, this link to Bacon’s artistic process is of interest to this study for three reasons. Firstly, the same process is at the origin of much of Gilles Deleuze’s thinking on abstraction as practice which will be central to the mode of reading abstraction that this thesis will develop. Secondly, a mode of abstraction very similar to Bacon’s is central to Peter Manson’s practice and will be explored in the third and fourth chapters. Finally, although Altieri’s work on Stevens is acknowledged throughout Ragg’s book, this takes the form of references to his distinction between first- and third-person positions and terms, mostly drawing on three essays with only one brief reference to *Painterly Abstraction* (pp. 27, 134, 142). The passage on Bacon explicitly uses the term ‘painterly abstraction’ twice, without any reference to Altieri’s sense of the term. This is particularly suggestive, as the passage goes on to develop into a phenomenological reading, drawing on passages from Merleau-Ponty’s *The Visible and the Invisible* (pp.95-6). Once again *Painterly Abstraction*, which frames its thinking as a phenomenology, is sidestepped. The second chapter of this thesis will put pressure on Altieri’s use of the term ‘phenomenology’ and draw Merleau-Ponty’s *The Visible and the Invisible* into a phenomenological reading of Peter Gizzi’s *The Outernational*. As Ragg’s book shows extensive familiarity with Altieri’s work on Stevens, it is telling that he limits his conceptual debt to Altieri’s grammatical distinction between first- and third-person positions, bypassing his uses of

‘abstraction’ and ‘phenomenology’ entirely even though these are key terms of his own argument. This suggests the possibility that Altieri’s employment of these terms differs so much from his own that any cross-referencing would obscure rather than clarify, or require substantial critique of the earlier work.

This study’s final debt to Ragg is his emphasis on the immanence of Stevens’s own abstraction (pp.95, 174) which does not only posit that abstraction is immanent to the mind of the poet, but suggests that it also plays itself out in the body and becomes palpable in the poems themselves (pp.93, 174). This supports the view of abstraction as an immanent practice that will be developed in this thesis, and emphasises the movements between mind, body and work that are crucial to this practice.

To this end, his passing reference to R.P Blackmur’s 1943 review, ‘An Abstraction Blooded’ provides further tendrils of connection between mid-century American poetic abstraction and that of contemporary European philosophy. Blackmur’s review posits that, in Stevens’ ‘Notes Towards a Supreme Fiction,’ abstraction, change and pleasure are related through a ‘mutual and inextricable’ movement rather than a sequential one, and that this change comes about as ‘abstractness’ is experienced and becomes visible to a ‘freshened eye’ (1943, p.298). These ideas are startlingly close to the relationships of reciprocal presupposition this project will explore in Deleuze, as is the insistence that Stevens’ ‘failure’ in this poem stems from relating every fragment back to a central abstraction rather than allowing for connections to develop freely between fragments (p.299). The contrast between abstraction as ‘major idea’ (p.299) and abstraction as creative movement is central to this thesis, and it is somewhat unexpected to find it clearly articulated in a 1943 review of Stevens. The final connection between Blackmur’s thinking and the Deleuzian abstraction that will be explored later in this chapter is his reclamation of the term ‘gibberish’ as the sound of language struggling in the face of a meaning that is too great to be expressed, presaging Deleuze’s ‘stuttering in language’ and emphasising the persistence of meaning in the failure of words (p.300). These are germinal shoots of ideas that we will see developed in

Deleuze's theory and in Peter Manson's poetic practice, and it is somewhat unexpected to come across them in Blackmur's New Criticism. This might be partially explained by what Fraser describes as his provisionality, a focus on 'lower-case' rather than 'capital letter' abstractions that was both his weakness and the strength of those of his essays that have endured (Fraser 1981 n.p.) and make him an early exponent of the mode of heuristic abstraction this thesis is proposing.

The introduction to Nelson's book establishes just such a 'lower-case' approach to abstraction in outlining her decision to deploy O'Hara's term 'true abstraction' to link her 'capital letter' abstractions, 'women' and the 'New York school.' This concept was outlined in O'Hara's 'Personism' manifesto, where it was distinguished from the abstraction of the painter in the following terms:

Abstraction (in poetry, not in painting) involves personal removal by the poet. For instance, the decision involved in the choice between "the nostalgia of the infinite" and "the nostalgia for the infinite" defines an attitude towards degree of abstraction. The nostalgia of the infinite representing the greater degree of abstraction, removal, and negative capability (as in Keats and Mallarmé) (O'Hara 2001, p.592)

In Nelson's book 'true abstraction' is not affixed to concepts as a label or used as a pre-established framework for them, and she cautions against the limitations inherent in such practices. Rather, it serves to generate productive tension between the other terms, keeping their definitions in movement (p.xviii). Since the term 'true abstraction' is itself open to oscillating interpretations, its potential as a heuristic abstraction is almost limitless. This idea will be developed further on with reference to Deleuze's claim, drawing on Whitehead, that abstractions do not explain but must themselves be explained, and Nelson's book embodies just such a process of exploratory abstraction.

As has been noted, she supports this mode with reference to Creeley's distinction between the idea of abstraction and its practice. Here, Nelson recalls a claim by Wendy Steiner that writers, unlike visual artists, were obliged to express their hatred of abstraction, echoing Perloff's explanation of the lingering mistrust of abstraction in the verbal arts which Nelson explains as an inevitable function of poetry's dual status as both a 'thing in the world' and a sign of that thing. She also encapsulates difficulties inherent in the use of the term 'abstract' itself, which is, as this

thesis is seeking to establish, ‘slippery’ to define and subject to different interpretations across disciplines (p.4).

Nelson stresses the centrality of Gertrude Stein to any consideration of the relationship between abstraction and referentiality in 20th Century poetry, particularly her ‘commitment to charting the “continuous present” and the habits of attention that form consciousness’ (p.12). Not only does this connect Stein with the mode of abstraction as immanence and movement outlined in Ragg’s Stevens, it also connects with ideas to do with abstraction’s dual status in poetry explored in Peter Quartermain’s *Disjunctive Poetics*.

Quartermain encapsulates the paradoxical abstraction of Stein’s language which is ‘abstract’ and ‘disjointed’, but a ‘passionate and extremely concentrated act of attention to a tangible [...] world’ (1992, p.4). The paradox of abstraction in language is that the more closely language attends to the world’s sensible particulars, the more abstract it comes to seem. This suggests that abstraction is an inevitable element of poetic language: either poetry abstracts from reality and presents something that gives the illusion of concrete particularity, such as the personal epiphanies summed up in Altieri’s most oft-cited term ‘the scenic mode’ (1984, p.5),² or it moves so closely and attentively within the particulars of the tangible world that the language itself takes on the abstraction it has eschewed in its gesture of attention. Such a paradoxical abstraction is also identified in Louis Zukofsky’s work which, in its process, attends to particulars and avoids abstractions (Quartermain 1992, p.6), resulting in poetic language that is extremely abstract (p.71). Of central interest to this study is the relationship Quartermain outlines between poem, meaning and reader in the context of this mode of paradoxical abstraction. He refutes any transactional view of reading, insisting that meaning cannot be extracted from the poem but only enacted through reading (p.19). This emphasis on the act of reading as a relationship between reader and

²Perloff (2012, p.244), Nerys Williams (2007, p.16) Hank Lazer (1996, p.56) and Timothy Yu (2009, p.103) have all cited this term, with the latter two using it in conjunction with Charles Bernstein’s term ‘official verse culture.’ Bernstein himself employs the adjective ‘scenic’ twice in an interview otherwise taking issue with many of Altieri’s recent positions (King 2017, pp.28, 32).

poem in which meaning is generated is underlined in his description of poem as ‘meaningful act’ as well as object (p.20), and the reader has a responsibility to remain open and attentive in their own meaningful act of reading (p.71). This is presented as a series of acts of translation and retranslation, with the poet’s close attention to particulars translating into highly abstract language which in turn translates itself into meaning when the reader pays close attention to its particulars: ‘the abstract becomes concrete, specific, in the activity [...] which the form of the song embodies, and which the form of the song calls forth in the reader: concentrated thought’ (p.80). Here, Quartermain stresses two ideas that are central to this study: the reciprocally generative relationships between abstract and concrete, reader and poem, and the fundamentally active nature of meaning, which persists within the movements of this relationship as an action rather than a concept that can be abstracted.

Stephen Collis, in his book on the Canadian poet and visual artist Phyllis Webb, also emphasises the polar nature of abstraction in slightly less dynamic form by distinguishing between abstraction as idea and as material (2007, p.148). He goes on to explore the non-hierarchical nature of these polarities, with subject/object, self/other and inside/outside functioning as equal relational poles rather than binaries that privilege one term over the other (p.155). Collis’s mode of abstraction does not manage to activate the tension between poles to give rise to the movement of abstraction found in Ragg, Nelson and particularly Quartermain. However, he does link the practice of abstraction with Robin Blaser’s concern, in ‘The Practice of Outside,’ with the creation of poetry that is part of the real world, not a secondary supplement to it (p.153). Blaser’s essay will be central to this thesis’s second and third chapters, and Collis’s emphasis on the juxtaposition of the real and poetic abstraction aligns his thinking with the relationship, proposed by Deleuze and developed by Brian Massumi which will be explored later in this chapter, between the actual and the virtual. Collis also emphasises abstraction’s shifting of focus from what is seen to how it is seen, an emphasis on the adverbial aspect of abstraction that connects his thinking with ideas about vision and conditions of visibility shared by Altieri and Deleuze that will be explored in

chapter two. Finally, he critiques the way abstraction's emphasis on individual autonomy has been read as apolitical and proposes the anarchist political potential of abstraction's decentring of the ego (pp.158-60). This political dimension of abstraction in the visual arts will be considered in the next section. It is notable that Collis, while acknowledging that 'apolitical' abstraction has been instrumentalised for political ends, and proposing a radical new politics of abstraction, chooses not to put pressure on the political implications of abstraction's own claims to purity. Affecting to stand aloof from politics is itself a political stance.

Visual Abstraction

As in poetry, much writing on abstraction in the visual arts centres on various meanings of the adjective 'abstract.' Charles Bernstein's 'Disfiguring Abstraction' (2013) plays on the difficulty of defining this adjective even in this single context, running through dozens of permutations of artistic abstraction, mentioning in passing that 'either everything is abstract or nothing is' (2013, p.492) and testing whether it is possible 'to see things not abstract as if they were. And vice versa' (p.494). This essay proposes that 'abstract' is both an amorphous term, taking shape from the context in which it finds itself, and a relational one, existing always in polar opposition to the concrete or figurative. These ideas will prove central to this study, as will Bernstein's interrogation of abstraction's political implications.

As early as 1989, W.T.J. Mitchell, while seemingly proposing the obsolescence of the concept of 'abstraction,' linking it with a conservatively-defined modernist period lasting from the early 20th Century to the aftermath of the second world war (p.348), instead proposed that the abstract, centred on Hegelian binaries and illusions of purity, was more usefully thought of as a more *arrière-* than *avant-garde* mode. This mistrust of a conception of Hegel's thinking based on the linear development of increasingly sophisticated concepts via the dialectical method (Maybee 2016, n.p.) is a position Mitchell shares with Thomas McEvelley and Mieke Bal. All three critics associate this stance with an aesthetically idealistic and insufficiently politically rigorous view of modernism

of a type that undermines some of the claims made for modernism in Altieri's work. It is important to note that this thesis is not seeking to critique Hegel's dialectics, or even the version of Hegelian thinking proposed in Altieri's work from *Painterly Abstraction* to the 'dynamic synthesis' of subject and substance outlined in *Reckoning with the Imagination* (p.108). However, it is clear that Altieri's thinking, particularly its uncritical championing of modernism, aligns with the view of modernism as shaped by Hegel that is critiqued by Mitchell, McEvelley, Bal and indeed Bernstein.

In outlining the paradoxical proliferation of a 'synthetic discourse' (p.355) around art-forms seemingly purified of all language, Mitchell briefly mentions Altieri's 75-page description of Malevich's 'Suprematist Composition' as the most extreme example of a critical rush to fill the shapes of abstraction with theory that he explains as: "The problem with this picture is not that we have nothing to say about it, or that it says nothing to us, but rather that we feel overwhelmed and embarrassed by the number of things it can be made to say" (p.357).

An aspect of abstraction that will be explored with regard to *Painterly Abstraction* is this focus on the 'narrative dimension to the perception of modernist art' (p.366) together with a tendency to universalise the particulars of one viewer's perceptions. This narrative dimension is doubled in *Painterly Abstraction*, given that the book sets out, in a spirit of 'aesthetic idealism' (PA, p.8) not just to narrate its own experience of modernist visual art but to speculate on how poets (who 'are likely to interpret visual experience by casting it in thematic terms' p.9) may have found, in readings resembling his very precise and individual experiences of artworks, inspiration for their own poetry.

Bernstein's essay draws on Mitchell's critique, together with that of Thomas McEvelley, to argue that abstraction can never be an uncontested, politically neutral term. McEvelley's 1991 book *Art and Discontent* and 1996's *Capacity: History, the World and the Self in Contemporary Art and Criticism* (with G.W. Denson) critique Hegelian tendencies in modernism and 'expose and weaken late modernism's implicit conceit that abstraction and formalism were the intellectual pinnacles of a linear and progressive Western civilization' (Denson in McEvelley and Denson 1996, p.11).

McEvilley, Mitchell and Bernstein also share a scepticism with regard to the Western focus of this view of abstraction, with all three drawing attention to the limitations inherent in viewing Western artistic abstraction in isolation from global artistic practice. McEvilley describes this linear Occidentalist view of art history as revealing ‘the parochial limitations of our world view and the almost autistic reflexivity of Western civilization’s modes of relating to the culturally Other’ (McEvilley 1984, in McEvilley and Denson 1996, p.101).

While Bernstein’s synthesising account of political cross-currents of the abstract is very recent, both McEvilley and Mitchell’s critiques predate *Painterly Abstraction*, although in the latter case familiarity is shown with Altieri’s preparatory essays. For this reason, an insufficiently critical adoption of abstraction as a guiding concept, in a work proposing ‘to make (a) case for the continuing value of Modernist individualism’ (PA, p.11), gestures at a degree of detachment from contemporary discussions of abstraction allied with a political perspective that is frequently enunciated in the same formulations with which it is renounced throughout Altieri’s work.

Given the centrality of Stevens’s ‘It must be abstract’ to Altieri’s thinking, it is interesting to consider the alternative view of politics and selfhood outlined in McEvilley’s long essay ‘On the Manner of Addressing Clouds’ (1991), whose argument is structured around quotations from the poems of Wallace Stevens. McEvilley starts by placing the modernist form/content binary in a 2500-year-old classical perspective, a hallmark of a mode of thinking informed as much by his classical background as by his career in art criticism. In this Aristotelian context he outlines the negative consequences of attempts to either separate dependant terms (right/left or yes/no) from each other or collapse their meanings into each other (1991, p.65).

In considering ways of thinking polar opposition without falling into fixed patterns or rendering both terms meaningless, it is important to note that it is readerly attention that reveals the limitations of both positions: ‘As soon as one pays attention to how the words work, both pure Form and the Oneness of Form and Content disappear into an invisibility not of transcendence but of linguistic non-meaning. They go where mistakes in grammar go’ (p.65). The ironic use of

capitals, reminiscent of Emily Dickinson's capitalised abstractions, reminds the reader that whether their readerly attention seeks to privilege the abstract over the concrete or vice versa, or fold the two terms into each other, both procedures lead to non-meaning. Meaning will only remain possible if the two terms remain mobile, in a relation of reciprocal presupposition to each other that is activated through reading or viewing.

McEvelley goes on to debunk what he describes as the lingering presence of Plato's 'Eye of the Soul' in modernist pretensions to pure form (p.66) allied with an evolutionary myth of cultural and historical progress, stating that these are 'not...eternal cosmic principles, but...transient cultural habit formations' (p.68). This essay, referencing Nelson Goodman and citing Wallace Stevens, poses a formidable challenge to Altieri's argument in *Painterly Abstraction*, which draws on the same sources towards mythical universalist ends. It is interesting in this context to note the perspective of contemporary Dutch artist and theorist Mieke Bal on claims that abstract art is necessarily the opposite of political art, that 'the desire for purity is itself a deeply political desire that, as history teaches us time and again, must not be left to its own devices' (2013, p. 204).

McEvelley's own process also challenges the reader who would seek to collapse or oversimplify categorical distinctions. If Stevens's 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird' can be used to frame thirteen ways of thinking about content (pp.70-84) that still only amount to 'a series of sample sightings of some great beast (Meaning) whose behaviour is too complex to be fully formulated' (p.85), it becomes clear that any reading that sets out to formulate a concept of abstraction based on simple opposition to that proposed in *Painterly Abstraction* will not come close to understanding the term. McEvelley offers trenchant criticisms of dualistic thinking (form/content, body/mind, spirit/matter) whose origins he traces to the political propaganda of early Greek states (p.102). However, he presents 'the problem of abstraction' in a slightly different light, suggesting that 'the very distinction between representation and abstraction was an artificial convention: all image codes are neutral in this respect until we project upon them one value or the other' (p.103).

This suggests, in answer to Bernstein's question about the possibility of seeing 'things not abstract as if they were. And vice versa,' that it is not only possible but necessary, as it is only in the act of seeing that abstraction emerges. While this supports Bernstein's assertion that 'the harder we try to define abstraction, the more it slips away' (2013, p.488), it underlines the fact that definition is both impossible and unnecessary. From this perspective, abstract/representational is not a dualism but a relational pair, like inside/outside, lend/borrow or parent/child, where opposition depends on point of view rather than category or quality. This is consistent with what Bernstein earlier described as 'shifters,' terms that 'have no unitary or definitive meaning within poetics' (1992, p.157), but derive their sense from position, context and relation. While McEvilley spoke of 'projecting values' of abstraction onto artworks, a stance that is in keeping with that of *Painterly Abstraction*, Bernstein proposes 'toggling of focus' (2013, p.494) as an alternative to framing. In a recent critique of the perceived limitations of Altieri's position on rhetoric, Bernstein laments that, in Altieri's poetics, poetry is 'born "sheer" but everywhere in frames' (King 2017, p. 30). In proposing toggling as a mode of viewing that keeps a range of materials, contexts and temporalities in play without rushing to fix them in a single framework, Bernstein recalls McEvilley's variable trackings of content and suggests that abstraction as an act of mobile attention has more to teach the reader of contemporary poetry than abstraction as description.

Political Abstraction

The idea of abstraction as movement or potential for movement is present in a rich vein of contemporary thinking that originates in Marx's varied modes of abstraction, including McKenzie Wark's *A Hacker Manifesto*, Franco Berardi's *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance* and Alberto Toscano's 'The Culture of Abstraction,' and recent work by Sianne Ngai ('Visceral Abstraction') and Amy De'Ath (*Unsociable Poetry: Antagonism and Abstraction in Contemporary Feminized Poetics*) has employed variations of Marxist abstraction in readings of contemporary poetry. While outside the

scope of the current study, these works indicate the contemporary pertinence of abstraction as both theoretical and methodological basis for the study of contemporary poetry.

Wark's *Hacker Manifesto* opens by turning the opening lines of *The Communist Manifesto* into 'A double spooks the world, the double of abstraction' (Wark 2004, p.13), and employs the phrasing and structure of *The Communist Manifesto* to propose a protean contemporary abstraction. While this mode has roots in Marxist abstractions of capital and labour, it emphasises the creative potential of abstraction as act, which serves to establish relations, express virtuality, actualise relationality and thus 'manifest the manifold' (2004, p.15). This definition is a succinct description of abstraction as action, which allows for complex, unpredictable and generative relations between matters that can be actualised in the abstract shape of a manifold. Abstraction's potential as creative action is central to this thesis, and Wark draws here on ideas from Deleuze that will be returned to in the next section (p.179).

Berardi's *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance* proposes that social movements proceed by such forms of action, with poetry functioning as 'the language of the movement as it tries to deploy a new refrain' (Berardi 2012, p.151). However, his book returns to abstraction all of the negative connotations of its Marxist form, with contemporary financial capitalism presented as the apotheosis of an exponential process of abstraction that began with the industrial revolution's abstraction of labour, culminating in 'the final predatory abstraction: life turned into time for repaying a metaphysical debt' (p.25).

While Berardi links the act of abstraction with dystopian outcomes, poetry is assigned the role of prophet within this dystopia, with poets credited with a 'frantic anticipation' (p.35) of global economic trajectories. Along with this visionary quality, poetry is credited with the power to reattach the skin flayed from the linguistic body by abstraction. While this reading of abstraction as an entirely negative force, along with the vatic role assigned to poetry with relation to this force, set this book at an angle to the thesis I am proposing, it nevertheless offers significant possibilities for this study. One is the idea that poetry is 'the language of nonexchangeability...the return of

the sensuous body of language' (pp.139-40). The return of abstract and abstracted language to the body (or the body to language) is achieved through voice, which has the potential to create shared spaces ('Poetry is a singular vibration of the voice. This vibration can create resonances, and resonances may produce common space' p.147). The capacity of voiced poetic language to create shared spaces is central to the work of Peter Gizzi and the epidermal quality of poetic language is central to Peter Manson's. Berardi deploys these qualities in a move against abstraction, but if '[p]oetry is language's excess, the signifier disentangled from the limits of the signified' (p.158), this disentangling is itself a gesture of abstraction.

Alberto Toscano's 'The Culture of Abstraction' proposes a return to Marxist 'real abstraction' as an alternative to what he describes as 'warm abstractions' derived from Deleuze (2008, p.58). These modes of abstraction are described, not uncritically, as replacing the qualities of separateness and rigidity previously associated with the abstract with flexibility and constant modulation. Toscano takes as his starting point Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy, which will be central to Charles Olson and Robin Blaser's poetic processes as well as Deleuze's own process philosophy, framing it as a pedagogical critique of scientific abstraction's dominance over other domains of learning and imposition of rigid disciplinary boundaries. He proposes to contrast Whitehead's 'pedagogical critique of abstraction' with Marxist 'real abstraction' as explicated by Alfred Sohn-Rethel. The first half of this essay gives a detailed analysis of Whitehead's understanding of the processes and problems of abstraction, drawing on Isabelle Stenger's six-volume study of his work and concluding that its primary critique of abstraction is pedagogical, proposing a vital role for philosophy as a 'critic of abstraction' since '[y]ou cannot think without abstractions; accordingly, it is of the utmost importance to be vigilant in critically revising your *modes* of abstraction' (in Toscano 2008, p.66). Toscano's essay goes on to critique Whitehead's thinking for failing to take into account the role of capitalist society itself in shaping and imposing dominant abstractions (p.66). While the second half of the essay engages in detail with Sohn-Rethel's explanation of Marx's 'real abstraction' as 'an abstraction other than that of

thought' (Sohn-Rethel 1978, p.102 in Toscano 2008, p.70) in order to critique Whitehead's blindness to such possibilities as 'abstract things' and 'abstract men.' (p.71), his conclusion suggests the potential of bringing both modes of thinking together 'to seize the true roots of abstraction in social practice' (2008, p.74).

This perspective would seem to be entirely in keeping with Whitehead's own pedagogical commitment to vigilance in critically revising modes of abstraction. While Toscano builds his argument around opposing poles of Whitehead/Sohn-Rethel, pedagogical/political abstraction, the pedagogical and the political often implicate one another and the next section will explore the pedagogical possibilities of warmer modes of abstraction shaped by constant modulation between seemingly opposed terms.

Heuristic Abstraction

Simon O'Sullivan's 'The Aesthetics of Affect' summarises Deleuze's philosophy as 'active concept creation in order to solve problems' (2001, p.129) and his essay hints at a pedagogical dimension to this activity. He suggests that the abstract in art functions as a portal to a world of becoming that interpenetrates our world, making virtual forces visible (p.128), and emphasises Deleuze's insistence that the virtual, unlike the possible, is not defined in opposition to the real but is a supplement to it. This is central to Deleuze's thinking, which proceeds by connection rather than negation, and will lead to John Rajchman's proposal that his abstraction operates through production rather than reduction, which will be returned to. Two aspects of O'Sullivan's essay are particularly pertinent to this study: his emphasis on the mutual enfolding of the actual and the virtual supports Gizzi's assertion that poetry is 'absolutely real and absolutely an act of the imagination' (in Bernstein 2008); and his claim that this mode of thinking changes art history 'from a hermeneutic to a heuristic activity' (p.130) reframes the function of theory and criticism as discovery rather than interpretation. For the reader of literary criticism, this allows for an

apprenticeship in reading based on close attention to what critical texts do as well as what and how they mean, a mode of reading that can then in its turn guide the reading of literary texts. Active concept formation is central to this process: unlike in a hermeneutic reading, where concepts can serve an interpretive or labelling function, in a heuristic reading concepts themselves are created or called upon to solve particular problems and must remain open to modification and adaptation as the circumstances of their deployment change. This idea will be developed once the role of abstraction in the process of concept formation has been clarified.

Rajchman has emphasised distinctions between Deleuze's conception of abstraction and Greenbergian modernism in terms that recall McEvelley's objections to the latter's project (1998, pp.58-9). Rajchman equates Greenberg's purified abstraction with negative theology and a tradition of abstraction as absence, and contrasts Deleuze's emphasis on 'not the loss but the *intensification* of the real' (p.59, emphasis original). This is an affirmative rather than a negative abstraction that 'has to do with the affirmation of "the outside"' (p.60), structured through the chain of 'ands' that is the stuttering of language 'possessed with the force of other things' (pp.60-1), which Bal has described as an 'endless andness' eschewing binary oppositions and based on "knots" rather than "nots" (2013, p.134). This productive and connective mode of abstraction has much to offer the reader of contemporary poetry. While it will often find itself in tension with poetic modes closely linked with Mallarmé's *néant* in the case of Manson or a Dickinsonian generative nothingness in the case of Gizzi, its emphasis on 'not yet' rather than 'not' (Bal 2013, p. 134) will help avoid the temptation to collapse readings into a poetics of negative theology.³ Particularly productive in this context is Rajchman's reminder that, for Deleuze, the canvas or the page are never empty and the artist's preparatory work must involve clearing a space for itself (p.61). This will be useful in exploring the poets' engagements with tradition, through citation and

³ Reginald Gibbons has referred to this poetics as 'apophatic poetry' (2015, p.93) and contrasts it with a vein of English-language poetry that seeks to name and define the world, of which he cautions that 'ultimately naming can produce an emptiness' (p.113). While Gizzi and Manson's work share some qualities of the apophatic, the dangers inherent in naming are more pertinent to Altieri's own procedure.

contradiction, as creative acts of negation: a heuristic strategy deploying negation as act and concept for generating the new as an alternative to a theological view of ‘creation from Nothing’ (Rajchman 2000, p.74).

An exploration of reading’s potential as a heuristic activity begins with Claire Colebrook’s description of Deleuze’s ‘ethics of reading’ that ‘creates new connections, new styles for thinking and new images and ways of seeing’ (2010, p.4). Colebrook identifies two essential qualities of this mode of reading: it requires more fidelity to the text’s construction than to its perceived ‘ultimate message,’ and it proceeds through connection with and mobilisation of ‘its own aleatory or paradoxical elements, elements that are both inside and outside, ordering and disordering’ (p.5). This will be a procedurally crucial distinction between the mode of reading being elaborated in this thesis and that modelled in many of Altieri’s readings, which demonstrate the kind of definition through opposition that Colebrook associates with a ‘relatively stable and self-contained autopoietic system’ (p.5). It also puts pressure on the oppositional reading of Sohn-Rethel against Whitehead through which Toscano presents his ‘culture of abstraction,’ and Deleuze’s own Whitehead-derived definition of abstraction, as well as his mobilising of polarities, is central to this mode of reading.

In *Dialogues*, Deleuze explains how Whitehead’s definition of abstraction (‘the abstract does not explain, but must itself be explained,’ Deleuze and Parnet 1987, p.vii) is central to his pluralist empiricism which does not seek the universal but rather the conditions in which the creation of something new becomes possible. In this mode of thinking, abstraction itself is a heuristic activity as each abstraction must itself be explained in a chain of concept formation that does not seek a universal or concrete final point, but the creation of something new in the process of trying to understand something that already exists. This mode of abstraction as constant revision (as Whitehead put it) will be central to this thesis’s readings of literary criticism and contemporary poetry and is modelled in Deleuze’s own engagements with literature.

According to his reading of T.E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* in 'The Shame and the Glory,' abstraction is central to the mind's interactions with the world, as the mind that contemplates its own projections on the world is guided by abstractions ('the mind that contemplates is not itself empty, and the abstractions are the eyes of the mind' ECC, p.119). 'The eyes of the mind,' like the 'haptic eye' of *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (FB, p.133) feel their way along the image, text and world they seek to understand so that '[a]bstract ideas are not dead things [but] entities that inspire powerful spatial dynamisms' (ECC, p.119). This dynamism takes the form of articulated rather than oppositional polarities that replace dialectical thinking with modal (Kylie Message 2010, pp.38-9). The poles, whether body/mind, text/meaning, virtual/actual (or 'the norm and its antithesis,' Message 2010, p.39) reciprocally determine each other so neither term can transcend or otherwise be detached from the other. In Michel Foucault's 'Theatrum Philosophicum' he refers to Deleuze's 'strategy of reversal built on movement and slight deviation, rather than opposition' (1970 n.p.) to free the concepts of difference and repetition from the constraints of models built on contradiction and negation. He describes this as 'thought that does not conform to a pedagogical model (the fakery of prepared answers) but attacks insoluble problems,' (Foucault 1970 n.p.) and this thesis will argue that this refusal of thinking based on prepared answers forms the basis of a pedagogical mode of its own. Central to this mode is the understanding that '[t]hought has to think through what forms it and is formed out of what it thinks through' (Foucault 1970 n.p.): thinking can, itself, not be done abstractly but only in the folds of the material in and through which it moves. This is key to the heuristic activity of this project, which seeks to situate its thinking within the folds of the texts it reads.

For Deleuze, this polar movement achieves its maximum vibratory potential in poetic language, which operates 'as if the language were stretched along an abstract and infinitely varied line' (ECC, p.109). In the 'poetic comprehension' of language, disjunctions become inclusive and connections become reflexive or reciprocal, in groping exploratory movements through which the language comes to resemble the movements of the 'haptic eye.' At this point the haptic eye itself

exhausts its heuristic possibilities, and the mode of reading being proposed here requires constant revision of its own abstractions with a willingness to relinquish them when they exhaust their usefulness. This is in keeping with the model of ‘concept as detective’ proposed in *Difference and Repetition* where ‘I make, remake and unmake my concepts along a moving horizon, from an always decentred centre’ (p. xix).

Marjorie Perloff has drawn on this quote as the basis for a mode of ‘differential reading’ that she somewhat ironically proposes extending to literary critics as well as contemporary poets (2004a, p.xxviii) and while the mode of reading elaborated in this thesis does not ultimately engage deeply with hers, it does proceed through reading criticism as a pedagogical preparation for reading poems. The act of making and unmaking concepts entails moving between polarities of historical/ eternal, particular/ universal in a gesture akin to Bernstein’s ‘toggling of focus,’ or indeed the heuristic strategy of abstraction outlined by John Ashbery in ‘The Skaters,’ where:

neither the importance of the individual flake,
Nor the importance of the whole impression of the storm, if it has any, is what
it is,
But the rhythm of the series of repeated jumps, from abstract into positive and
back to a slightly less diluted abstract. (Ashbery 2010, p.153)

The rhythmic repeated jumps of Ashbery’s skaterly abstraction resemble those of what Brian Massumi has proposed as a mode of ‘lived abstraction,’ drawing on Deleuze and Whitehead’s process philosophies (2011, p.6) and especially Deleuze’s description of the abstract as ‘lived experience’ (p.15) to posit the body as a site where thought can ‘think through what forms it.’ Eldritch Priest gives a useful synopsis of Massumi’s lived abstraction as the virtual or non-sensuous dimension of felt experience (2013, pp.52-3) and cites his claim that ‘what is felt abstractly is *thought*’ (2011, p.109 in Priest 2013, p.52, emphasis original).

While Priest’s description focuses on music, of which John Cage’s ‘4’33’ is the example felt most ‘absolutely abstractly,’ it gestures at potential for the reading of contemporary poetry (2013,

p.62). The phrase quoted from Massumi ('what is felt abstractly') echoes Ezra Pound's line 'tis felt, I say' (1968, p.159). This was his translation of Guido Cavalcanti's line '*non razionale ma che si sente*' ('not rational but that is felt,' author's translation), a non-rational dimension of 'realities perceptible to the sense' linked with the 'world of moving energies...magnetisms that take form, that are seen, or that border the visible' (1968, p.154). Massumi approaches this idea of 'moving energies' in his description of the activation of thought as abstract feeling in the experience of art which 'plays between the poles of interaction and relation...so they can be usefully cross-connected, or fusing them together in amodal immediacy to each other. As experience approaches either limit, it automatically toggles to the other' (Massumi 2011, p.74). This develops on the articulated polarities of Deleuze's abstraction to describe the sense experience of interacting with an art installation, and it is notable that the mode of movement in question is the toggling between poles that we have already noted in Ashbery, Toscano and Bernstein.

While the materiality of the signifier is such a recurrent concern of modern and contemporary poetics that Jim Keller's reference to the 'often overlooked materiality of the sign' (2006, p.226) strikes a somewhat jarring note, what Massumi outlines here offers the potential to consider a materiality of the signified.⁴ This would concern itself with the way meaning translates itself into the material of the person reading or otherwise experiencing the artwork, where lived abstraction plays itself out in the folds of the material human body. Richard Owens has identified such a tendency in Peter Manson's poetry, which seeks to reverse the process of liberating signifier from signified by attending closely to the material specificity of language (2011, n.p.), resulting in 'an oscillating movement between continuity and rupture, between the determining force of a philological rootedness and the chaotic play of seemingly disconnected free-floating signs and sounds' (Owens 2011, n.p.). Massumi's concern with the amodal in-between at the juncture of sense modalities which serve as 'polarities, dynamic orientations in an abstract qualitative map of

⁴ Michael Davidson has written on the multiple materialities of modern and contemporary poetry (1997), as has Bernstein (1999) and both stress social or interpersonal dimensions of materiality in terms that are pertinent here (Bernstein 1999, p.9; Davidson 1997, p.xii)

potential experience' (2011, p.76) stages this 'oscillating movement' in the body, at the threshold where seeing, hearing, touch and proprioception ripple into one another.

There is a similar dynamic at play in Lisa Robertson's *Nilling*, which traces a materiality of the signified particular to the relation between book and reading body ('[t]he inchoate state I crave dissolves and reshapes itself in the codex; reading feels like a discontinuous yet infinite rhythmic dispersal that generates singularities' 2012, p.13) and Robertson locates a political dimension in this 'folded time,' the interpenetration of textual and human materialities where 'the person and an impersonal speech test and inflect and mix into one another' (p.12). Jean-Luc Nancy develops the idea of the human as site of meaning in *Being Singular Plural*, where he argues, against contemporary laments about the loss of meaning, that human being and meaning are inextricably intertwined so that 'we are meaning in the sense that we are the element in which significations can be produced and circulate' (2000, pp.1-2). This formulation, entirely detached from the world of contemporary abstract poetry, nevertheless echoes Quartermain's thinking on the embodiment of meaning. These are different presentations of the same process, the translation of meaning into human form, which will be central to readings of the emergence of meaning in contemporary poetry in chapters three and four, guided by heuristic abstractions and gestures elaborated in the first two.

These gestures centre on the making, remaking and unmaking of concepts. In his *Dialogues*, Deleuze expands on Whitehead's claim that 'the abstract does not explain' to propose that rationalism starts with abstractions and makes the world conform to them, while empiricism reveals new concepts from 'the state of things,' enabling us to 'find the conditions under which something new is produced' (Deleuze and Parnet 1987, p.vii). This is the heuristic system that this thesis establishes in its critical readings, creating conditions for the emergence of 'something new' in its poetic readings. Jon Clay's book *Sensation, Contemporary Poetry and Deleuze* has also looked to Deleuze's work as a source for concepts to guide its readings of contemporary British poetry, and this approach, as well as its chosen poets, particularly J.H Prynne, Maggie O'Sullivan, Andrea Brady

and Keston Sutherland, initially made it a touchstone for this thesis, particularly its readings of Manson. However, there is a significant methodological distinction between Clay's work and this project: while Clay's book works through permutations of the Deleuzian concept of 'sensation' across a range of readings, the current thesis will seek to avoid reading poetry in support of a single central abstraction. Rather than abstracting a concept from critical readings to employ as a frame for poetry, it will seek to guide readings of poetry through movements and heuristic concepts learned from its critical readings. These concepts will not serve as framing ideas: they will be subject to remaking and unmaking and will be relinquished at the point where they exhaust their creative potential.

Michael Hardt has described Deleuze's own philosophical apprenticeship as a process of 'select[ing] what is living and transform[ing] it, making it adequate to his concerns,' (2003, p112) and the first two chapters' readings of Altieri's criticism will adopt a similar procedure. In this it will take its lead from what Charles Stivale described as Deleuze's pedagogical mode, which does not offer a philosophical school or fixed concepts, but rather offers notions, along with the possibility that 'students as other solitary persons could seize these notions in movement, twist them in their own way, and use these concepts and notions as needed' (Stivale 2008, p.42). He goes on to suggest that 'practical pedagogy' is centred on a teacher attending carefully to student potential and striving to 'form, deform and reform their modes of attachment' (p.46). The chapters that follow will develop this pedagogy into a mode of reading that attends closely to its chosen critical texts, forming, deforming and reforming their attachments in an attempt to twist them into concepts that can be used to think through contemporary poetic texts. If 'the abstract does not explain,' this thesis will follow Deleuze following Whitehead in remaining vigilant and critically revising its modes of abstraction.

Outline: Reading Abstraction

‘...all theoretical agendas must be replaced by heuristic ones.’ (Steve McCaffery 2001, p.7)

The primary heuristic strategy that will underpin this project’s readings in criticism and poetry is the action of gathering, an approach to reading that will find its guiding concepts in the texts themselves. While remaining mindful of the claims of individual poems to shape their reader, it will propose an initial critical engagement that will yield concepts and gestures with the potential to shape later readings in contemporary poetry. This methodology is rooted in Beckett’s tracing of the etymology of the verb *‘legere,’* ‘to read,’ back to the noun *‘lex,’* or ‘crop of acorns’, casting the act of reading as a process of gathering words (1972, p.11).

Beckett glosses this action as ‘[t]o gather together letters into a word, to read,’ and while his gathering seems more descriptive of the act of writing than reading, this thesis will propose a mode of reading that gathers concepts and meanings from the texts being read. It will attempt not to abstract these concepts and meanings from their texts, but rather allow them to change and modify themselves in their encounters with other texts. While Beckett linked the use of type names (naming ‘every hero after the first hero, every poet after the first poet,’ p.11) with man’s early ‘inability to abstract the general from the particular’ (p.11), a converse mode is identifiable in contemporary criticism such as Altieri’s, whose highly developed ability to abstract from the particular leads it to use abstract concepts as type names for which it subsequently gathers examples. The latter mode recalls what Beckett criticised as ‘decadent’ reading, a gesture of rapid ‘skimming’ based on the readerly assumption that ‘form is so strictly divorced from content that you can comprehend the one almost without bothering to read the other’ (p.13).

Beckett’s insistence on the inextricability of form and content presages what Adkins has described as Deleuze and Guattari’s criticism of western thought’s mode of polar thinking based on privileging one term and subordinating the other which is often ‘articulated as a form-content relation, a hylomorphism’ (Adkins 2016, p.354). Adkins summarises a key idea of Deleuze and Guattari’s that will be central to this thesis, that ‘every thing is composed of two opposed

tendencies but does not privilege either tendency' (p.354). Beckett's 1929 essay enacts a similar refusal to privilege one term over the other in its consideration of the relations between poetry and language (1972, p.11), form and content (p.14), insisting on the necessity of flux and movement for the 'continuous purgatorial process' of Joyce's *Work in Progress* (p.22).

This is most vividly expressed in his concluding contrast between the stasis of heaven and hell and the generative movement of purgatory, powered by the 'flood of movement and vitality' released in the clash between 'any pair of large contrary human factors' (p.22). This thesis will adopt this mode of polar dynamics from Beckett and Deleuze. It will also draw on Beckett's central commitment to tracking the movements of 'the sense which is for ever rising to the surface of the form and becoming the form itself,' (p.14) in its readings of literary criticism and contemporary poetry, bearing in mind that Beckett, throughout this essay, uses 'sense' in the sense of 'meaning' and therefore makes meaning immanent to the text's own surface and form.

Robert Duncan formulates a similarly dynamic view of meaning as an act of gathering in *The H.D. Book*, which explicates its own reading process as going a 'long way round. "Beating about the bush" is our common expression. I gather what I mean as I go. And must write as if I gathered my sense as a man would gather water in a sieve' (2011, p.311). Duncan's colloquial bush contrasts almost comically with Beckett's noble oak, and the image of gathering water in a sieve underlines the provisional and quixotic nature of the act of gathering meaning. It is a process without a defined beginning or ending in which meaning cannot be gathered up and abstracted from the text. It can only be enacted in the commitment to gathering up the text's meanings while knowing that these meanings cannot exist outside of the text. As Beckett's 'sense' rises to the surface and becomes form, so Duncan's is gathered from and returned to the source. What is so compelling in Duncan's formulation is its acknowledgement of its own underlying and eternal state of ignorance. Sense can be gleaned, but only held temporarily; it is constantly trickling away so needs constant replenishment. Duncan's modesty hints at reading as an infinite process: if meaning cannot be abstracted, it must be constantly re-enacted in reading.

Deleuze outlines a very similar pattern and dynamic in the interview 'N for Neurology' in Pierre-André Boutang's film *L'Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze, avec Claire Parnet* (Stivale 2011, n.p.) He claims that a self-taught reading is possible for many kinds of difficult texts (scientific, mathematical, philosophical), and that both types of reading, expert and self-taught, are necessary, functioning like the two wings of a bird (in Stivale 2011, n.p.). Deleuze emphasises that this mode of double reading should not proceed randomly but should, rather, take as its starting point a problem that originates elsewhere. He goes on to posit the 'border between knowing and not knowing' as the space where this reading takes place, emphasising that ignorance is a necessary precondition for any attempt at understanding: 'one is always at the extreme *<pointe>* of one's ignorance, which is exactly where one must settle in *<s'installer>*, at the extreme of one's knowledge or one's ignorance, which is the same thing, in order to have something to say' (in Stivale 2011, n.p.). This is remarkably similar to Duncan's act of gathering meaning in a sieve. Deleuze sites the act of understanding at the extreme point of ignorance: knowledge is created in the act of attempting to understand. This thesis will enact its heuristic strategies at the extreme point of its own ignorance. Rather than pursuing a 'theoretical agenda' (McCaffery 2001, p.7) for which its readings serve as test cases, it will make reading itself the act and site where knowledge comes into being.

Deleuze cautions against the randomness that can result from self-taught modes of reading, and this thesis will try to avoid such impulses by grounding its readings in the problem of abstraction. This will be especially pertinent in the first two chapters, which will read the literary criticism of Charles Altieri as a way of teaching itself to read poetry that performs one or more modes of abstraction. In the transition from self-teaching to practice that is begun in the second chapter and developed in the third and fourth, it will modify, develop, extend and eventually relinquish concepts gathered in the first two chapters' readings. The transition from pedagogy to practice between chapters two and three will slightly adapt McCaffery's dictum that theoretical agendas must be replaced with heuristic ones: just as Deleuze and Beckett caution against

privileging one polar term over the other, this thesis will propose that the theoretical and the heuristic are reciprocally generative.

So rather than replacing theory with heuristic strategies, this thesis will enact a mode of reading as praxis. Through its engagements with literary criticism and philosophy, it will gather concepts that will inform its approaches to contemporary poetry. These concepts will remain open to constant critical review, adapting themselves to the particularities of the poems under consideration. Thus, rather than passing from theory to praxis, these readings will proceed by constant movement between concept and material, theory and praxis, tracing the shape of Deleuze's pedagogy of 'constant looping back' (Stivale 2008, p.36) or the toggling between poles and modes that has already been identified as one of abstraction's generative gestures.

The first chapter focuses closely on Altieri's criticism from the 1970s to the present day. It begins with an overview of Altieri's own pedagogy as outlined in the 2006 essay 'Reading for Affect in the Lyric.' This essay yields concepts and modes that are then explored in a range of Altieri's work, particularly his books *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry* (1989), *The Particulars of Rapture* (2001) and *Reckoning with the Imagination* (2015). The purpose of this reading is twofold: to gain a clear understanding of the modes of abstraction that operate in his work, and to critically review these modes for their potential in reading contemporary poetry. This chapter makes an original contribution to knowledge by engaging in depth with Altieri's work across the course of his career.

The second chapter will focus on some of the points of rigidity identified in Altieri's readings, particularly their tendency to set and maintain chronological and conceptual boundaries. This section will be based on a close reading of Altieri's rereading of Robert Lowell's 'Skunk Hour.' It will draw on a range of Deleuze's writing to put pressure on these points and borders and turn their rigid polarities into dynamic ones. It will go on to explore Altieri's use of phenomenology as a source of terminology and tropes, reading Peter Gizzi's *The Outernational* in the light of Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible* in order to question some of the static polarities imposed on

Gizzi's work in Altieri's essay 'Gesture and Philosophical Reflection in the Poetry of Peter Gizzi' (2018). This also serves to have the poetry itself revise some of the abstractions that have been imposed on it in critical readings.⁵ This section proposes proprioception, the system by which the body locates and maintains a sense of itself in space, as a useful analogue to the way meaning emerges and perseveres in the act of reading.

Proprioception, like Beckett and Duncan's 'sense,' only exists in and through movement, providing a suitably dynamic mode for understanding the emergence of meaning in contemporary poetry. This chapter goes on to zoom in on a moment of conflict between Altieri's fixed borders and Robin Blaser's more dynamic 'flowing boundary' (McCaffery 1999, p. 379) staged in a discussion between the two men following the paper 'Some Problems about Agency in the Theories of Radical Poetics' delivered by Altieri at a conference dedicated to Blaser in Vancouver in 1995. In this discussion, Blaser himself puts pressure on some of the more inflexible aspects of Altieri's thought. The rest of this chapter continues to apply this pressure, drawing further on Deleuze, and on Massumi, to emphasise the generative relationship of reciprocal presupposition in dynamic polarities that have been reduced to static binaries in Altieri's work. This section emphasises that meaning, like Beckett and Duncan's 'sense,' is similarly dynamic and can only be traced in its movements, not pinned to static abstract concepts.

Chapters one and two between them gather a range of abstractions from their readings of Altieri and Deleuze. These include gestures of hollowing and repeated citation, and the concepts of the conative and the proprioceptive. Chapter one critiques a tendency for Altieri's critical prose to make theoretical claims for reading that are either left ungrounded in poetic readings or supported by perfunctory or partial readings, cutting his theorising off from practice. The second half of this thesis marks a passage from reading as apprenticeship in abstraction to reading as

⁵ Bernstein has recently written of the problems with Altieri's mode of rhetoric as based on 'dualism at best, or sentimental humanism at worst,' and follows a lengthy quote from Altieri with the quip that 'Poetry is born "sheer" but everywhere in frames' (2017, p. 30). While this thesis does not intend to restage this dualism by directly opposing Altieri's position with Bernstein's, this is a particularly apposite criticism of Altieri's use of framing abstractions.

praxis. However, rather than using the gestures and concepts gathered in the first half to frame the second half's readings, it will extend its commitment to exploratory, heuristic modes of reading to its engagements with poetic texts. Its readings of contemporary poetry will be guided by the abstract gestures and concepts gathered in the first half, but these abstractions will revise themselves continually in relation to the particularities of the poems being read. So rather than serving as a frame for poetry, the poetics gathered in the first two chapters will evolve and adapt in its mutually generative engagement with poetry. The praxis of reading enacted in the second half of this thesis is one in which the theoretical underpinning of the readings is subject to constant critical review through response to the poems themselves.

The third and fourth chapters will put the gestures and concepts gathered in the first two chapters' apprenticeship in reading into practice. It will focus on work by Peter Gizzi and the Scottish poet and translator Peter Manson. These poets were initially chosen for a shared concern with liminal states as vocal performance revealed in the coincidence of 2008 publications entitled *Threshold Ballads* (Manson) and *Threshold Songs* (Gizzi). This suggested an affinity between their work's concerns and forms and the mode of reading as 'flowing boundary' outlined in the thesis's first two chapters. As Altieri's most recent extended critical essay was a reading of a range of poems from across Gizzi's career, this also provided a valuable crossing-point between theory and praxis, with a close reading of Gizzi's work providing an opportunity to query some of the limitations imposed on this work in Altieri's reading.

Both Gizzi and Manson are poets who have made space for their work on the edge of the broader currents of experimental poetry, operating in productive tension with the dominant strains of contemporary innovative poetics on either side of the Atlantic, Language poetry and the poetry of the Cambridge School. In this respect, they follow a pattern that Lynn Keller, writing on female poetic experimentation, has described as 'varying approaches to experimentation often indebted to Language writing but not necessarily closely tied to it' (2010, p.6). Both poets' earliest work grew out of apprenticeships with some of the foremost poetic innovators on either side of the Atlantic.

Gizzi, who was born in western Massachusetts in 1959, became acquainted with Keith and Rosemary Waldrop in his teens through his older brother, and went on to study with them at Brown University (Casper 2007, n.p.). Manson, born in Glasgow in 1969, had some of his earliest poems and visual works published by Bob Cobbing's Writers Forum, the site of his earliest readings outside Scotland. Gizzi and Manson have both held the Judith E. Wilson Fellowship in Poetry at Cambridge University (English.cam.ac.uk 2018, n.p.), a position that has, in recent years, tended to recognise poets writing out of innovative engagements with poetic tradition, including Trevor Joyce, Lisa Robertson, Vahni Capildeo and Peter Hughes.

Both writers went on to found short-lived but influential magazines of innovative poetry originating in letter-writing campaigns to poets whose work they admired, with Gizzi describing the genesis of *o-blek* magazine as 'I wrote letters to the poets I admired with a list of what we imagined the first issue to be' (Casper 2007, n.p.) and Manson tracing the origins of *Object Permanence* to 'a grapeshot-scatter soliciting campaign of...brehtaking naiveté' (Manson 2016c, n.p.). The roster of poets published by both journals demonstrates the extent to which their poetic constellations overlap, with work by Keith and Rosemary Waldrop, Fanny Howe, Charles Bernstein, Ron Silliman, Kevin Killian, Bob Perlman and Clark Coolidge featuring in *o-blek* and *Object Permanence*, and early versions of Gizzi's 'New Picnic Time' and 'Rewriting the Other and the Others' appearing in Manson's journal. The title of Gizzi's journal, pronounced 'oblique,' proves an apt description of both poets' positioning of their work, at an angle to lines of poetic tradition and innovation with which it is, nevertheless, in constant contact.

Peter Manson's work has no direct link with Altieri's, but a concern with processes of visual and conceptual abstraction explicated in his 2007 essay 'Love Poetry' and embodied in such poems as 'The Liver (for Arshile Gorky)' (2005) and 'Twenty for Baselitz's "45"' (2007) suggested the potential for his work to respond in generative ways to heuristic gestures and concepts derived from Altieri. This thesis's second original contribution to knowledge is a sustained critical engagement with Manson's translation and poetry, from the 1997 pamphlet *me generation* to 2016's

Mallarmé translation *The Marrying of Hérodiade*. While there have been critical essays on individual works, notably Craig Dworkin's 2007 essay on *Adjunct: An Undigest* and Tom Betteridge's 2018 close reading of poems from the collections *For the Good of Liars* and *Factitious Airs*, his work has yet to receive sustained and substantial critical attention. The close readings of chapters three and four contribute to closing this gap in the scholarship of contemporary British innovative poetry.

Chapter three proposes that there is a productive interplay between inside and outside discernible in the work of both Gizzi and Manson, rooted in Jack Spicer via Robin Blaser's 'The Practice of Outside' whose exploration of the reciprocity of these terms echoes in the work of both contemporary poets. It begins by looping back to Gizzi's *The Outernational* to trace aspects of this interplay elided in Altieri's more polarised reading. It then explores the dynamic potential of citation and contradiction in Gizzi's 1998 collection *Artificial Heart* before tracing similar dynamics in Manson's 2007 collection *Between Cup and Lip*. These readings are guided by gestures of hollowing and citation and the concepts of the conative and the proprioceptive gathered from Altieri. The final section of the chapter traces the emergence of meaning in Gizzi's 2008 poem 'True Discourse on Power' and Manson's 2012 poem 'raven A,' via a reading process modelled on Duncan's mode of 'gather[ing] meaning as I go.'

Chapter four extends this gathering of meaning to a range of Manson's work, beginning with his multiple and diverse translations and reworkings of Mallarmé before moving on to his 2014 collection *Poems of Frank Rupture*, particularly its central long poem 'Sourdough Mutation.' While these readings continue to draw on the thesis's guiding heuristic abstractions, notably the gesture of hollowing and the concept of proprioception, they emphasise that this project's apprenticeship in reading is not confined to the first two chapters: reading Gizzi and Manson's own acts of reading in chapter three has yielded its own heuristic abstractions that can be drawn into the final chapter's readings. In particular, this chapter will explore the permeability of the threshold between physical and poetic bodies, and trace the emergence and development of meaning and self through movements through and across this dynamic boundary. This chapter

will loop back to Blaser's 'flowing boundary,' and to several readings from Deleuze that emphasise the centrality of abstraction itself to this project's heuristic strategies. In proposing that the abstract should be understood in positive terms rather than as the mere negation of the concrete, Deleuze made the provocative claim that:

'True lived experience [*le vécu*] is an absolutely abstract thing. The abstract is lived experience. I would almost say that once you have reached lived experience, you reach the most fully living core of the abstract. In other words, lived experience represents nothing.' (in Adkins 2016, p.355)

Much of Manson's poetry, particularly 'Sourdough Mutation,' recreates just this 'living core of the abstract' in poetic forms that do not represent, but rather embody or enact, their meanings. Clay has described this mode as poetry that 'does not represent a world of which it is a copy, it is itself a real part of the world' (2010, p.7). This places it in a direct line of descent from Beckett's Joyce, whose 'writing is not *about* something; *it is that something itself*' (1972, p.14, emphasis original), making it the ideal ground for a practice of reading committed to testing and revising its own modes of abstraction.

Chapter One: Starting from the Abstract Pole—Learning to Read with Altieri

I had to face the perhaps bizarre truth that I feel much less hollow elaborating theoretical projections about how to direct one's teaching than I do pretending to offer practical wisdom.

(Altieri 2001, p.260)

Introduction

The introduction outlined the multiple contexts in which the term ‘abstraction’ is employed in the study of contemporary poetry, and initially supported Charles Altieri’s claim that ‘getting straight about abstraction obviously takes an embarrassing amount of abstraction’ (PA, p.386). This chapter will attempt to demonstrate that ‘getting straight’ is not a reasonable objective in the study of his own abstraction, and that its contradictory qualities will prove resistant to all efforts to have it conform to a predetermined concept. Instead, it will be necessary to engage with Altieri’s abstraction as a process by learning to read its currents and movements. In the introduction to a 2001 essay, ‘Taking Lyrics Literally: Teaching Poetry in a Prose Culture,’ which established terms and procedures that would become central to his pedagogy and poetics, he admits to a heuristic mode that begins from ‘elaborating theoretical projections’ and that, in many cases, remains in that domain rather than proposing anything resembling ‘practical wisdom’ (p.259). In this respect it can be seen to start from the opposite pole to such educational theory as Whitehead’s that proposes abstraction as an active element in the process of learning.⁶ This chapter will follow that trajectory: beginning with a close reading of the 2006 essay ‘Reading for Affect in the Lyric’ from

⁶ Whitehead claims that ‘I hold that by a process of constructive abstraction we can arrive at abstractions which are the simply located bits of material, and at other abstractions which are the minds included...’ (in Irvine 2015 n.p.).

Poetry and Pedagogy, it will seek to establish the terms and procedures of Altieri's mode of reading. It will then use these concepts to guide a more extensive reading of Altieri's work, ranging from *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry* (1989) to 2015's *Reckoning with the Imagination*. It will draw on works spanning the period between these books to argue that for all the abstract terms⁷ that compose Altieri's thinking, the central abstraction at work throughout is his own process of reading and writing.

'Reading for Affect in the Lyric' (2006a) expresses concern that approaches based on reader-response theory 'are strongly tempted to isolate the subject as a separate topic for study, abstracted from careful attention to how the work works' (p.40). This concern prepares the reader for a text that will pay close and careful attention to its chosen works and steer clear of grand abstract claims. He goes on to propose a 'best of both worlds' mode of reading that draws on a synthesis of hermeneutics and reader-response theory. This would seem a rigorous yet responsive approach, in keeping with the mode of heuristic abstraction that was proposed in the introduction.

Yet a close reading of selected passages will demonstrate how the modes of abstraction at play undermine the larger claims which Altieri makes. He begins by proposing to divide the training of readers into 'conventional' and 'affective' elements (p.41), a seemingly unnecessary and untenable splitting. The introduction to these modes of training uses no concrete examples: the argument is outlined in the abstract, with Hopkins, Wordsworth and William Carlos Williams each called on to personify a concept. Despite the claim 'I shall not dwell on the abstract theory' (p.41) this is exactly what this reading does, spending seven pages detailing an abstractly-defined set-up ('a possible path through 150 years of self-reflexive feelings,' p.41), telescoping 150 years of literary history into a narrative of antagonistic engagement with preceding traditions, and outlining an elaborate, if individual, series of distinctions between the nature and functions of affects, feelings, emotions, moods and sensations. This section demonstrates two hallmarks of Altieri's thinking: a

⁷ Recurring 'major abstractions' (Stevens 1990, p.388) include 'constructivist abstraction' (PA, pp.386-422) 'the aesthetics of the affects' (PR, pp.1-37) and 'the phenomenology of value' (WS, pp. viii-x, 35-6, 237)

tendency towards what McEvilley has described as ‘a belief in the linear continuity of the Western tradition’ (1996, p.116), and a prose style built around minute definitions and refinements that customise commonly used terms.

Once this argument has been elaborated in a series of ‘theoretical projections’ (Altieri 2001, p.260), the next move is to support it with a series of ‘exemplary’ readings. This is the second pole of the abstract process: each proposition or projection is supported with a text selected for its exemplarity. Rather than reading texts responsively and deriving theories from their material qualities, arguments are elaborated entirely in the abstract and then supported with an example whose exemplarity is stated, but rarely justified. This technique loosely follows a pattern that Brian Reed has defined as ‘narrative as a tool for conveying the intricacy...of perceptual and affective experience’ (2012, p. xxi). Thus, each poem chosen for study is presented as the best possible example of the abstract concept being elaborated. Arnold’s ‘Isolation: To Marguerite’ is the ‘quintessential Victorian poem’ (Altieri 2006a, p.46); ‘For heuristic purposes, the best quick way to indicate what this cultural shift involves is to turn to the lyrics of William Carlos Williams’ (p.50). Most unexpectedly, ‘radical poetry,’ a loosely-defined genre to which Altieri frequently expresses antipathy, as shall be seen in the next chapter, is imbued with exemplary qualities nested in a range of abstractions:

[In a new poetry] it might be possible to stage writing as an activity with exemplary social force because it can envision a version of affect capable of organizing shareable resistance to dominant cultural habits for orienting our capacities for feeling and for investing in those feelings. (p.53)

The poem chosen to illustrate the oppositional reworking of modernism that Altieri reads into this mode is proposed as being exemplary in multiple ways: ‘there is no contemporary work more suggestive than *Sight*, a collaboration between Lyn Hejinian and Leslie Scalapino. For the collaboration itself takes on all sorts of exemplary qualities [that] give exemplary social force to the compositional energies forming the work's intentionality’ (p54). Altieri’s modified use of the term ‘intentionality’ will be the focus of a later section, but what is particularly striking is that this paragraph proposes exemplary status for sections of Hejinian and Scalapino’s long poem for

reasons that never become quite clear. This technique is central to Altieri's process: concepts are proposed in the abstract and poems or other works are selected as exemplary supports to these concepts, but it often remains unclear why.

Somewhat at odds with the resolutely abstract prose style is the narrative reading given to each of the 'exemplary' poems: the entirely semantic reading of Arnold's poem is focused on what it says, not how it says it; the reading of Williams's short poems confines itself to telling one reader's version of the story of the poems and extrapolating a broader point, paying little attention to the poems' structure or sound. This discussion of lineation without any examples will, as we move into the abstraction of Deleuze, come to strike the reader as a weird form of 'abstract line' that has been abstracted to the point of invisibility. Most incongruously, the final sections narrativise the motivations of 'radical poetics,' cuing the reader in to what 'Hejinian probably wants us to feel' (p.57). It is notable that Hejinian herself cautions against modes of reading that treat poems as 'merely exemplary' of particular aspects of poetics, reminding readers that poetry and poetics are 'mutually constitutive' and 'reciprocally transformative' practices (2000, p.1). This view of the complex and reciprocally generative interaction between poetry and poetics is much more supportive of the mode of reading proposed by this thesis than what will be defined later in this chapter as Altieri's problematic and limiting concept of exemplarity.

The overall effect of this essay is a disorienting reading, where poems are reduced to narrative props in support of an abstract storyline they never quite feel related to. This storyline turns the locus of meaning from text to reader, but also posits a single, predetermined 'you' that each text solicits, in a move that seems to short-change both text and reader in ways that will be explored further in chapter two: 'we can shift much of the energy we have been putting into interpretation, the postulating of meaning and purpose for actions, into the exploration of who texts ask us to become if we *participate in their particular ways* of fusing sensation and imagination'

(p.46, emphasis added). It is particularly striking that the ‘particular ways’ in which this mode of reading asks us to participate are paid so little concrete attention.⁸

This essay, then, allows a responsive reader to abstract features of Altieri’s poetics to guide a wider engagement with his work: it starts from a pole of abstraction; it adapts and customises terminology to serve its developing line of argument; and it supports its arguments with readings of ‘exemplary’ poems and artworks.

1.1 The Process of Abstraction: abstracting prose and hollowing terminology

This section will pay close attention to stylistic and procedural features that lend Altieri’s prose its qualities of polar abstraction, and the process of abstraction as emptying-out that reveals a similar dynamic at work in his terminological choices.

1.1.1 Polar Prose

Any attempt to come to an understanding of Altieri’s thinking must first confront the mode of abstraction presented by his own prose style. For this reason, I intend to begin by examining some elements of Altieri’s style. I will then consider the ways in which he defines and applies abstract concepts in a manner that contributes to the density of his prose while establishing a process of polar abstraction. For this purpose, I will focus on sections from his 2003 book, *The Particulars of Rapture*. As will later become clear, many of the elements of abstract style and processes of abstraction that are employed in this text have their roots in *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry*. However, *The Particulars of Rapture* offers particularly rich examples of the abstractions of Altieri’s style and process, as well as a position from which to assess how *Painterly*

⁸ Bernstein has recently criticised Altieri’s tendency to champion poets who ‘suit his tastes’ in a way that ‘actually undervalues their work’ (King 2017, p.29).

Abstraction's key ideas have been reused and refined in later work. In this sense, it offers a vantage point from which to consider the currents of Altieri's polar abstraction.

I will open this section with a reading of passages from the introduction that illustrate difficulties characteristic of Altieri's writing, before examining his mode of classification, whose aim in seeking to clarify terms is frequently undermined by the complexity his categorisations entail. I will attempt to establish the extent to which these stylistic features contribute to a 'rationalist' process where 'the abstract is given the task of explaining' and '[o]ne starts with abstractions such as the One...and one looks for the process by which they are embodied in a world which they make conform to their requirements' (Deleuze and Parnet 1987, p. vii).

Elements of Style

In the fifth section of his introduction, Altieri sets out to outline and defend what he terms an 'expressivist view of affective agency' in the following terms: '[t]his domain of value considerations depends on how our expressive interests project and find satisfactions in particular states of consciousness and forms of social interaction' (POR, p.18). This sentence illustrates two qualities that contribute to the not unjustified perception⁹ that Altieri's prose is unusually rebarbative. Firstly, the substantives are all double abstractions ('domain of value considerations,' 'states of consciousness,' 'forms of social interaction'), making it difficult for the reader to grasp exactly what the subjects and objects of the sentence's actions are. Furthermore, many of the nouns are qualified by adjectives ('*value* considerations,' '*expressive* interests,' '*social* interaction') in a manner that provides clarity and precision to each individual term while rendering the sentence as a whole dense and difficult to follow. This sacrificing of overall clarity to the detailed definition of key terms, which will be returned to in the next section, is discernible in Altieri's prose to such a degree that it merits consideration as an operative element of his process. The confusion elicited by the

⁹ (Hoffman (1992, p.133), Robinson (1993, p.131), Mao (2008, p.174)

clustering of hyper-defined noun phrases is compounded by the peculiarly inert verbs and verb phrases ('depends,' 'project' and 'find satisfactions in') that make it a challenge to understand the type of actions that link the noun phrases to each other. A sentence where a cloud of vague abstractions engage each other on a conceptual level is a difficult one to follow, and builds a prose style that ultimately threatens to deflect or even repel the reader's attention; yet it is all but impossible to recast this sentence in more solid concrete terms. Considerations of value and the finding of satisfaction are key terms in, perhaps even aims of, Altieri's thinking,¹⁰ and they are resistant to straightforward definition. The subtle shifts in attention to and emphasis of the worlds of feeling, expression and consciousness are similarly generative of meaning that is frustratingly difficult to paraphrase. The challenges posed by this deflective prose style, and the adjustments the reader must make in navigating it, give rise to a 'meaning' that is more present continuous verb than noun, and the reader's attention to *how* the text is making its meaning is essential to generating any movement in which it can be read.

Definitions and Enumerations

This introductory chapter demonstrates a technique central to Altieri's thinking: an intricate and often polarized engagement with a range of interlocutors drawn from the domains of philosophy, literary theory and poetry. Altieri engages in detail with a range of contemporary scholars¹¹ whose thinking will help shape the flow of his argument throughout the book, along with Emmanuel Kant (pp.14-15), Friedrich Nietzsche (pp.18-19, 23, 29) and Baruch Spinoza (pp.4, 15-16, 29). As well as these major interlocutors, Altieri turns to a range of minor interlocutors¹² to clarify, often through opposition, his thinking on complex points and distinctions, with these interactions frequently relegated to the endnotes. In the case of Jacques Derrida the gesture suggests dismissal,

¹⁰ 'Satisfaction' is a key term, often the stated goal of interactions with the world and/or art via which 'value' is derived (e.g. POR, pp.4, 15, 29).

¹¹ E.g. Sue Campbell (pp. 11-12, 17, 19), Richard Wollheim (pp.27-28) and Richard Moran (pp.13, 29)

¹² E.g. Ben-Zeev (pp.255, 260), Cataldi (p.259), Demasio (pp.260-262) and Derrida (p.259)

but the work of Aaron Ben-Zeev and Antonio Demasio, in particular, are discussed with subtlety and in some detail in this ex-centric forum. Gilles Deleuze, conversely, is mentioned with wariness in the body of the text (pp.23, 29), but some degree of approbation in the endnotes (pp.259, 275, 287). This procedure demonstrates a tendency that will be returned to in chapter two, whereby Altieri sets and maintains clearly delimited conceptual and chronological boundaries in his work, exiling all that does not fit the pattern to appendices and endnotes outside the body of the argument.

Along with his relegating of long engagements with other thinkers to the abundant endnotes, Altieri's second technique for maintaining order among his myriad concepts and interlocutors is his process of classification, whereby he enumerates and outlines the qualities of his concepts and the aspects of his engagements with other thinkers.¹³ The guiding principle behind this mode is refinement: in most cases where Altieri proposes two aspects of a concept, he is attempting to tease out the nuances of difference in interpretations or applications of a term, clarifying the interpretation he will apply in his reading. This tendency, driven by a desire for precision in the use of key terms, has the corollary of slowing and fragmenting the flow of argument to the point where it becomes difficult to follow. While nuances of meaning are being teased out in relation to individual abstract nouns, the reader's grasp of the overall shape of argument tends to slip. This leads to a situation similar to that outlined in the previous section on

¹³ At the risk of seeming to have fallen foul of this mania for enumeration, I will provide a quick overview of the classifications provided in this opening chapter: there are four categories of affects (p.2), two forms of dissatisfaction with philosophy (p.3), two fundamental aspects of aesthetic experience (p.5), five *topoi* of contemporary accounts of the emotions (p.6), two limitations to this approach (p.6), two motifs guiding contemporary theories about the affects (p.8), two kinds of judgment elicited by jealousy (p.9), two conceptual victims of the classification of emotions, synonymous with the limitations previously mentioned (p.9), two serious errors caused by the adjectival approach to emotion (p.12), two material features of the representational model of the affects (p.13), Kant's two modes of judgement (p.14), two basic dimensions of value brought to bear by literature (p.17), two poles of expressivist theory (p.18), two possible rationales for not imposing value judgements on Othello (p.22), four advantages of an aesthetic approach to the affects (p.24), two insufficiently discussed aspects of agency (p.29), two ways of characterizing values free of reason (p.32), three conative states (p.32), two reasons why phenomenology is central to his project (p.34), and two problematic aspects of privileging the neurological over the phenomenological approach to the affects (p.35) in the text alone, with further examples in the endnotes.

the use of adjectives to define key terms in detail. There is something of a paradox at play here, where increased precision leads to an overall lack of clarity.

There are abundant examples of this polar process in action in some passages from pages 16-20 where key concepts are defined and refined. Firstly, weak and strong versions of the word ‘amenable’ are discussed in the context of the emotions’ disposition towards rational argument’ (p.16). This leads to a discussion of the ‘two basic dimensions of value usually ignored by philosophy’ (p.17) that a focus on the literary makes available for consideration. The discussion of the interplay between these dimensions is set up, in a formation that will come to be seen as totemic in Altieri’s thinking, as two poles between which a nexus of minutely outlined abstract terms swing. The first pole here concerns ‘a range of states open to self-reflection that are too subtle or transient to have much to do with cognition or rational appraisal,’ and the second pole musters ‘the problematic but provocative roles that the imagination plays in our affective lives’ (p.17).

The next section sets out to situate these values, and those of the affects more broadly, in relation to ‘two versions of expressivist theory’ (p.18), again taking the form of two poles: the ‘epistemic’ and the ‘aesthetic’ poles of expressivist theory. Altieri carefully teases out the ‘competing pulls’ of these poles in shaping the complex concept of expression (p.18) and proposes a model of expression that harnesses Sue Campbell’s inchoateness to Nietzsche’s notion of ‘ends in themselves’ in service of an aesthetic view of the affects. The subtle shifts of nuance characteristic of Altieri’s process of definition and refinement, demonstrated in this section but central to his work at large, yields a prose that is thick with shades of meaning, therefore rich in potential for misunderstanding. However, it is worth drawing on one of Altieri’s own conclusions in this regard (‘I want to set performing one’s affects against understanding one’s affects, so that we recognise how even the process of understanding can sometimes become a matter of stylizing and personalizing’ p.19), and considering how the act of reading the passage in which this assertion is made becomes a cognitive allegory of the affective process it describes.

Through procedures of minute definition and interlinked polar dualities, Altieri's prose poses formidable challenges to the process of understanding. The next section will attend to his 'stylizing and personalizing' of key terms in a manner that calls into question the concept of understanding itself.

1.1.2 Hollowing Terminology

This section proposes that Altieri voids his key terms of fixed meanings by a 'dialectic of emptying-out' that Roberto Finelli traces to Marx's *Grundrisse*, where 'the abstract occupies and itself invades the concrete' (2007, p.66). Finelli's argument is based on a view of post-modernism as a more complete realisation of, rather than a rupture with, modernism that is in keeping with Altieri's concern with 'contemporary recastings of...Modernist heritage' (Altieri 2006a, p. 47). Finelli 'posits the abstract and the concrete in connection not through contradiction but through abstraction - emptying-out' (2007, p.66). This sense of abstraction through the act of emptying is congruent with Elisabeth Loevlie's use of kenosis¹⁴ to denote 'a repeated emptying and weakening' through which poetic language unsettles language's referential function. (2015, p.91). This section will examine the hollowing out of the terms 'intentionality,' 'conative' and 'irritable reaching after' via this mode of abstraction, not in order to suggest that the mode of abstraction they employ imbues Altieri's language with a poetic function, but to emphasise features of its troubling of referentiality that prepare the reader for the more overtly kenotic manoeuvres of contemporary poetry.

¹⁴ Kenosis refers to Christ's emptying of his divine self in order to be filled with the human nature, 'the sublime Self-forgetfulness of the Son of Man, who on their behalf had "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant"' (McClain 1998, p. 88).

Intentionality

In an endnote to the first chapter of *Particulars of Rapture*, Altieri defines intentionality in precise and comparatively specific terms:

The simplest definition of intentionality may be the most useful: intentionality is what it takes to turn *a* situation into *this* situation. Put more philosophically, ‘intentionality’ refers to those orientations of consciousness that give directedness and so make it possible for the activity of mind to engage a concrete world. Intentional states are those through which we make possible the offering of descriptions and the motivating of actions. (POR, p.260)

There are a couple of points worth noting in this definition. Firstly, in its orienting function it aligns closely with ‘attunement,’¹⁵ a central concept in his mode of valuing that will be discussed in the next section. Secondly, Altieri takes care to distinguish his version of intentionality, drawn from Richard Wollheim, from the traditional definition provided by Franz Brentano. His assertion is that Brentano’s definition limits itself to considerations of directedness without taking account of the contents derived from directedness (p.260). A passage synthesising Spinoza and Kant makes the assertion that ‘intentionality is dynamic’ (p.15) comprising, not just orientation, but the search for knowledge and the creation of consciousness. Given that Altieri’s unconventional phenomenology will be explored in chapter two, this section will attempt to address the extent to which his ‘dynamic intentionality’ hollows out the concept as it is understood in phenomenology.

In his essay outlining Edmund Husserl’s model of intentionality, Jean-Paul Sartre positions it as an alternative to what he characterises as a Kantian ‘digestive philosophy of empirico-criticism’ (Sartre 1939, p.1), a philosophy in which all access to the world is reduced to the soft, digesting mist of the self (p.1). In the face of this queasy dissolution of world by self, ‘Husserl persistently affirmed that one cannot dissolve things in consciousness’ (p.1). Here, we have an intriguing point of contrast with Altieri’s model: while Sartre posits Husserlian intentionality as a counter-measure to a neo-Kantian absorption of consciousness of the world into the self, Altieri suggests adopting

¹⁵ Attunement, or attuning, is the term Altieri uses to describe the complex dynamic whereby agents engage with others, with artworks, or with the consequences of their own emotions (POR, pp.3, 5, 10). This form of engagement is also extended to the characters in artworks, whose attempts to process the aesthetic qualities of their own actions and relationships mirror and elicit the response of their readers (POR, p. 22-3). This, then, is a flexible, interactive process, one that will both enable and complicate Altieri’s conception of intentionality, and play a central role in his phenomenological thinking in *Reckoning with the Imagination* (p.22).

Kant's own notion of 'purposiveness' as a means of allowing for a more flexible, dynamic model of intentionality (POR, p.15). This proposal would appear to smooth over a distinction made by Maurice Merleau-Ponty between a Kantian process of detaching the subject by 'showing that I could not possibly apprehend anything as existing unless I first of all experienced myself as existing in the act of apprehending it' (Merleau-Ponty 2005, p.x) and a Husserlian "*noematic reflection*" which remains within the object and, instead of begetting it, brings to light its fundamental unity' (p.x). It appears that Altieri's version of intentionality privileges the very process of 'bas[ing] the world on the synthesising activity of the subject' (p.x) in contrast to which Husserl, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty all conceive of phenomenology. Chapter two will attempt to untangle some consequences of framing his literary and philosophical commitments as an 'embarrassed phenomenology' (POR, p.32).¹⁶ In *Wallace Stevens and the Demands of Modernity* (p.9) he proposes a 'phenomenology of intentionality' which would seem to reverse the usual direction of these terms. This, taken together with his development, in *Reckoning with the Imagination* (pp.32-6), of a version of intentionality that overlaps considerably with the concept of authorial intention, underlines the extent to which Altieri hollows out existing abstract concepts to fulfil the role he requires of them in his own process. Central to that version is the argument that 'if we cannot structure our interpretive discourses around what the author is trying to do in the making, we are necessarily trapped in abstractions such as "meanings," which breed counter-abstractions such as "free play" and "conversation"' (RI, p.34). This assertion will be returned to at the end of the chapter.

In Merleau-Ponty's and Husserl's phenomenology, there are two related categories of intentionality: 'intentionality' of act' entails the deliberate taking up of a position, and is described as corresponding to Kant's thought in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (Merleau-Ponty 2005, p.xx), thus supporting Altieri's Kant-inflected model of dynamic intentionality; and 'operative intentionality,' 'that which produces the natural and antepredicative unity of the world and of our life' (p.xx), in

Wallace Stevens and the Demands of Modernity (pp.37-63) and *Reckoning with the Imagination* (pp.9, 35-6) both present themselves as forms of this idiosyncratically synthetic phenomenology.

other words, an intentionality that originates in the world and in turn shapes consciousness of the world via our desires and evaluations, ‘furnishing the text which our knowledge tries to translate into precise language’ (p.xx). Thus Merleau-Ponty’s definition of intentionality gives ample support to Altieri’s recourse to Kant (pp. xix, xx), and to his dynamic presentation of intentionality, while simultaneously undercutting these supports and reversing the poles of the dynamic. While Kant proposes the world as the ‘possible object’ unified in the consciousness of the subject, Merleau-Ponty shows a world that is ‘always “already there” before reflection begins’ (pp.vii), source of the consciousness that shapes the subject and from which his consciousness is derived, in turn giving rise to the sense of the world derived from the intersections of subjectivity and intersubjectivity (pp.xix, xxii). Merleau-Ponty’s description of the dynamic of intentionality takes the world as its starting point and posits a subject formed by its interactions with what is ‘always “already there.”’ In these two currents of thought, the poles of origin and end are reversed, but the dynamic flowing between them is otherwise strikingly similar. This reversal of the direction of intentionality mirrors the reversal of the ‘concrete to abstract’ poles, and reversal becomes a means of hollowing. It is striking, and will be further noted in chapter two, how little Altieri draws on Merleau-Ponty, or indeed Husserl, in elaborating his models of intentionality and phenomenology.¹⁷

Instead, he seeks to define it through opposition to cognitivism. Altieri’s concern to distinguish his thinking from that of cognitivist philosophy fuels the contrarian dynamic of his interaction with Martha Nussbaum’s *Upheavals of Thought*, particularly in his interrogation of her use of intentionality (POR pp.160-7), which allows him to refine his model of the concept through contradiction. He presents the outline of her argument in terms tantalizingly close to his own (‘Nussbaum is committed to making the theory of emotion much more sensitive than traditional cognitivism is to complex features of intentionality’ p.160), before turning his comprehensive

¹⁷ There is only one glancing mention of Merleau-Ponty in the body of the text (POR, p.211) and two in the endnotes (pp. 265, 271), and none of Husserl.

disagreements with her position into an opportunity to clarify his own (p.161). He finds fault with her unifying concept of ‘embodied beliefs’ and suggests that cognitive concerns and considerations of intentionality are fundamentally incompatible, and that it would be ‘more accurate to maintain a position that cognitive concerns have to emphasize how the emotion connects to the world, while intentionalist ones focus on the subject rather than the object’ (p.164). While this separation of domains is consistent with deeper ethical and literary disagreements with Nussbaum that will be returned to in the next section, the urge to corral intentionalist concerns into a category separate from, and untouchable by, cognitive ones, risks restricting their domain to one that is so circumscribed as to be unusable. A tendency to define his thinking through opposition and minute terminological distinctions risks leaving him with an impoverished and sequestered version of intentionality, unable to fulfil the dynamic and complex functions he has proposed for it.

Conative

The adjective ‘conative,’ derived from Spinoza’s use of the noun ‘*conatus*’ in his *Ethics*, occurs over 50 times in *The Particulars of Rapture*, beginning with the assertion that ‘[in making affective experience a source of value to be pursued] the arts seem to require our developing a fairly tight connection between our aesthetic interests and what Baruch Spinoza elaborated as our conative drives’ (p.4). It is striking that the first use of this central adjective goes unmarked with explication or para-text, given the centrality of both to Altieri’s procedure. The second instance occurs on the next page, in a description of valuing as an ‘abstract aspect’ of a process Altieri will go on to define later in this section (p.12) and elaborate in *Reckoning with the Imagination* (pp.22, 99) as ‘attunement:’

[This is] concerned not with how we engage the world but with how we reflect upon the values involved in our various ways of experiencing the world. For I want to use aesthetic models to foreground conative experiences of affective states as ends in themselves, experiences quite at odds with the philosophical tendency to treat affects primarily as means for generating actions and attitudes. An aesthetic perspective invites us to ask what states, roles, identifications and social bonds become possible by virtue of our efforts to dwell fully within these dispositions of energies and the modes of self-reflection they sustain. Rather than asking what we can know about the affects, or how they contribute to the work of knowing, we begin to ask who we can be by virtue of how we dispose our self-consciousness in relation to affective experience. (POR, p.5)

This passage proposes a central concern of Altieri's thinking, 'who we can be' or become through self-reflexive engagement with art, that will be traced more fully in chapter two. It frames that process as using 'aesthetic models to foreground conative experiences of affective states,' therefore a lack of clarity regarding his definition and understanding of the concept of the 'conative' hinders access to meaning in what is already a recursively abstract passage. Adding to the potential for confusion is the fact that the conative is one of Jakobson's six functions of language: as the aspect of language that orients it towards an addressee, it is associated with imperatives and direct addresses (Hébert 2011 n.p.). Jakobson's 'Statement on Linguistics and Poetics' highlights these aspects of the conative function in poetic language, locating it in particular in poetry in the second person which is 'supplicatory or exhortative' (Jakobson 1985, p.154). This sense of the word does not fit its use in this text or in 'Taking Lyrics Literally,' neither of which references Jakobson or draws on examples of poetry in the second person. However, for the reader familiar with the 'conative function,' the discrepancy between that term and the use of the adjective in this text poses a challenge to understanding.

The term, and its Spinozan context, are next mentioned in a passage drawing them into a synthesis with Kantian 'purposiveness':

Conatus [from Spinoza] is a very general form of purposive orientation exercised by all living agents in their efforts to persist in their own being. Purposiveness [from Kant] seems to me a powerful way of identifying the dynamics of conative activity so that we can postulate satisfactions and interests that are not dependent on epistemic value stories. (POR, p.15)

This gives a brief synopsis, again without para-text, of the generally-accepted definition of the term *conatus* before reverting to the adjective and back into the flow of abstract exposition. Given the tendency in this prose to define and refine key terms with references and foot-notes, the reader is on the lookout for a substantial explication of this guiding concept that is not provided until chapter four ('Why Manner Matters: Expressive and Conative Value,' p.109), which promises to establish a speculative framework via 'Baruch Spinoza's account of conative activity' (p.112). The realisation of this promise, however, is deferred again to a brief overview on p.140 whose endnotes cite two brief references to Spinoza's *Ethics* and two secondary sources, one of which ('Deleuze's

great book on Spinoza which I engage at length in my *Subjective Agency*,’ p.279) is acknowledged but not engaged with in the text. Attaching rhetorical weight to such a thinly-defined concept compounds the disorienting effect of this prose: terminological slipperiness prevents the reader from gaining traction on meaning. At this point it may be useful to get a sense of the origins of ‘conative,’ both in Deleuze and in Altieri’s engagements with his reading, to get a better grasp on what the word is doing in Altieri’s thinking.

Deleuze defined it as ‘being’s tendency to persevere in its existence’ (Deleuze 1981, author’s translation)¹⁸ and Hardt, synthesising both Deleuze and Spinoza, called it ‘the essence of being insofar as being is productive; it is the motor that animates being as the world’ (Hardt 2003, p.93)¹⁹ and it could be described as a tendency or a striving. In both cases, it is presented as a source of movement, ‘pure activity’ (Hardt, p.93) in which ‘the dynamic characteristics of *conatus* are linked with its mechanical ones’ (Deleuze 1990a, p.230). It is also a ‘rich synthesis’ of action and passion, mind and body (Hardt, p.93) so that ‘a composite body’s *conatus* [is] only the effort to preserve the relation of movement and rest that defines it, that is, to maintain constantly renewed parts in the relation that defines its existence’ (Deleuze 1990a, p.230). It has been proposed (LeBuffe 2015 n.p.) that the concept allows Spinoza to provide a mental correlate for physical bodies’ tendency towards motion. This takes the form of tending towards what one perceives as good, and away from what is perceived as evil:

IIIp9s suggests that the fact about the person which the label reveals is her conative state:

It is clear that we neither strive for, nor will, neither want, nor desire anything because we judge it to be good; on the contrary, we judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it. (LeBuffe, 2015)

Thus the *conatus*, and its adjective conative, have rich potential for considering literature and art, serving to conceptualize and clarify relationships of movement and rest; relations between multiple

¹⁸ Deleuze (1981) emphasises that, for his reading, ‘persevering’ is more important than tending : ‘*je comprends que dans l’expression « tendre à persévérer dans l’être », je comprends « persévérer » avant d’avoir compris « tendance »*’ or ‘I understand that in the phrase ‘tending to persevere in being,’ I understand ‘persevering’ before having understood ‘tendency.’

¹⁹ Hardt’s doctoral dissertation, on which this book draws, was completed under the supervision of Altieri (Hardt, Smith, Minardi 2004).

composing parts; and the tendency to designate as ‘good’ that which one already desires, and ‘bad’ that which one does not.

The first uses of the term in Altieri’s work are in *Subjective Agency*, where it is proposed as an alternative to such infelicitous coinages as ‘myness’ and ‘selving’:

Were it not violence to the English language I would go on to refer to this sense of myness as “selving,” since that participle captures the distinction between the unity provided by self-images and the unifying activity that gives one confidence that one is the orienting intentional agent of one’s own actions, even when there is no clear concept of the self operating. But for this study I will use various circumlocutions for that activity, resorting to *conatus* when I am in real trouble. (SA, p.26)

This initial presentation emphasises the provisionality of the term’s use, pressed into service in order to avoid grammatical and terminological difficulties, and the coining of the present participle ‘selving’ will provide an analogue for suggesting ‘meaning’ as a present participle in chapters three and four. However, there is very little focus on poetry in *Subjective Agency*, other than a reading of Stevens preceded by a note on the *conatus* as a way to ‘establish modal colourings of Substance’ (p.86) that allow for a polar modulation between active and passive affects. The entirely theoretical argument is difficult to follow, and much of its detailed interaction with the specifics of Deleuze’s *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* takes place in the endnotes (SA, pp.259-264). However, it does emphasise the term’s dynamic and relational qualities more clearly than in some later uses.

‘Taking Lyrics Literally,’ on the other hand, appears to assign more agency or more conscious directing power to the concept than would seem justified by any of the readings from which it originates:

Conative force seeks to resist all those factors "that can annul" the sense of individual existence for itself. Then because this emphasis so tightly weaves feeling a being’s distinctive existence into an imperative for activity, the *conatus* provides the basis for a teleological account of the affects. (Altieri 2001, p.274)

This reading makes the *conatus* grounds for a teleological view that would seem at odds with Spinoza’s use of the term as an alternative to teleological accounts of desire (LeBuffe 2015). Furthermore, the collocations used throughout his argument, from ‘conative powers’ to ‘conative energies’²⁰ lend a directedness and force to the concept that does not seem in keeping with its

²⁰ The twenty pages of this essay include references to ‘conative powers,’ (x3) ‘conative energies,’ (x3) ‘conative forces,’ (x2) ‘conative sense,’ (x2) ‘conative relations,’ ‘conative investments’ (x2).

formulation as a ‘tendency’ or a ‘persevering.’ This tendency that is more usually presented as underlying agency is here being credited with agency of its own, a manoeuvre that will prove very useful in reading meaning and material in contemporary poetry in chapters three and four. However, it does lead to a somewhat unconvincing reading of Elizabeth Bishop’s ‘Sonnet:’

More striking yet is the way that the concept of conatus helps us characterize the deep joke of writing this sonnet in thirteen lines. The fourteenth line need not be given any concrete specification because it has meaning simply as the space of possibility...(Altieri 2001, p. 275)

The argument has built itself out of a chain of energies and forces, so the poetic example itself ends up being torqued to fit the outline of the abstract argument. While the missing fourteenth line could more comfortably be read as the poem’s formal marking of its thematic escape from constraint, the constraint Altieri has devised for his own reading requires him to find parallels to the energetic concept he has evoked in the poem’s own structures. This reading of the missing fourteenth line is rendered even more mystifying once it is noted that the poem is more usually lineated with a break in the line ‘Freed – the broken/ thermometer’s mercury’ (Schwartz 2000 n.p.) that enacts the freedom-giving gesture of breaking while restoring the missing fourteenth line. The tensions that constraints impose on reading will be a central theme of chapters three and four, and it is interesting to note that, even though the constraints here are conceptual rather than formal, their folding or knotting action has implications for the text’s ability to mean.

‘Irritable reaching after’

In the ‘Conceptual Grammar for Constructivist Abstraction’ that constitutes the second appendix to *Painterly Abstraction*, a passage rich with the complexities of Altieri’s abstract prose outlines the ‘ideals of constructivist agency’ (PA, p.396) in terms that posit a shared agency, a kind of reciprocal presupposition between viewer and artwork, will and perception:

The art must take responsibility for how it makes the visible visible, so that its subject becomes the alignment of *will* and *world*, accomplished *without any irritable reaching after symbols and stories*. Full self-consciousness is necessary for a full emotional attachment to things as they are. And the only way not to have the will continually exceed perception is to have its demands already factored into the stance one employs as one’s means of making those positions articulate. (PA p. 396, third emphasis added)

The idea of reciprocal presupposition, drawing on Deleuze, will be explored in chapter two, and it is interesting to note that Altieri's 'making the visible visible' prefigures Deleuze's stipulation that 'painting must render invisible forces visible' (FB, p.71).²¹ The more compelling allusion in this passage is the line 'without any irritable reaching after symbols and stories,' an echo of Keats' perennially influential 'negative capability.'²²

In the letter briefly outlining this idea, Keats proposed it as a stance that opposed the gesture of 'irritable reaching after':

I had not a dispute but a disquisition with Dilke, on various subjects; several things dovetailed in my mind, & at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, *without any irritable reaching after fact & reason*—Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetrallium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge. (Keats 2009, second emphasis added)

The emergence of this idea in heated 'disquisition' on many subjects is mirrored in its unattributed emergence in the threads of Altieri's lengthy and detailed elaboration of a constructivist 'grammar.' In this formulation, negative capability appears to be a feature of the artwork's own responsibility, guiding its gestures of revelation and alignment.

This gesture is reworked, again without attribution, in a passage from *The Particulars of Rapture* outlining the abstract agency of Rothko's paintings:

Abstraction ceases to be a matter only of how the surface of painting deploys visual forces and controls dynamic balances. Abstraction becomes access to a particular kind of substance and a particular disposition in relation to that substance. That relation, I think, is a kind of second order willing...We feel spirit not only because of the painting's dynamic energies but also because of the qualities of rest it affords when we experience ourselves fully yielding agency to it. We become introspective not by thinking about the painting, or thinking about ourselves viewing the painting, but by thinking what it might be like literally to take on the modes of existence that these colour relations make utterly and mysteriously material...The painting offers itself as an alternative site where *there need be no irritable reaching after fact and reason*: viewers can find relief from the anxieties that haunt the empirical ego. (POR, pp.67-8)

In this reiteration, replicating Keats' formulation almost exactly, there is a slight but telling shift in stance. Negative capability is no longer a function of the artwork itself, but rather a capacity that it makes available to its viewers. McEvilley has referred to Rothko's paintings as 'the last great

²¹ As Deleuze's book was not translated until 2003, and *Subjective Agency* (1994) is the first of Altieri's works to engage with Deleuze there is no causal link, but the difference in emphasis between the two stances will be returned to in chapter two.

²² Barnett (2017) has outlined the proliferating use of the term in poetic, ecological, political and even legal contexts.

monument of Modernism and the abstract sublime' (McEvelley and Denson 1996, p.78) and Altieri's concern with 'spirit' and 'yielding agency' to the 'utterly and mysteriously material' of colour relations places him in a tradition that seeks in modernist abstraction a continuation of a Hegelian 'advance of Universal Spirit towards Perfection' (McEvelley 1991, p.67).²³

Abstraction as a striving towards the sublime bears the hallmarks of what O'Hara formulated as 'nostalgia *for* the infinite' (emphasis added), a lesser 'degree of abstraction, removal, and negative capability (as in Keats and Mallarmé)' than 'the nostalgia of the infinite' (2001, p. 592). Thus, by positioning modernist abstraction in terms of the 'Hegelian art-historical myth' of linear progress (McEvelley and Denson 1996, p.116), Altieri is paradoxically depriving it of the negative capability accessible through the greater degree of abstraction, limiting its potential to act (its *conatus*) to gestures of irritable reaching after.

The universalising tendency in Altieri's project is legible in the switch from a neutral (if still problematically narrative) third-person perspective in *Painterly Abstraction* to a more coercive use of the first-person plural to implicate the reader in its thinking and conclusions.²⁴ The earlier 'Full self-consciousness is necessary' is replaced by 'We feel spirit,' 'we become introspective,' and one individual reader or viewer's perspective on an artwork is presented as a universal feature of every reader or viewer's experience. This totalising gesture is troubling, and its ramifications will be explored in the second section of this chapter. It is even more prominent in his third iteration of an attempt at negative capability:

I do not think we are supposed to dwell much on this general level. ... Instead we have to let the juxtaposition of details do all of the work of shaping the speaker's investments, *without our irritable reaching for* dramatic or thematic models. (Altieri 2006a, p.51)

²³ The ironising stance highlighted in McEvelley's use of capitalization is developed in his dry assertion that 'the terrifying responsibility of perfecting Spirit exerted an unhealthy influence on artists and poets who, in earlier cultures, had not been noticeably more tortured, alcoholic or suicidal than other small producers or artisans' (1991, p.67)

²⁴ This contrasts with Nancy's 'being singular plural,' in which the first persons singular and plural coexist in a non-hierarchical relation (Collis 2007, p.112).

Here, judgements regarding suitable aspects of the poem to dwell on are imposed on the reader, and one reader's focus on 'juxtaposition of details' is used to curtail other possible readerly responses or modes in a gesture that embodies the very 'irritable reaching' that it seeks to deny. The act of 'reaching after' is itself a verbal structure called the 'conative alternation,' which refers to an attempted but incomplete action that Carol Adams has described as 'the action not achieving the intended end, contact not being achieved with the internal argument' (2001, p.14). It is a gesture of thwarted effort and, given Altieri's interest in the striving properties of the conative, it is fitting that he should use it repeatedly in formulations that reverse its incompleteness, fulfilling the very gesture of 'irritable reaching' that it seeks to negate. The implications of this poetics of 'irritable reaching after' will be explored in the next section.

1.2 'Far better to begin at the opposite pole': from exemplarity to the opposite of ethics.²⁵

Having established and explored the centrality of abstraction to Altieri's process, this section will attempt to clarify the purpose of two of these gestures of irritable reaching: the use of exemplarity, and the repudiation of ethical reading. It will end by proposing some lessons that the careful reader of Altieri's work can bring to their reading of contemporary poetry.

1.2.1 'Exemplary linguistic acts': setting an example.²⁶

The very concept of 'exemplification' itself, requiring that the reader pluck qualities from an artwork to apply in other situations, enacts a gesture of abstraction in line with the verbal ones outlined in the introduction, and emphasises the extent to which Altierian abstraction is polar, but not necessarily responsive. This section will examine Altieri's use of examples as another instance of a polar dynamic originating at the abstract rather than the concrete pole. His argument begins

²⁵ From 'Taking Lyrics Literally' (2001, p. 260)

²⁶ Title is drawn from the claim that 'poetry stresses various aspects of provisional identification with what can be accomplished by exemplary linguistic acts' (Altieri 2012, p.80)

and builds itself in the abstract, drawing on examples from art and poetry for support as it develops. This way of proceeding risks forcing examples into separately elaborated lines of thinking, rather than allowing the lines to emerge responsively in the reading of the text in question. More worryingly, it risks instrumentalising texts in service of the universalising project signalled in the previous section's concern with the coercive use of 'we.' This is particularly striking in the assertion 'I think the arts' insistence on exemplary concrete particularity provides a vital arena for developing working definitions for how we in modern Western society might best characterise various kinds of affects' (POR, p.5), which puts a perceived insistence on exemplarity on the part of all art at the service of a project combining both universalist pretensions and worrying exclusions in the formulation 'we in modern Western society.' This position reveals the extent to which its thinking is underpinned by what McEvelley critiques as 'a tribal superstition of Western civilization: the Hegel-based conviction that one's own culture is riding the crucial time-line of history's self-realization' (1996, p.115) despite repeated claims of that time-line's exhaustion that will be returned to in chapter two.²⁷

Hermione Lee (2010, p.99) has referred to Virginia Woolf's 'subtly coercive use of we [that] breaks down barriers between this image-making critic and her readers,' and this type of coercion, albeit not always deployed subtly, is a feature of Altieri's universalising of the particulars and purpose of one critic's aesthetic engagements. However, there is more at stake here than the breaking down of barriers. Emma Akdağ and Dalene Swanson have described the 'coercive use of 'we'' as an imperceptible form of interpellation that convinces individuals to 'accept cultural notions as though they are obvious or natural,' (2018, p.75), and this appears to be a feature of Altieri's framing, both of individual aesthetic experiences²⁸ and of a wider cultural project derived from these experiences:

²⁷In 'What Theory can learn...' he expresses the concern that 'that domain of possibility seems increasingly exhausted' (2012, p.74)

²⁸For example 'we find ourselves complexly woven into what must be called transsubjective states, if only for the moments we participate in the work' (1998, 227) or 'we feel strange conjunctions between pure proprioceptive states and a rush of imaginative projections.' (POR, p.52)

I will try to elaborate a way of thinking about the lyric that can cogently draw connections between how we might best structure conversation about particular poems and how we might describe the basic values lyrics make available or reinforce for cultural life. (2001, p. 259)

The short step from universalising one's own aesthetic experiences to extrapolating shared principles for the discussion and valuing of these experiences is troubling, particularly in a context where this universalising 'we' explicitly concerns itself only with 'modern Western society.' In the face of claims that he frames as a demand from 'various cultural groups' for a canon of one's own, he offers the response that 'most of us are best served by letting forms of identification that the traditional canon offers play a major role in our educational practices' (1990, pp.59-60). This paradoxical insistence on the universal exemplarity of an individual, specialised and tightly delimited canon of modernist and contemporary work signals at a gate-keeping ambition behind Altieri's criticism whose methods and motivations require close attentive reading.

In 'What Theory Can Learn from New Directions in Contemporary Poetry' this manoeuvre serves to implicate the reader in a project of exemplification that briefly uses an excerpt from Juliana Spahr's poem 'We' to exemplify 'efforts to elaborate how "we" hovers around our first-person singular intensities' (2012, p.73). What is both characteristic and compellingly strange in this instance is the literal-minded choice of a poem called 'We' to exemplify the relations between the first-person singular and plural; the lack of attention paid to the poem itself, once three neat decontextualized stanzas have been co-opted to the essay's efforts; and the contrast between Spahr's questioning, politically constituted 'we' and the essay's universalising one. It is hard not to hear her lines 'we who proclaim, we who proclaim our values as culture and thus argue that these values should not be tarnished with we, we who say that is the way that it is when it might not really be that way' (1998, p. 90) as a rebuke to this essay's blithe claim that '[w]hen we ask what we have experienced, we can characterize the poem as providing exemplary authorial and dramatic attitudes' (2012, p.79).

Part of this tendency to base large abstract universal claims on slight and scarcely developed examples originates in Altieri's concept of 'exemplification,' which is drawn from

Nelson Goodman's work on aesthetics, particularly *Languages of Art*. It refers to the way in which an artwork can be usable or meaningful to its viewer by exemplifying some feeling, form or relationship, thereby making it accessible to the reader and allowing her to incorporate these qualities into her world. Altieri explains the concept of exemplification as outlined by Goodman in his 1981 book *Act and Quality*. This book adapts it for application to literary arts (rather than visual or musical, as per Goodman's original conception), describing it as the way 'works literally or metaphorically exemplify forms, feelings, affinities, contrasts, to be sought in or built into a world' (p.285), a definition that is reiterated periodically in subsequent work.²⁹ All of these instances draw on the same excerpt from *The Languages of Art* that is summarised in *Reckoning with the Imagination*:

Goodman's striking ability to find the appropriate example helps immensely to see how useful this concept can be. He points out that there are two ways to make a red color swatch refer to the world (*LA*, 53–56). We can ask others to check whether this color matches another object such as a sweater. This would be a clear instance of establishing the truth or falsity of a description. But one can also use the colored swatch to ask someone to find in a pile of sweaters all those that match its shade of red. This is reference by using a model that enables us to sort particulars. I think this sorting by example is absolutely crucial to anyone concerned with the worldliness of the arts. Works and elements in works can be used in the construction of repertoires by which we identify and often deepen our capacity to handle distinctions we need in the world beyond the text. (RI, p.139)

If it seems counterintuitive to compare poems to colour swatches used to find specifically-coloured sweaters in a pile, it does make sense of the perfunctory use of poetic examples in the 'What Theory Can Learn' essay and elsewhere. If poems are colour samples being held up for matching, there is no need to attend closely to their material qualities. Their purpose is to demonstrate a single, defining feature. This goes some way to explaining the literal-mindedness of so many selections: not just Spahr's 'We' to exemplify the first-person plural, but Bishop's 'Sonnet,' with its 'bubble/ in the spirit level' to exemplify 'our investment in small adjustments and balances' (POR, p.251) and Ashbery's flight of the imagination in 'The Instruction Manual' to exemplify '[deploying] the imagination imaginatively' (RI, p. 43). Not only does this type of exemplarity

²⁹ This includes *Painterly Abstraction* (p.52, which describes it as 'scandalously underused in literary criticism'), *Subjective Agency* (p.119, p.265), 'What Theory can Learn from Contemporary Poetry' (p.80) and *Reckoning with the Imagination* (pp.137-139, where it is combined with a 'grammar of example' drawn from Wittgenstein).

reverse more intuitive polarities of reading that move from a poem's particularities to more abstract concepts, it leads to a reductive mode of reading where poems serve to identify useable 'distinctions we need in the world beyond the text' (RI, p.139) and are then discarded, in a move that short-changes both world and text. The incompatibility of this mode with the concept of 'attunement' that Altieri has proposed as an alternative to literary ethics will be returned to in the next section.

1.2.2 Reversing 'ideals of ethical reading': turning against the ethical turn.³⁰

*'Resources for thinking about ethical concerns'*³¹

Painterly Abstraction proposed a mode of reading explicitly turned towards ethical ends based on sharing 'powers that we can even imagine building a community around or using to develop the kind of principles that Habermas does out of the practice of conversation' (PA, pp.356-7). The opening chapter of that book sets out the terms of its view of abstraction as a mode with ethical force:

Even to approximate infinite incantations of ourselves, art must be abstract. For there is no other way to tease out from our empirical representations the range of states we bring under the penumbra of self, and there is no other way to make visible the sense of intersubjective connectedness that this diversity affords. Thus Wallace Stevens's imperative provides the focus for this book: I hope to explain what Modernist poetry achieved in its experiments with abstraction, and I hope to show how those experiments can still carry imaginative and ethical force. (PA, p.12)

This view of the self as infinite incantations of a range of states is unexpectedly congruent with Peter Manson's description of his work as 'a writing that emerges from the crises and particularities of one body and as many minds as will fit in it' (2017a), and the 'ethical force' linked here with 'experiments in abstraction' is, as will be explored in chapters three and four, also a function of the intersubjectivities fostered in experimental modes of contemporary poetry.

³⁰ *Reckoning with the Imagination* p. 162

³¹ *Painterly Abstraction*, p.489

Painterly Abstraction's final endnote acknowledges its failure to recognise the 'radical otherness' of the art sites it considers, in contrast with work by Bruns and Kristeva, but explains this by identifying its main concern as 'experiments in agency,' further suggesting that 'the terms of agency explored allow me to appropriate the art within a loosely philosophical language and to claim that it offers us resources for thinking about ethical concerns' (PA, p.489). Although the language of 'exemplarity' is not explicitly evoked here, the gesture described is the same one considered in the previous section, which 'appropriates' an artwork to stand as example of some larger abstraction. Even within this work's 'ethical concerns,' however, there are elisions and glossings that raise ethical concerns of their own. The most salient of these is the use of Ezra Pound in the framing of what he calls the 'basic ethical attitudes' (p.284) defined by modernist poetry. The fifth section of the chapter on Pound's ethos turns to the *Cantos*, shifting focus from the forms and energies the artist makes available in his work, to the demands it places on the reader if he or she is to fully engage with these forms and energies:

The constructivist space of poetry demands intensive concentration, which then composes a site where the careful attention to varied voices can take on its full differential resonances. (PA, p.303)

'Careful attention' will be key to the concept of 'attunement' that will later be proposed as an alternative to the ethical turn, but it is striking that, in highlighting the demands made by this type of reading on its reader, very little attention is paid to the material of the exemplary texts.

The reference to 'varied voices' emphasises the importance of other voices, in quotation or translation, in constructing the play of energies and forms needed for the poem to fulfil its exemplary function. Engagement with prior voices, albeit stripped of any exemplary pretensions, will be a concern of chapters three and four. The process of incorporating external texts into the poem is presented by Altieri in terms approaching the sacred, with techniques referred to by other writers as 'collage' and 'uncreative writing'³² taking on the qualities of a modernist sacrament where 'the action consists simply in the transforming of outward texts into the direct energies of a writerly

³² See for example Perloff (1996, p.22, 2001, pp.78-112), Dworkin (2011 pp.xxxviii – xxli), Goldsmith (2011 pp. xx-xxi)

grace' (p.305). McEvelley has framed post-modernism as a period of nostalgia for modernism's lost certainties prior to 'giving up the ghost' in exhaustion (McEvelley and Denson 1996, p. 224), a trope that will be returned to in chapter two, and his practical approach to citation usefully punctures this passage's religious undertones. He identifies a puritanical streak within modernism, derived from its mythical and religious residue, that he identifies with its 'delusion' that its modes of quoting were acts of creation :

The flaw in Modernism was precisely its conviction that it was not quoting and varying, but creating. Seen in this larger context, Alexandrian or post-Modern quoting is simply a process of bringing out into the open what all modes of expression do all the time anyway, but without usually bothering to acknowledge (or even realize) it. Quoting is an inevitable component in all acts of communication; it is what makes communication possible. (McEvelley 1991, p.245).

Seen in this light, propositions of 'writerly grace' can be read as a restatement of that modernist delusion that also sets the scene for a more troubling hollowing out of Pound's own ethical choices. Pound's politically, economically, and personally disastrous embrace of fascism is elided as 'a turn to increasingly abstract models of order' (PA, p.318) understandable, if not justifiable, in the context of frustration at his marginality. More troublingly, the *Pisan Cantos* are presented as a site where Pound 'became the exemplary reader of his own ethical project' (p.320). Despite all the proposed concern for 'intersubjective connectedness,' (PA, p.12) the ethical goal of modernist citational practice is here revealed to be the birth of an 'exemplary reader' from the ashes of its own practice.

The ethical claims made for Stevens are not directly linked with his own political concerns and are defined around a considerably more 'abstract form of order' that Altieri defines as the 'philosophical grammar' of 'as' (PA, p. 343), for which he claims the capacity to 'define the powers that theorizing makes visible for life' by the manner in which it 'intricately folds description into valuation and makes each description something that the audience can participate in' (p.343). These capacities are at the heart of a mode of reading derived from Stevens and Ludwig Wittgenstein which will be extended to the reading of the affects in *The Particulars of Rapture* (pp.148-9). Even prior to drawing on Wittgenstein as second pole around which to shape the

dynamic of ‘as-kissing’ (pp.343-4), the Stevensean ‘as’ is credited with a complex of capacities for arranging content and engaging with the concrete, before synthesising these capacities into a model of self-reflexivity with far-reaching implications for the act of reading. This needs to be cited at length, as it outlines the mode of reading central to polar abstraction, while signalling the direction in which it will later turn away from the ethical:

I have considered each of these functions of ‘as’ only with respect to the content they organize. We must realize, however, that (they) also operate in terms of the site that the work of art carves for itself and in terms of the modes of sight and insight that it composes for its audience. The temporal, modal and self-reflexive synthetic forces each qualifies the specific testimony of the rendering. The “as” literally produces resemblances, affords shifts in the level of discourse, and allows us to entertain provisional sympathies with a variety of attitudes. We see our seeing of x as y. Within such self-consciousness, the abstract ‘as’ refers directly to the way poetry crosses life, because it names the state of equivalence basic to all acts of valuing. In order to appreciate what this involves, we need only think of how completely reading can serve as a paradigmatic form of such valuing: In the equivalences that reading provides, we take on other identities and observe ourselves as we so dispose our wills. Poems establish possibilities of relation that readers take on as portents of their own possible powers, as they read...Thus there are not worlds and interpretations, but worlds as interpreted in a variety of ways, each perhaps best articulated, not by descriptions, but by making manifest the energies involved. (PA, pp.346-7)

This intricate elaboration of one grammatical operator within the reading of one poem can be unfolded to reveal a scale model of the workings of polar abstraction itself. As the ‘as’ does in this passage, it modulates between the organization of content in the art-works with which it engages and the potential for reflection and self-reflection that these provide their reader. It allows for a constant modulation between forms of engagement and attunement that focus on the work itself, on the opportunities for self-consciousness it provides, and on the values attendant upon these attentions. Finally, it demonstrates ‘valuing’ as an act, something that must be engaged in as part of the process of interacting with the poem, not an inert abstract quality that can be isolated from the poem, and it posits reading as the paradigmatic mode of such valuing. These are all concerns that will be reiterated in later work, once stripped of their ethical claims. In order to give philosophical heft to this active valuing, Wittgenstein’s ‘as’, ‘his emblem for certain powers of mind manifest only in its most elemental processes’ (p.350), is allied with an already complex dynamic allowing ‘(b)oth ethics and aesthetics (to) become more than abstract statements about values, and the theory of poetry (to become) the basis for a complete theory of life’ (p.350).

The ambition of this ethical claim is immediately undercut by the flimsiness of its textual foundation. While the passage outlines an ethical role for reading as a mode of valuing, the readings upon which this claim is based do not pay careful attention to the poems' various voices, lineation or sound structures, attending only to the semantic functions of one grammatical operator within a Stevens poem. While there is an early caution that '[t]heoretical constructs are to criticism what grammatical constructs are to discourse: they make certain relations possible, even shape the contours of our investments, but they are inert...' (PA, p.59), many of the readings used to support theoretical constructs throughout Altieri's work suffer from an inertia that is the result of their failure to attend closely to the material qualities of texts prior to abstracting their 'possibilities of relation' or their 'manifest...energies' (p. 347).

This quality of inertia reaches its apotheosis in *Subjective Agency*, which will be returned to in chapter two, and it is revealing that this, the last of Altieri's major works to make large ethical claims, does so in a mode almost entirely stripped of poetic points of reference other than a brief reiteration of Stevens's 'grammar of 'as'' (SA, p. 88). This entire work is a 'theoretical construct' built around 'Kantian aesthetics as a proto-ethics' (p.90) and positioning itself as a movement 'towards an expressivist ethics' (p.151). It is notable that while it repeatedly articulates efforts to 'give substance to these ideas' (p.111)³³ its abstract ethical project of 'shaping who we can be' (p.114) develops entirely through theoretical and grammatical exposition in the absence of substantive practical or literary examples. If the subsequent pivot from ethics to the present participle 'valuing' could be traced as a movement from abstract exposition to the act of paying close attention to textual particulars, it could be seen as a promising development, particularly given some of the problematic elisions that have been cloaked under the adjective 'ethical.' However, as the next section will establish, the transition is not quite so straightforward.

³³ This formulation is repeated with variations throughout *Subjective Agency* (e.g. pp.50, 60, 110, 111, 120)

*'Manifestly unethical practices'*³⁴

By 2001's *The Particulars of Rapture*, ethical concerns have become so distasteful to Altieri that one of the opening challenges that book sets itself is to 'show how most "ethical" readings tend to produce abstract substitutes for the texts and so end up sharing with socio-political historicism a tendency to overread for "meaning"' (pp.1-2). The scare quotes equating the ethical with reading for meaning gesture at the shape of the argument against ethics that this text will outline, one that is problematised from the outset by its own tendency to use texts as abstract substitutes, exemplars of their own most basic semantic meanings. This concern is reiterated at key points,³⁵ with the source of his mistrust outlined most clearly in his chapter on Nussbaum:

In the pursuit of ethical ideals, Nussbaum comes close to indulging in what for Joyce's world and for mine is the one manifestly unethical practice – ignoring or sacrificing particularity in order to support the fantasies of importance one gains by taking on the power to identify with ethical ideals. (POR, p.180)

This criticism sits uneasily with the tendency in his own practice to sacrifice texts' material particularity in order to have them serve as exemplary models of some abstract, albeit no longer 'ethical' ideal.

The condemnation of contemporary philosophers for the unseemly haste with which they dispatch the particulars of a text in their rush to ethical judgement is reiterated in the endnotes to *Wallace Stevens and the Demands of Modernity*:

These philosophers [Nussbaum and Alice Crary] rarely attend to states like intensity or precision or the capacity to dwell in fascination without having to make practical judgements, and they are not at all interested in formal questions as figures for the roles artifice plays in our lives. (WS, p.242)

Throughout this book, he returns to Stevens to counter this tendency and allow him to work out the 'phenomenology of value' alluded to in the book's subtitle, starting by establishing a mode of value that comes into existence through 'poetry's capacity to reach beyond itself through itself' (WS, p.8). In framing this as a gesture that poetry as agent can accomplish through its own material threshold, Altieri proposes a mode of reading with implications for the understanding of agency

³⁴ *The Particulars of Rapture*, p.180

³⁵ Examples include pp.58, 162, 176-182, and 283

and subjectivity in contemporary poetry that, although it is neither developed nor fully established through any close textual engagements in Altieri's own work, is central to this thesis's reading practice.

Instead, a transpersonal mode of valuing is derived from a re-reading of the sections of Pound's *Cantos* already imbued with such problematic ethical capacities in *Painterly Abstraction* (pp.310-3), allied with Stevens's concern for the nature of reality and the mediating role of the imagination, to form a hybrid model of valuing 'by which the lyric not only refers to values but also invites our participation in the imaginative forces that embody them' (WS, p.29). Altieri identifies a concern with the process of valuing rather than the content of what is valued as central to Stevens's conception of the imagination (p.31), and in working through the implications of this stance, he fleshes out some of the assertions initially made in 'Lyrical Ethics and Literary Experience'³⁶:

Literary modes like lyric often ask us to participate in states that are either too elemental or too transcendental or too absolute or too satisfyingly self-absorbed to engage ethical criticism. Yet these states can have enormous impact on how and why we are concerned with values of all kinds, including those that we pursue by ethical reasoning. Minimally, they bring to bear examples of positive intensities that any ethics might have to take into account. And at their richest these works explore the limitations of all judgmental stances by requiring complex blends of sympathy and distance, and hence eliciting our fascination with extreme states of mind while complicating any possible grasp of how one might put such states into the categories affording commensurability on which ethical judgment must ultimately depend. (WS, p.3)

Readings that served to establish an ethical criticism in *Painterly Abstraction* are now used to deny that such a critical mode is even possible; while Stevens's 'it must be abstract' once defined a mode allowing 'ethics and aesthetics (to) become more than abstract statements about values' (PA, p.350), in *Wallace Stevens* it is recast in the service of a mode of valuing as an alternative to ethical criticism. While the ethical is critiqued as always seeking to abstract a moral from the text, as though this were a detachable stand-alone element,³⁷ the 'mode of valuing' (WS, p.4) that Altieri proposes is intended to be at all times embedded within the text and activated in a process of reading that is abstract but not abstracting; its values and meanings extend beyond the text, but

³⁶ This essay was inspired by its author finding himself 'angry and frustrated with the criticism and theory now arrogating to itself the aura that invoking "ethics" still seems to promise' (1998a, p.272), and this irritable turn away from the ethical turn will later sit somewhat uncomfortably next to Nussbaum's 'Defense of Ethical Criticism' in Davis and Womack's *Mapping the Ethical Turn* (2001, pp.30-58).

³⁷ This is first expressed in 'Lyrical Ethics and Literary Experience' (1998a, p.280), and subsequently reiterated in POR (pp.82, 183), WS (p.242) and RI (p.177).

are at all times rooted within it. Value can be unfolded in the text through an act of responsive reading that opens the poem into transpersonal dimensions, but it cannot be detached from it in the form of a moral. The immanence of poetic meaning and value articulated here has the potential to be deeply relevant to contemporary poetry's present continuous acts of meaning and valuing. What renders it problematic is the stalled transition from theory to practice.

Reckoning with the Imagination proposes appreciation and attunement as alternative modes of valuing in what has, by now, become an irritable practice of pushing against the ethical:

In order to fight off the authority of "ethics" I think we need to develop an overall model of actually attributing values that is generated by the specific modes of attunement and participation called for by particular texts.
(RI, p.30)

It goes on to question what sets these abstract modes apart from the act of careful reading:

Why distinguish valuing from simply careful, attentive reading? There is obviously considerable overlap. Indeed I would say that any careful reading is at least pre-reflexive valuing. But the degree of reflection on what the self is doing as it reads is crucial for how we develop the possible worldliness of texts. Full valuing requires a roughly phenomenological mode of self-reflection. That is, we not only engage the text but engage this sense of who we become by virtue of the qualities of our attention to the text and to what the text mediates as possible worlds.
(RI, p.180)

The phenomenology of the peculiarly inert potential agent 'who we become' will be returned to in chapter two. What is particularly salient here is that the distinction between 'valuing' and 'careful attentive reading' is accomplished in an almost complete absence of attentive reading. In this book, readings of Williams (p.82) and Moore (pp.82-3) rework more detailed readings from *Painterly Abstraction* (pp.232-5, 263-5) to arguably less compelling effect, and foundational readings of Ashbery's 'Instruction Manual' (pp.47-54) and Yeats's 'Leda and the Swan' (pp.53-61) seem insufficiently robust to bear the conceptual weight they are being asked to shoulder. Altieri self-consciously acknowledges this possibility with relation to the Ashbery poem in the endnotes (p.227), however there is a mismatch between the claims made for the process of reading as valuing and those demonstrated within the text itself. This is partially attributable to the version of 'exemplarity' considered in the previous section, and partially a feature of a tendency to revisit and rework old readings in new contexts that will be explored in chapter two.

Both of these tendencies combine in a poetics of irritable reaching that draws on examples recycled from earlier work to stage a case against what has been designated as a troubling new theoretical position. Thus in 'Lyrical Ethics,' the stanzas of Yeats's 'She and Him' beginning 'As the moon sidles up' and ending 'With that sweet cry' are presented as 'no better contrast to the ethics of literary pathos' (1998a, p.13). Almost two decades later, the same stanzas serve as the exemplary means of 'resisting the Deleuzian aspects of Robertson's critique of identity thinking' (2015, p.8) in an essay that sets out to oppose a tendency for which it has coined the term 'relational poetics,' in the following terms:

I think Lisa Robertson's book of essays *Nilling* is the best theoretical statement we are likely to get from relational poetics, so despite the variety I just mentioned I will concentrate only on its arguments, then set against her case what late Yeats via Hegel stages as the values in pursuing modes of self-consciousness deriving from how poems are produced. (2015, p.2)

Leaving aside the theoretically and ethically questionable nature of a practice that sets out to critique a fellow writer for her 'theoretical statement' of a position one has just coined for the purposes of the present argument, it is hard to argue that this essay demonstrates the 'attention to the text and to what the text mediates' (RI, p.180), either with regard to Robertson's *Nilling* or Yeats's 'She and Him,' called for by the practice of treating 'reading as an art in its own right' (RI, p.160). In its use of exemplarity to bolster pre-defined arguments and establish contrarian positions, it becomes clear that Altieri's abstraction does not embody the commitment to careful, attentive reading as valuing that it espouses. The last section of this chapter will consider what the careful reader of contemporary poetry can learn from this mode of reading.

1.2.3 What Contemporary Poetry Can Learn from Theoretical Abstraction

As an 'apprenticeship in reading' abstraction in contemporary poetry, it might be tempting to conclude that Altieri's polar abstraction might not be the best place to start. However, taking a cue from his pedagogical proposal of the benefits of 'starting from the opposite pole' (2001, p.260), it can be argued that several of his signature abstracting gestures, as well as his proposed if untried mode of reading as valuing, have much to offer an attentive reader of contemporary poetry.

Hardt concludes his *Gilles Deleuze: An Apprenticeship in Philosophy* with the claim that he has ‘tried to read Deleuze’s work using his method of selection and transformation in order to pursue my own education, my own apprenticeship in philosophy’ (2003, p.112). In this chapter, I have tried to value Altieri’s work by adopting his proposed method of ‘careful, attentive reading’ (RI, p.180) and I will now propose aligning this with the Deleuzian method of selection and transformation to derive a mode of reading as abstraction, an ethics of reading centred on ‘allowing more of what is *not* ourselves to transform what we take ourselves to be’ (Colebrook 2010, p.4).

Gestures of abstraction that can be selected from Altieri’s thinking and adapted to the reading of contemporary poetry are: the process of abstraction as ‘emptying out,’ hollowing terminology and citation to yield new effects in new contexts; conative striving, in which meaning can be considered as language’s tendency to persevere in its material being; and the immanence of meaning in the threshold that is the poem itself, articulated as ‘poetry’s capacity to reach beyond itself through itself’ (WS, p.8), a more open and exploratory gesture than ‘irritable reaching after.’ In considering what of Altieri can be transformed, it is useful to consider Deleuze’s description of the ideal teacher, ‘those who tell us to “do with me” and are able to emit signs to be developed in heterogeneity rather than propose gestures for us to reproduce’ (DR, p.23). Rather than seeking instructions in Altieri’s work that can be reproduced in slightly altered contexts to predictable effect, this apprenticeship in reading seeks ‘signs to be developed in heterogeneity’ that will be enacted in the next three chapters. If these signs switch the poles of his abstraction, beginning always in the particular rather than the theoretical and attempting to maintain the focus of its reading there as much as possible, this too is in the spirit of paradoxical abstraction.

Chapter Two: An Applied Poetics of the Fold

Introduction

An applied poetics of the fold alters radically the phenomenology of the fragment. Citations figure not as textual shards in a collage, but as textual nomads... (McCaffery 1999, p.380)

This chapter will propose an unfolding of some of the rigidities of Altieri's thought via a thorough engagement with the thinking of Gilles Deleuze. This method is suggested by congruencies between their dynamic conceptions of abstraction and by the promising but circumscribed engagements with Deleuze throughout Altieri's work after *Subjective Agency*. By reintegrating these threads of connection with Deleuze, it should be possible to mobilize Altieri's thinking to 'reach beyond itself through itself,' drawing on the gestures identified in chapter one to engage openly and responsively with contemporary poetry. A useful figure for this process could be adapted from Steve McCaffery's description of Robin Blaser's poetry: 'a streaming or a "flowing boundary" which is an equally apt description of the monad's negotiation with the outside through *conatus*' (McCaffery 1999, p. 379).³⁸

To this end, the first section will consider Altieri's use of citation and repetition as forms of territorialisation, setting and maintaining both the boundaries of modernism and the limits of a highly individualised canon of exemplary works. It will explore the role of the refrain in territorial marking, and its potential to allow for productive as well as reproductive difference (Deleuze and Guattari TP, p.314). The second section will draw on Altieri's disembodied use of the language of phenomenology and consider the limiting polarization of his reading of Peter Gizzi. It will suggest Charles Olson's concept of proprioception as an embodiment of conative striving, useful for thinking through the perseverance of meaning in the nexus of body, text and world. The third section will unfold a threshold of engagement between Altieri and Robin Blaser to tease open the

³⁸ This formulation describes Robin Blaser's presentation of Jack Spicer's 'composition-as-fold' (p.379). It will be a useful figure to bear in mind, not only as both Blaser and Spicer will be woven into this chapter's thinking, but the model of a flowing boundary in which the *conatus* enacts its striving is an image of the thinking itself.

self-imposed and self-reflexive boundaries of Altieri's abstraction, allowing for the transformative operations of more immanent abstract modes.

2.1: Pacing the Boundaries of Modernism

The Refrain

In a general sense, *we call a refrain any aggregate of matters of expression that draws a territory and develops into territorial motifs and landscapes* (there are optical, gestural, motor, etc., refrains) (Deleuze and Guattari TP, p.323)

This section will consider Altieri's repeated readings of Robert Lowell's 'Skunk Hour' as a case-study in the self-limiting operation of citation and repetition in his work. In McCaffery's Deleuzian framing of Blaser's poetics (1999, p.380), he suggests quotation as a means of folding and refolding nomadic text within a plenum (a text written without spacing, McCaffery 1999, p.389). In this poetics, quotation serves as more than a collaged fragment or a supporting example: it becomes a means of introducing potential for change into a text. McCaffery's essay works outwards from Deleuze's book on Leibniz's fold, drawing attention to the twisting of Leibniz's 'monad' into Deleuze's 'nomadology.' It is important to clarify that this conception of the 'nomadic' implies more than transience. One of the qualities of the nomadic, whatever the context, is a dissolving of hierarchical dialectics framed as form versus content or matter versus expression.³⁹ It is entangled in a series of random events of which it is both subject and object, 'wherein each system of singularities communicates and resonates with the others, being at once implicated by the others and implicating them.' (Deleuze LOS, p.60). Thus, the nomadic shares two features with the other Deleuzian concepts that shape this chapter's thinking: it is dynamic, and its movement is generated

³⁹ Colebrook explains the origin of Deleuze's use of the term to Kantian limitations imposed by reason on thought: 'Deleuze...rejects the idea that a principle, or a power or tendency to think, should be limited by some notion of commonsense and sound distribution. Nomadicism allows the maximum extension of principles and powers; if something can be thought, then no law outside thinking, no containment of thought within the mind of man should limit thinking's power (D 1994: 37)' (Colebrook 2010, p.186). Her explanation of 'nomadic distribution' will have implications for Altieri's transcendental subject: 'The second point of view of *nomos* or nomadic law has its principle of distribution within itself. That is, there are still hierarchies but these are not determined by a separate principle; rather by the power of the principle itself. This is extremely important for Deleuze's philosophy. Deleuze wants to get rid of transcendent and external criteria – say, judging philosophy according to whether it will help us to acquire transferable life skills, or judging art according to whether it will make us more moral – but he does not want to get rid of distribution and hierarchy altogether,' p.186).

by, and generative of, the folding together of terms more usually considered in binary or dualistic opposition.

Citation and allusion are central modes in Altieri's thinking, and his work from the 1970s to the present demonstrates a striking tendency to return to the same poems, painters and passages from philosophy in an effort to define and refine the terms of his poetics.⁴⁰ These works come to constitute a personal canon, capable of supporting and exemplifying a proliferating range of conceptual frameworks. While recent work has drawn contemporary poets such as Juliana Spahr and Jennifer Moxley into this canon (Altieri 2011), what makes Altieri's criticism such a fascinating focus for study is its tendency to base large universal claims on such a small and highly individualised canon.

The work of revisiting, rereading and reframing that characterises Altieri's engagements with this company is central to his process, and as a representative and suggestive case study, I will focus on his readings of Lowell across a period of over 30 years. The previous chapter questioned the structural function of his repeated allusion to Keats's 'negative capability,' and this section will explore allusion, citation and repetition as a process of establishing a refrain to build and mark the boundaries of a territory, Deleuze and Guattari's territorial refrain as 'poster' or 'placard' (TP, p.316). Their conception of the refrain is particularly useful here, as it emphasises its power to create the territory that it is marking out ('The territory is not primary in relation to the qualitative

⁴⁰ The principle on which Altieri's refrain is built is 'exemplarity,' the term from Nelson Goodman discussed in the previous chapter. Through this method, Altieri adapts a concept from his readings of philosophy, visual art and poetry, shapes that concept into a perfect example of his thinking that can be folded into subsequent readings, imposing a measure of the structural and conceptual coherence derived from boundaries, on his thinking. The most pervasive instances are Goodman's 'exemplarity' (AQ pp.279-89, PA pp. 52-3, 55-6, SA pp. 61-3, POR pp. 77, 260-1, 269-70, RI, pp. 137-42), Wittgenstein's 'aspect-seeing,' 'models' and 'examples' (AQ pp. 41- 52, 233-4, 260, 263, PA pp. 52-55, 218-9, SA pp. 14, 16, 39-51, POR pp. 63-4, 237-8, RI pp. 25-7, 70-2, 83, 126-7), Malevich's 'tilt' (PA pp. 214-21, SA pp. 31-34, FF pp. 197-201, POR pp. 51-2, 250, RI pp. 91, 247) and Cezanne's 'seeing' (PA pp. 165, 171-4, 180-98, POR pp. 195, 197-9, 242-3, 278 ATC pp. 11, 38-40, 46-8, 218 RI p.231). While it is not always possible to abstract general concepts from his specific readings of poems, some poets yield a central exemplary abstraction, as in the case of Stevens' 'grammar of 'as,' (PA pp. 344-8, SA pp. 87-9, POR pp. 148-50), Creeley's 'exemplary self-consciousness' (ET pp. 19, 172-93, SS pp. 104-10, 119-31, POR pp. 278, RI pp. 155-8) and Olson's 'fields and energies' (ET pp. 97-103, SS pp. 23, 91-2, 110, 223, RPW pp. 411, 416). The case of Lowell is particularly illustrative of the way many of these examples become more limited and limiting in their conceptual, chronological and territorial range as Altieri's work develops. An analogous case is Olson, whose thinking is engaged expansively in the 70s and 80s but reduced to a synecdoche for 'field poetics' by the mid-90s.

mark; it is the mark that makes the territory' TP, p.315). The following readings of Altieri's Lowell will focus on allusion and repetition as territorializing refrain, as well as briefly considering the role of 'nomadic quotation' in Lowell's 'Skunk Hour' itself. They will trace the path taken by Altieri through and around 'Skunk Hour' in *Enlarging the Temple* (1979), 'Contingency as Compositional Principle in Fifties Poetics' (1998) and *The Art of Twentieth Century American Poetry* (2006). Two factors suggest these readings as typical of Altieri's territorializing process: none considers the poem in its entirety, and isolated aspects are seized on as exemplary support for an argument that has already been elaborated in abstract terms.

Enlarging the Temple, Altieri's 1979 overview of the poetry of the 1960s, opens with an allusion to Gramsci's oft-quoted dictum on the crisis of authority:⁴¹

In my view, confessional poetry is essentially a transition between two faiths – one dead, the other desperately trying to be born' (ET, pp.17-8)

The book ends on a note expressing hope of reconciling 'optimism of will with optimism of intelligence' through 'the specific strategies of contemporary poetics – the rejection of high tradition... in favour of careful intense attention to the natural and the familiar' (pp.243-4). Once again, a Gramscian aphorism⁴² is hollowed out to frame the task of contemporary poetry as an oppositional dynamic, deriving its charge from the interaction of abstract structure and concrete experience in the gesture of paying 'careful intense attention' to the particular. In this instance, use of allusion serves a double purpose: it situates contemporary poetry in a morbid 'interregnum,' a place and time of schism and uncertainty; however, it suggests hope that this state can be transcended through a folding-together of intelligence and will via an act of attention. This anachronistically proto-Deleuzian folding,⁴³ promising though it is, will prove short-lived in

⁴¹ 'The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.' (Gramsci 1999, p.556)

⁴² This echoes Gramsci's frequent citing of Romain Rolland's maxim "Pessimism of the intelligence, optimism of the will" (1999, p.395).

⁴³ *A Thousand Plateaus* (Massumi trans.) was published in 1987, and *The Logic of Sense* (Lester, Stivale trans.) in 1990.

Altieri's readings of Lowell, which will soon retreat to polarization, and the pacing of their self-defining territory.

2.1.1 Reading 1: '*...the ultimate nothingness or absence of meaning...*'

A child in the dark, gripped with fear, comforts himself by singing under his breath. He walks and halts to his song. Lost, he takes shelter, or orients himself with his little song as best he can. The song is like a rough sketch of a calming and stabilizing, calm and stable, center in the heart of chaos. Perhaps the child skips as he sings, hastens or slows his pace. But the song itself is already a skip: it jumps from chaos to the beginnings of order in chaos and is in danger of breaking apart at any moment. There is always sonority in Ariadne's thread.

(Deleuze and Guattari TP, p.311)

In *Enlarging the Temple*, the chapter 'Robert Lowell and the Difficulties of Escaping Modernism' presents 'Skunk Hour' as the culmination of a series of patterns which Lowell employs in an attempt to 'overcome the intense privacy he associates with the fall into prose' (Altieri ET, p.69). A central pattern in Altieri's own work is the use of citation and allusion to weave a self-protective refrain, like the child's 'little song', to find a 'centre in the heart of chaos' and this first reading will focus equally on 'nomadic quotation' as Lowell's own self-protective refrain, and on the territorializing refrain through which Altieri traces the boundaries of his modernism.

Altieri's initial stance is polarising, setting public self against private and poetry against prose, with the equation of privacy and prose (and, indeed, hell) further complicated by incompatibilities in the processes of meaning-making between genres:

For value to emerge in the prose world, the poet must develop a style that can convey its glimpses of meaning within contingency without the aid of allegorical or paradigmatic structures. Poems must appear to remain faithful to the casual flux of experience... (ET, p.63)

He goes on to suggest that Lowell makes his poems *seem* contingent but provides patterns for their interpretation by 'appropriating techniques from the prose tradition.' (p.64). This claim is based on a close reading of the poem's last three stanzas, preceded by the following gloss on the opening stanzas and particularly the fifth stanza, the speaker's 'dark night of the soul':

The poem first of all embodies the ultimate lucidity, the denial of all imaginative evasions... This then brings him to a dark night of the soul... There he encounters the ultimate nothingness or absence of meaning, which is perhaps the result of all pursuits of sheer lucidity (I am thinking of the nineteenth-century novel, particularly of Flaubert). For Lowell the absence is dual - an emptiness he witnesses in the scene of perverted love among the love cars, mirrored by a horrifying sense of his own inner emptiness, "I myself am hell; / nobody's here." Hell here is the ultimate prose - a profound sense of the absence of all sources of meaning and value in the public world represented by the landscape and in the private realm where one defines his personal identity. (p.66)

The movement from ‘ultimate lucidity’ to an encounter with the ‘ultimate nothingness,’ the hell of ‘ultimate prose,’ is an early instance of the peculiar hyperbole with which Altieri frames his examples. In the journey from the pursuit of lucidity to the hell of inner emptiness, prose is depicted as both vehicle and destination. Perloff, in a reconsideration that identifies ‘Skunk Hour’ as a point where Lowell falters, praises *Life Studies* as ‘Chekhovian in its use of detail’ (2004b). The engagement with prose, which other writers have identified as a source of the collection’s richness and strength, is cast by Altieri in infernal terms. This is consistent with his mapping of the poem as a site of Gramscian struggle, but not necessarily fully supported by the text where this struggle is sited.

Robert Duncan’s introduction to a reading by Lowell at the poetry centre in San Francisco in 1957 asserted that ‘All realizations in Art are...dynamic, at once virtuous and vicious, in relation to new necessities which they call into being’ (Bertholf 1999, p.93). This ‘calling into being’ of new necessities is central to ‘Skunk Hour,’ a birth-struggle that takes place in the soul’s dark night, brought about by a realisation that Altieri depicts as a crushing sense of doubled absence: the emptiness witnessed among the love-cars reflecting and amplifying the soul’s own crushed hollowness. However, ‘the ultimate prose’ seems a wilfully limiting epithet to apply to an intertextual refrain that locates ‘Hell’ in an ‘I myself’ that draws in Marlowe’s Mephistopheles, Milton’s Satan and Sartre’s Garcin, anti-hero of ‘No Exit.’ The triggering absence, which Altieri depicts as ‘emptiness he witnesses in the scene of perverted love among the love cars,’ also bears closer scrutiny.

While the voyeurism of this stanza is acknowledged, what is so intriguing is Lowell’s own textual sleight of hand. This effects a hollowing out via the use of allusion to, as Williamson put it ‘lead away from the exclusively personal, towards a shared world of sophisticated discourse’ (1986, p.61). Firstly, nothing is ‘witnessed’ in the stanza: the speaker seeks out ‘love cars,’ protective metal carapaces that provide a synecdoche for the lovers whose antics (only ‘perverted’ in Altieri’s

formulation) they serve to conceal. Secondly, the urge to seek out and spy on lovers can be read as woven into the stanza's intertextual refrain at least as much as it is propelled by the mind's own unrightness. St John of the Cross's 'Stanzas of the Soul,'⁴⁴ which provides the line 'On a dark night', depicts a soul driven from its home by desire, guided by the night to the arms of a waiting lover. This journey provides a textual model for the stanza's act of kenosis, emptying poetic language of its referentiality through citation (Loevlie 2012, p.91).

Even the most 'secular, puritan and agnostical' (Parkinson 1968, p.131) reading of the stanza that follows must find spiritual and psychic impetus, as well as carnal, for its act of thwarted voyeurism. This sense of authorised or prescribed transgression is compounded in the following stanza's accretion of allusion: Milton's Satan, in Book IV of *Paradise Lost*, discovers himself unable to flee the hell that is himself and yet makes his way to Eden, where he is tormented by the sight of Adam and Eve in each other's arms:

Sight hateful, sight tormenting! Thus these two,
 Imparadised in one another's arms,
 The happier Eden, shall enjoy their fill
 Of bliss on bliss; while I to Hell am thrust (2003, pp.98-9)

Even the mirror-reversal of Sartre's 'Hell is other people' (Sartre 1989, p.45) in the lines 'I myself am hell;/nobody's here—' offers a glimpse of another inferno of tormented, unwilling voyeurs, where Estelle, Inez and 'the noble pacifist' Garcin are forced to watch the lives they've left continue unfolding, and the play climaxes with Inez, compelled to watch the other two's love-making, taunting them 'I'm watching you, everybody's watching, I'm a crowd all by myself' (p.45). So, to read these stanzas as a depiction of Hell as 'the ultimate prose' is to risk misreading, or simply not reading, their dense allusiveness, which David Gewanter has described as a "free-styling" of prior voices,' (2005, p.137) through which the poem enacts its gesture of confession. Altieri's 2006 *The*

⁴⁴ The exposition of John of the Cross's text glosses the 'dark night' as 'purgative contemplation, which 'causes passively in the soul the negation of itself,' and the entire poem is explicated as 'the method followed by the soul in its journey upon the spiritual road to the attainment of the perfect union of love with God,' (St. John of the Cross, Peerson trans., n.p.).

Art of Twentieth Century American Poetry, to which I will return in the final section, opens with a quote from Pound:

Nine out of every ten Americans have sold their souls for a quotation. They have wrapped themselves about a formula of words instead of about their own centers. (Ezra Pound, "Patria Mia") (Altieri ATC, p.11)

In Lowell's poem, and Altieri's circumscription of it, the centre is itself constructed of a formula of words, a refrain of 'nomadic quotation' forming and marking the territory of a self.

2.1.2 Reading 2: 'Round and round the confessional style goes in its narrow pound'

Nearly 20 years later, in 1998's 'Contingency as Compositional Principle in Fifties Poetics' (PN), Altieri sets out once again to name and mark the territorial limits of a poetics that came into being, or attempted to, in the USA of the 1950s and 60s. This time the growing concern for questions of agency that has, in the meantime, become central to his thinking, casts the elaboration of subjectivity as a central concern, and the essay posits a 'logic of contingency'⁴⁵ as the defining dynamic of the innovative poetry of the period. Once again Lowell is cast as the liminal figure straddling, or more properly constituting, the dividing line between determined and contingent, a stance already assigned to him in *Enlarging the Temple*.

In this essay Lowell is not the central focus. Altieri is, once again, insisting on a 'transitional moment' between modern and contemporary poetry characterised by 'exhaustion' and 'failure of nerve' (McEvilley 1996, p.224). Once again Lowell, specifically 'Skunk Hour' and its closing stanza, are pinpointed as the site of a standoff between the old order and a new concept to which Altieri will attempt to affix the label 'the logic of contingency.' His initial delineation of the concept, called into existence by a perceived need to distinguish his thinking from that of Williamson and Longenbach, demonstrates a hollowing of intertextual allusion:

As Sartre never tired of saying, contingency is the experience of existence preceding essence and hence of particulars deforming or differing from the very terms used to impose categories upon them. (PN, p.88)

⁴⁵ Perhaps echoing Deleuze's 'Logic of Sense' (1990), whose chapter 'The Simulacrum and Ancient Philosophy' defines the clinamen in terms of contingency and Altieri's prized term, *conatus* (LOS, pp.269-270).

This assertion seems to have been assembled from fragments of *Nausea*⁴⁶ collaged with *Being and Nothingness*'s famous definition of freedom ('Freedom is existence, and in it existence precedes essence' Sartre 1992, pp. 567-8), with neither source containing these exact elements in this precise relation. This suggests a mode of allusion similar to what Steve McCaffery proposed as 'transcreational' quotation ('Understood 'transcreationally,' the act of quotation effects not a simple decontextualization, but rather an annihilation of the prior situation and a subsequent new resuscitation,' 1999, p.389), annihilating a text's prior context to resuscitate it in a new situation. However, it also effects a reflexively transcreational reworking of the terms of a reductive contingency centred on Lowell's 'I myself am hell', outlined in Altieri's own *Self and Sensibility*:

Lowell's confessional style marks for me the crucial turning point because it makes the self, shorn of intellectual and cultural traditions, the necessary source of authentic lyric feeling. Yet the self can be manifested only in continual conflict...with forms of understanding that might interpret the intensity as a means to some sense of transpersonal powers. (SS, p.40)

This claim for a lyric authenticity expressed by a coherent individual self has been called into question by the densely allusive origins of the textual self that is expressed in 'Skunk Hour.' Far from existing independently of cultural traditions, it originates and expresses itself through its engagements with them. Not only does this seem closer to McEville's view of the self as 'a transient situation arising from the web of conditions and subject to its changes' (1991, p.77), that view of the 'transient' self would be more in keeping with transitional moments and logics of contingency.

The reading in *Postmodernisms Now*, based entirely on the final stanza of 'Skunk Hour,' briefly deploys a promising reciprocal presupposition, a dynamic that will be returned to later in the chapter, that frames Lowell as 'playing the roles of both subject and object of analysis,' assigning a priestly function to the 'I' standing on the steps that feeds off a 'self-victimizing identification with the skunk' (PN, p.95). The earlier reading had Lowell's poem embody a site

⁴⁶ 'The essential thing is contingency. I mean that one cannot define existence as necessity. To exist is simply *to be there*; those who exist let themselves be encountered, but you can never deduce anything from them. I believe there are people who have understood this. Only they tried to overcome this contingency by inventing a necessary, causal being. But no necessary being can explain existence: contingency is not a delusion, a probability which can be dissipated; it is the absolute, consequently, the perfect free gift.' (Sartre 2013, p.131)

where public and private, poetry and prose, grapple to find meaning and value. In *Self and Sensibility*, this grappling is presented as the continual conflict that is the self's only means of manifesting itself. In 'Contingency as Compositional Practice,' the 'continual conflict' is reduced to a 'staged intensity' between arbitrarily designated poles of the self that are put on display for the reader, what Altieri calls the 'psychological trap at the core of confessional poetry' (PN, p.95). Over the course of his re-readings, Altieri has whittled away at the 'middle ground' he assigned to Lowell in the late 70s until it has become a circumscribed and circumscribing trap.

2.1.3 Reading 3: '....small revolutions in how we imagine ourselves imagining...'

Some ten years later, in *The Art of Twentieth Century American Poetry*, Lowell has been restored his central role in mid-century poetics. Not only that but, where Altieri's earlier work had positioned him at a turning point, and depicted innovative work of the 50s, 60s and 70s as a movement of opposition to, or at least away from, Lowellian poetics, by 2006 he makes up the borderline, along with Creeley, Ashbery, Rich and Bishop, beyond which Altieri will not venture in his overview of the territory of 20th Century American poetry. These poets are considered exemplary in their 'exhaustion of the possibilities of modernist styles,' and they 'remain part of my story because the sense of exhaustion requires them to engage the force of the imaginary in quite distinctive ways' (ATC, p.9). Exhaustion and failure of nerve are characteristics that McEvilley has identified with a view of post-modernism as 'an abortive termination of a project that was not yet complete' (1996, p.224), qualities that are evident in much of Altieri's more recent work.

The question then becomes, not why this group of poets remains part of the story but why they have now been reframed as the *end* of the story rather than its beginning. Altieri expresses some of the exhaustion he has projected on the poets in his own refusal to speculate on which contemporary poets will continue or oppose this engagement, claiming:

I have decided to stop where there has emerged a fairly clear canon, and where I am fairly confident that the poets are still engaged with the issues posed by the major modernist poets. (ATC, p.157)

It is hard not to read this as a failure of nerve on the part of a critic who, already in the 70s was identifying the ‘exhaustion of modernism’ as the point of departure for late century poetry. In this new dispensation, the previously decanonized Lowell is restored to the congregation and his confessionalism recast, not as a ‘psychological trap’ but as ‘probably the most powerful instrument for rendering this sense of the imaginary as ineffable burden’ (p.167). Throughout this book, from the chapter on Eliot on, Altieri draws on what he calls ‘Lacan’s idea about subjective agency’ (p.64), derived from his reading of ‘The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I.’

Altieri’s 1994 book *Subjective Agency* rejected, or at least tightly delimited the usefulness of, Lacan’s thinking about agency,⁴⁷ but by 2006 he has been rehabilitated, and Lowell with him.⁴⁸ ‘Skunk Hour,’ once ‘the ultimate hell,’ ‘the ultimate emptiness,’ ‘the ultimate prose,’ can now be viewed as ‘the most intricate treatment I know of how the imaginary can pervade every aspect of efforts at self-knowledge’ (p.166). With this equally hyperbolic claim, Altieri effects something of a transcreation of Lacan, suggesting an ‘imaginary’ that is somehow external to the process of self-knowing, permeating it as the ‘red fox stain covers Blue Hill,’ rather than the realm where the subject’s doubled relationship with itself originates.⁴⁹ This reading, once again, skirts around the poem’s pivotal fifth and sixth stanzas, moving from a close reading of the opening four stanzas to a detailed reworking of his previous ‘priest’/ ‘skunk’ reading of the closing stanza, without so much as a passing mention of the poem’s central crisis, as if the ‘ineffable burden’ of Lowell’s imaginary had rendered it *itself* unspeakable, and reduced all efforts to articulate it to gestures towards its absence.

⁴⁷ He expresses concern that Lacan’s version of subjectivity, like Sartre’s, derives from negativity and creates paradoxes that ‘do little to help resist empiricist refusals to let subjectivity play a significant role in philosophical reflection’ (SA, p.9).

⁴⁸ Gwiazda notes a similar pivot from criticism to appreciation with regard to Rich in the same book (2014, p.162)

⁴⁹ Lacan presents the mirror stage in equally ‘exemplary’ terms (‘This jubilant assumption of his specular image by the child at the *infans* stage...would seem to exhibit in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the I is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject,’ 2005, p.2) with engagement with the mirror image serving to precipitate, rather than permeate, an ‘I’ that precedes its own capacity to engage with the other and thereby become a subject.

The absence around which Altieri has been shaping his refrain, from *Painterly Abstraction* to his most recent essays on new materialism,⁵⁰ is the abstraction of ‘who we become’, through self-conscious engagement with works of art. Tracking this elusive subject through acts of allusion and citation, gestures of framing and reframing that call into being such self-reflexive recursions as ‘small revolutions in how we imagine ourselves imagining’ (ATC, p.171) leaves the reader no wiser as to who this ‘we’ is, and how it comes into being. In all cases, the self-reflexive, transcendent subject⁵¹ is positioned outside the poem or painting in relation to which its identity is defined, exiled to a position outside its territory of origin.

Deleuze and Guattari, through their own allusions to Sartre and Lacan, question the reflexive forms of subjectivity yielded by field models, whether structural or phenomenological:

In the literature of the face, Sartre's text on the look and Lacan's on the mirror make the error of appealing to a form of subjectivity or humanity reflected in a phenomenological field or split in a structural field. (TP, p.171).

The next sections will assess the potential of a poetics of the fold to open up the territory to a more reciprocal subjectivity, beginning with an overview of Altieri's own phenomenological field.

2.2: ‘The Opposite of Gesture’⁵²

In the previous chapter, I gave a brief overview of the phenomenological term ‘intentionality,’ to contextualize Altieri's tendency to fold that concept into the idea of authorial intention. This section will proceed to a more detailed outline of the phenomenological method with reference to Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, starting with a brief definition and some of its core terms; just as the previous chapter identified differences between their uses of the term ‘intentionality’ and Altieri's,

⁵⁰ ‘[W]hen we see the difference using the first-person can make, we might be open to a range of other contexts that can suffice for a picture of shared human powers like attuning to other people or reflecting on *who we become* by virtue of seeing in distinctive ways.’ (2016, p.253, emphasis added)

⁵¹ This ‘transcendent subject’ is explicitly named at several points. Altieri's first reading of Malevich's ‘Black and Red Square’ (PA, 219), the painting's ‘tilt,’ which will later be reframed in a proprioceptive reading (PR, p.250), allows for the emergence of the ‘transcendent subject.’ The ethics of reading, partially derived from Wittgenstein and Goodman, in *Act and Quality*, is focused on ‘transcending our limited identities’ (AQ, p.330).

⁵² From Altieri (2018), p.16: ‘The opposite of gesture is what I am calling the reflective philosophical mode that tries to generalize the situation of the poem as an instance or type of more capacious relations between mind and world.’

this chapter will explore similar deviations between Altieri's use of the concept of phenomenology and theirs. D.W. Smith (2016, n.p.) has defined phenomenology as 'the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view. The central structure of an experience is its intentionality, its being directed toward something, as it is an experience of or about some object' and it is concerned with the meanings things have within our own experience or 'lifeworld.' The centrality of 'things' to consciousness is underlined in the introduction to Husserl's *Paris Lectures* which emphasises the variety of 'things' available to the phenomenological process:

For confirmation we must always turn *zu den Sachen selbst*, to the things themselves, where "*Sachen*" or "things" refers not to physical objects but to any presentation or phenomenon whatever that may confront the ego in consciousness: *e.g.*, a chair, a star, a law of nature — such as that of universal gravitation —, a headache, the sense of impending doom, the law of contradiction, the square root of -1 , "the idea of nothingness, etc. (P. Koestenbaum 1998, p.19)

In Husserl's method, the things themselves must be considered via a process of abstraction or detachment that he called *epoché*, from the Greek word for bracket:

The method of phenomenology consists in focusing on any part or all of my experience, and then observing, analyzing, abstracting, and describing that experience by removing myself from the immediate and lived engagement in it...Only through distancing, bracketing, and reflecting can we see an object as it is in itself (that is, as it appears in itself), can we divorce an object from the projections of practical reason and the interpretations of our synthesizing consciousness (p.19-20).

The 'distancing, bracketing and reflecting' called for by Husserl's *epoché* recalls the operation effected on the Altierian subject ('who we become') in the previous section. However, by abstracting the subject, which it then makes the object of its reflection, Altieri's 'phenomenological process' renders the method infinitely reflexive, trapping the abstracted subject in the reflections of its own synthesizing consciousness. Merleau-Ponty posits a world and subject that are reciprocally generative of one another, rather than one pole reflecting or expressing the other:

In so far as, when I reflect on the essence of subjectivity, I find it bound up with that of the body and that of the world, this is because my existence as subjectivity is merely one with my existence as a body and with the existence of the world, and because the subject that I am, when taken concretely, is inseparable from this body and this world. The ontological world and body which we find at the core of the subject are not the world or body as idea, but on the one hand the world itself contracted into a comprehensive grasp, and on the other the body itself as a knowing-body (2005, p.475).

Merleau-Ponty's subjectivity arises from, and dwells within, a reciprocal triple folding of self, body and world. Considering individual and poetic subjectivities as originating and persevering in such

a threshold could prove a useful corrective to the framing of philosophical reflection as ‘the opposite of gesture’ from which this section takes its title.

2.2.1 *Disembodied Phenomenology*

The introduction to *The Particulars of Rapture* contains a section modestly entitled ‘On Being between Disciplines: Notes towards an Embarrassed Phenomenology.’ Here, Altieri imagines a ‘discursive universe’ for his work, envisioning an audience made up of philosophers and those concerned with the arts (POR, pp.33-4). This builds on efforts, discernible in his work from 1994’s *Subjective Agency* onwards, to position his work at a point of intersection between the disciplines of philosophy and literary criticism. This act of territorialisation may be motivated by the desire to respond to philosophy’s ‘literary turn’ with a ‘philosophical turn’ of its own.⁵³ What is less immediately clear is why a writer whose most constant philosophical interlocutor is Wittgenstein,⁵⁴ should choose to frame his own philosophical turn as a phenomenology, embarrassed or otherwise.

This is initially expressed as a hope that careful attention to the affective aspects of literary works can ‘[create] opportunities for experiencing states like intensity, involvedness and plasticity while encouraging us to reflect on who we become as we experience such states’ (p.33). This emphasis on reflection on who we become through engaging with artworks and reflecting on those engagements is the fulcrum of Altieri’s thinking. His version of a dynamically-constituted self, taking the passive role of spectator and object of the process of thinking in order to reflect on the subject’s active engagement with the world seems, as has been noted, to share formal and dynamic properties with Husserl’s transcendental ego, yet Altieri’s thinking here sidesteps Husserl’s work

⁵³ As explored in chapter one, Altieri takes issue with the limitations of the ethical positions adopted with regard to literature by such philosophers as Nussbaum (LE, POR), Crary, Derek Attridge and Stanley Cavell (RI), and his work after *Subjective Agency* distances itself from his previous concern with the ‘ethical’ in favour of ‘valuing,’ one of his tasks in *Reckoning with the Imagination* being ‘to show how to avoid ethics entirely as a topic for literary theory.’ (p.161).

⁵⁴ Wittgenstein is central to the theoretical framework of *Act and Quality*, *Painterly Abstraction*, *Subjective Agency*, *The Particulars of Rapture* and *Reckoning with the Imagination*.

to a remarkable degree. He makes one fleeting reference in the body of the text ('I cannot imitate the systematic exploration of standpoints that one finds in Husserl,' p.34) and rejects what he describes as 'transcendental ambition.' Interestingly, this allusion is not linked to any specific reading of Husserl, who appears neither in the text's endnotes nor bibliography. Instead of employing phenomenology as a method or a process, here it seems to be deployed in an adjectival capacity, a means of labelling and categorising a kind of thinking that Altieri aspires to: 'a useful conceptual defense for being suspicious of explanation and for preferring careful descriptions of how consciousness actually engages the world in particular ways' (p.35). This formulation has much in common with Gadamer's phenomenological approach to aesthetic experience (Davey 2016 n.p.), most pertinently his claim that '[t]he more intimate one is with poetic conjoining [*Fügung*], the richer in meaning and the more present the word becomes' (Gadamer 1992, p.74). Yet neither Gadamer's thinking, nor the kind of intimate poetic engagement it propounds, feature in this text.

Phenomenology is instead deployed as 'conceptual defence' against contemporary neuroscience and what is described as 'sociological interests in how states of mind are culturally constituted' (POR, p.34). While no interlocutor for either position is mentioned in the text, the endnotes engage in lengthy disagreement with work by Antonio Damasio, representing the neuroscientific pole, and Lauren Berlant the social-constructivist (p.262). However, there is no obvious fundamental incompatibility between these domains, as attested to by the growing field of neurophenomenology and the centrality of phenomenological methods to the development of social construction theories.⁵⁵ Here, Altieri seems to be invoking phenomenology as a gesture of naming, another means of creating and demarcating a territory for himself and establishing a boundary between his thinking and other domains. He goes on to draw on Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Colour*, invoking Proust to make the claim that 'rather than explain or judge Swann's jealousy,

⁵⁵ For example work on neurophenomenology by Varela, 1996, and on the social construction of reality by Berger and Luckmann, 1991.

the phenomenologist tries to bring attention to its distinctive energies and to show what possible uses such energies might have for the audience's own future projections of their affective capacities' (p.35). This is somewhat at odds with Merleau-Ponty's⁵⁶ analysis of Swann's jealousy, which focuses on the meaning of his jealousy for Swann *himself*, rather than for the lives of some imagined audience:

Swann's love does not cause him to *feel* jealousy. It *is* jealousy already and has been from the start. Jealousy does not produce a change in the quality of love: Swann's feeling of pleasure in looking at Odette bore its degeneration within itself, since it was the pleasure of being the only one to do so. The set of psychic facts and causal relationships merely translates in an external fashion a certain view that Swann takes of Odette, a certain way of belonging to another. Swann's jealous love ought, moreover, to be related to the rest of his behaviour, in which case it might well appear as itself a manifestation of an even more general existential structure, which would be Swann's whole personality (Merleau-Ponty 2005, p.495).

Rather than deriving meanings from Swann's jealousy that an audience can abstract for later use, Merleau-Ponty engages deeply with the work of Proust, via a phenomenological method that both share, in order to consider its complex (and unabstractable) interactions of time, subjectivity and lived experience. This close attention to the text puts pressure on any tendency to abstract the adjective 'phenomenological' from its process to use as a label to distinguish work, or a refrain to mark territory.

This tendency is re-enacted in *Wallace Stevens and the Demands of Modernity*. Here, despite the text's subtitle 'Towards a Phenomenology of Value,' readings in the discipline are confined to Dermot Moran's *Introduction to Phenomenology*, and do not engage with work on Stevens and phenomenology by scholars such as Krystof Ziarek (whose work is dismissed as 'problematically technical', WS, p.237), or Thomas J. Hines, whose 1976 book *The Later Poetry of Wallace Stevens: Phenomenological Parallels with Husserl and Heidegger*, is not mentioned. Phenomenology is evoked in the context of acts of directed and mediated self-reflection (WS pp.9-10) and definitions are proposed that seem to echo both Husserl's reduction and Gadamer's aesthetics, such as the intriguing definition of abstraction as 'the cutting away of the specific contents of value in order to focus on the qualities that constitute *how* we value' (p.35 emphasis original). This abiding concern with *how* we read, feel,

⁵⁶ Altieri uses Merleau-Ponty's essay on Cezanne's seeing as an analogue for Creeley's self-consciousness of the desiring subject (p.278), but this instance of exemplarity aside, his phenomenology does not draw on Merleau-Ponty's.

think, value, with an adverbial rather than adjectival emphasis on experiences as processes, seems to form one of the most constant and compelling aspects of the thinking in this book and *Particulars of Rapture*,⁵⁷ a concern that demonstrates strong affinities both with phenomenology and with Deleuze's process philosophy. This theoretical commitment to the adverbial is, however, everywhere undercut by a practice centred on the adjectival (as in the case of *The Particulars of Rapture*'s 'conative') or the nominal (as in *Reckoning with the Imagination*'s 'attunement' or *The Art of Twentieth Century Poetry*'s reiterated gestures of naming), and that centres its attention on 'who we become' through such experiences, rather than *how* becoming takes place in these processes.

Two characteristics emerge from a close reading of Altieri's idiosyncratic phenomenology: firstly, its reluctance to ground its thinking in attentive, exploratory readings of philosophical and literary texts lends it a disembodied quality. Consequently, this disembodied thinking navigates a territory on which it has little corporeal purchase by means of acts of naming and defining that seek, through the work of territorialisation that has already been mapped out in relation to citation and repetition, to set and maintain boundaries within which the disembodied self can move in relative security. I will consider how these qualities interact in his recent essay on the work of contemporary American poet Peter Gizzi. But before doing this I will read some of Gizzi's work, from his 2007 collection *The Outernationale*, in an effort to highlight the congruency of his thinking with aspects of Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible*. This will serve a dual purpose: emphasising the resonances between Gizzi's poetics and a conventionally phenomenological reading; and establishing that a mode of reading originating within Gizzi's work has the potential to permeate, open and operate across boundaries such as those employed by Altieri to delimit the scope of his own poetics.

⁵⁷ The emphasis on the affects as adverbial is reiterated on pp.73, 107, 111, 125-6.

In a 2011 interview with Levi Rubeck, Gizzi gave the following description of his poetics:

The ultimate line that poetry has continually crossed is between the living and the dead, or the visible and invisible worlds... [It is] the dream of a phenomenal syntax that can reanimate that which has been otherwise lost to the world. (Rubeck 2011, n.p.)

In considering Gizzi's phenomenological process I will focus on sight as a structuring element of this collection, identifying ways in which he sketches an imagery of the visible which functions both as commentary on poetic process within individual poems and as thematic framework for the collection as a whole. The titles alone conjure 'a telescope', 'a cinematographer', 'phantascope', 'pictures', 'polaroid', 'battle photographs', suggesting that the self and world imagined in these works will, in many cases, be mediated: refracted through a lens rather than seen by the naked eye. These 'artificial eyes' are more concerned with the transmission of moving pictures than the capture of static images, as in these lines from 'Beacon':

you are inside my projector
Turning overhead and me
Coming in and out of focus
When your light will not reach me (Out, pp.34-5)

The projected image here is not fixed; it requires light and focus to come into clear view. The lens, artificial eye through which the view is captured, is also not synonymous with the poem's lyric 'I', who is as likely to be object as subject of these viewings. The instability of the moving image, the need for constant attention to focus and light, carries over into the process of making the poem in 'Homer's Anger':

I see you and hear you
And that is the beginning of the poem.

Not a circle but a ray
Not a definition but a journey

Flowering in scenes.
This composition is still all the time

Coming into view. (p.63)

These lines demonstrate an instability of rhythm typical of many poems in this collection, where an end-line stress suggestive of finality is destabilised by enjambment, often across stanza breaks.

This technique seems exploratory rather than contradictory, allowing lines and stanzas to voice the permeability of their own boundaries.

Clear divisions of I/ other, inside/outside are called into question in the final lines of 'Saturday and its festooned potential':

When twigs scratching
Join to an idea of time
To a picture of being

Like to be beside and becoming
To be another and oneself
To be complete inside the poem

To be oneself becoming a poem (p.60)

The suggestion here that the interweaving of an object from the natural, visible world with a series of doubled abstractions ('idea of time', 'picture of being') is analogous to the process of becoming a self inside the poem, signals at the generative interdependence between the visible and the invisible operating within and between the poems of Gizzi's collection, an instance of the kind of relationship of reciprocal presupposition that will be thought through with Deleuze at the end of this chapter.

The second section of the opening serial poem, 'A panic that can still come upon me', takes up the motif of the legibility of the visible world, and suggests a porousness at the juncture of mind and world that will allow for an invisible extension of the mind into the spaces between the world's visible lines:

I can read the narrow line above the hills
The day unbraid its pretty light
And I am here to see it
This must be all there is
Right now in the world
There are things larger than understanding
Things we know cannot
be held in the mind (p.4)

The reiterated, aborted 'if' clauses in the next section find the speaker casting doubt on the central tenets of his own process ('if speech can free us...if no-one believes what I see', p.6).

Finally, the poem finds peace with its own 'phenomenal syntax' in its first fully realised if-clause:

if I wanted to go all over a word
And live inside its name, so be it

There is my body and the idea of my body,
The surf breaking and the picture of a wave (p.11).

Olivier Brossard has described the process that brings this poem to its conclusion as ‘the general movement towards abstraction, when the body gives way to “the idea of my body” before being washed away by “the surf,” itself replaced by a mere image’ (2008, p.156). It is certainly the case that these lines depict a movement from particular to abstract: from ‘a word’ to ‘its name’, from ‘my body’ to ‘the idea of my body’, from ‘surf breaking’ to ‘the picture of a wave.’ However, rather than a process of ‘giving way’ to ‘image,’ I would suggest that the action here is not so much *towards* abstraction but rather movement *as* abstraction, central to Gizzi’s poetics of the seen and lived world throughout this collection. This movement, replicated in the reader’s movement through the poem, is an attempt to get at the ‘mute meaning’ of individual experiences of the world, which Merleau-Ponty has described as ‘not a thought of seeing or of feeling, but vision, feeling, mute experience of a mute meaning’ (1968, p.215).

In Deleuze’s book on Foucault, whom he credits with ‘the conversion of phenomenology into epistemology’ (F, p.90), he uses the latter’s thinking to repudiate the idea of the visible as expressive of ‘mute meaning’:

There is a disjunction between speaking and seeing, between the visible and the articulable: ‘what we see never lies within what we say,’ and vice versa. The conjunction is impossible for two reasons: the statement has its own correlative object and is not a proposition designating a state of things or a visible object, as logic would have it; but neither is the visible a mute meaning, a signified of power to be realized in language, as phenomenology would have it. (Deleuze F, p.55)

This position, which deals a blow to Wittgenstein’s propositions as well as Merleau-Ponty’s ‘mute meaning,’ is derived from Foucault’s favouring of immanence over intentionality. According to this view, *statements* do not express a subject, but rather refer to the language that gives being to subjects and objects; *visibilities* operate through a similar procedure, but in this case the medium is light. This anti-phenomenological stance collapses intentionality into the gap opened up by the ‘non-relation’ between speaking and seeing’ (p.90), and the subject arises from the acts of speaking and seeing, rather than directing or reflecting on such acts. The immanence of the subject is created through the act of folding, and it is ‘derivative of the outside, conditioned by the fold’ (p.87). Thus,

instead of subjects taking up positions, positions give rise to subjects ('ONE SPEAKS, an anonymous murmur in which positions are laid out for possible subjects' p.47), and this laying out and taking up of subjectivity forms a folding between inside and outside:

There never 'remains' anything of the subject, since he has to be created on each occasion, like a focal point of resistance, on the basis of the folds which subjectivize knowledge and bend each power (p.87)

One could read Gizzi's *The Outernationale* as giving voice to Merleau-Ponty's 'mute meaning,' making out the legible traces of invisible meaning in the names, ideas and pictures lining the visible world's words, bodies and waves. However, it is equally possible to read his title's estranging of the Internationale as an invitation to consider, with Deleuze and Foucault, the implications of subjectivities arising from poems' folding of inside and outside, and these possibilities will be developed in chapter three.

To return focus to the voicing of mute meaning, in 'A telescope protects its view' it is the dead who are rendered legible to the poem's 'I' by an act of abstraction at the level of the word:

I like to read the dead.

there's so and so going by
everyone, outside

everyone

the words scroll onto air.

Synecdoche: act of receiving from another.

Metonymy: change of name. (p.25).

The dead are inside the words that make them legible, but also outside everyone; due to the 'non-relation' of speaking and seeing,' the fact that their names can be spoken does not mean that they can be seen. Mute meaning can only be made visible at the level of the word. The poem takes its title from John Ashbery's 'Clepsydra,' and allusion to that poem opens the lines to even wider possibilities for the complex enfolding of inside and outside worlds:

I am
Not speaking of a particularly successful attempt to be
Opposite; anybody at all can read that page, it has only
To be thrust in front of him. I mean now something much
Broader,
The sum total of all the private aspects that can ever

Become legible in what is outside, as much in the rocks
 And foliage as in the invisible look of the distant
 Ether and in the iron fist that suddenly closes over your own.
 I see myself in this totality, and meanwhile
 I am only a transparent diagram, of manners and
 Private words with the certainty of being about to fall.

(Ashbery 2010, pp.144-5)

These lines cast new light on Gizzi's 'There are things larger than understanding/ things we know cannot be held in the mind,' a line already reflecting an intense inner dialogue with Stevens's 'Of Modern Poetry.' Here, as in Gizzi's poem, the final line's uncertain stress-pattern opens it to contrasting readings (is it the 'certainty of being' that's about to fall, or is the certainty *of* 'being about to fall?') Can the 'things we know' not be held in the mind, or are there things that we know *cannot* be held in the mind?). Ashbery's poem sketches a transparent diagram of a self which is both outside and inside a world where the mind can seek to read, in the spaces outside itself (that also contain itself), all that cannot be held in the mind. It repudiates the dynamic of opposition in favour of a movement of mutually encompassing and productive uncertainty, recalling Gizzi's 'to be another and oneself/ to be complete inside the poem.' For Deleuze, the relationship between what can be seen and what can be said takes the form of 'mutual presupposition between the two, a mutual grappling and capture' (Deleuze F, p.57), with the articulable taking primacy over the visible.

Ceaseless folding motion between and through the things of the world provides the conditions within which they become and remain legible, their 'phenomenal syntax' reanimating 'what has otherwise been lost from view', to return to Gizzi's opening formulation. Through this movement, the self and the world construct each other in a dynamic, reciprocal process, as in these lines from 'In a Western Garden:'

So often we measure
 By what is false.
 We should measure by what is barely legible
 Barely in our dailiness.
 It is the invisible that does not lie
 The invisible through which
 We see ourselves finally
 On a back street in the world (p.90)

Here, Gizzi's claims for the powers of the invisible allow for the mutual enfolding of Merleau-Ponty's position with Deleuze and Foucault's. If Merleau-Ponty saw the invisible as the site of 'mute meaning,' and Deleuze rejected the possibility of rendering the visible articulable, Gizzi frames this very inarticulacy of the invisible as the source of its power: what cannot speak does not lie. The subjects of this poem form themselves and find themselves in the world through a movement away from articulable falsity. What unites these philosophical positions, despite their fundamental and irreconcilable divergences on questions of origin and orientation of the subject, is their emphasis on the subject's emergence in interactions between body and world. This reading has sought to establish some basis for considering Gizzi's work as employing a phenomenological process that is open enough to enfold Deleuze's anti-phenomenological stance. The next section will apply this openness to the rigid boundaries and polarizations defining the thresholds of Altieri's poetics.

2.2.2 *Towards a Proprioceptive Poetics?*

Proprioception effects a double translation of the subject and the object into the body... (Massumi 2002, 59).

In the opening paragraph of Altieri's essay, 'Gesture and Philosophical Reflection in the poetry of Peter Gizzi,' it is made clear that the gesture and reflection of the title will be considered as separate, polarized and essentially antagonistic entities:

As I was working on a book about Wallace Stevens, I came to think that two of his central preoccupations might be increasingly important in contemporary poetry—as distinctions among poets and as distinctions that dramatize competing forces within a single poet's work. Let me call these forces explorations in the power of expressive gesture and elaborations of what philosophical reflection can do—and not do—in lyrical modes of establishing significance for our affective states (2018, p.2).

The polarization originates with a pair of remarkably static 'forces,' recalling the earlier formulation 'the concept of force as frame' (Altieri 1998): explorations and elaborations. Within this polarization, 'expressive gesture' is further opposed to 'philosophical reflection,' and the apparatus is deployed to create distinctions between, and within the work of, contemporary poets. However, there are ways of reading, such as those we have briefly encountered in Foucault and Deleuze, or

Charles Olson's dynamic conception of 'Proprioception' (1965, p.2), that operate via a polar dynamic without linking the poles through opposition. For example, Massumi suggests the model of a 'bipolar' abstract machine as the best way of understanding the complex relations of force and fields of force operating between content and expression in *A Thousand Plateaus*:

The subject is the agency that selects which words are generated and coupled with which states of things. It is an abstract machine which, as always, is immediately bipolar: on one side it organizes a form-substance of content, and on the other a form-substance of expression (1992, p.27).

This position diverges from Altierian polarisation in two key respects: form and substance are distributed, with the poles of content and expression both resulting from exchange between form and substance; as a result, it incorporates a movement and exchange of forces absent from Altieri's more dualistic position. Deleuze and Guattari open this dynamic to movements of transformation operating at the poles of content and expression, suggesting that those, too, are not fixed terms but determined by position and relationship:

[W]e find forms and substances of content that play the role of expression in relation to other forms and substances, and conversely for expression. These new distinctions do not, therefore, coincide with the distinction between forms and substances within each articulation; instead, they show that each articulation is already, or still, double. (TP, p.45)

In this model the poles of form and substance, content and expression, must always be considered in terms of reciprocal presupposition (p.46). What is 'content' in one context becomes 'expression' in another, therefore poles cannot be considered in petrified opposition but only traced in articulation. They are, as has already been seen in the case of the 'nomadic,' dynamic, their movement generated by, and generative of, the folding together of terms often considered in binary or dualistic opposition. Altieri's forces of 'expressive gesture' and 'philosophical reflection,' formed as they are of fixed, opposing poles, have difficulty opening to this generative movement. He goes on to elaborate the capabilities of a philosophical poetry through further acts of opposition, naming and recursive self-reflexion:

The opposite of gesture is what I am calling the reflective philosophical mode that tries to generalize the situation of the poem as an instance or type of more capacious relations between mind and world, so that the poet's treatment of a situation can be seen as testing and eliciting belief in some truth about the world. The reflective mode has two primary concerns. First, it must get the substance of the world down correctly. It must find names for what persists, so that naming itself is a demanding and powerful act of imagination. Second, it must accept an obligation not just to use names, but to speculate on how and why it matters that we have this power of naming.

This is poetry bound to correlating the consciousness that looks outward with the activity of self-consciousness that looks at how its own capacities might be grounded. (2018, p.16.)

This opposition between philosophical reflection and gesture is a striking counterpoint to Agamben's assertion that 'poetic verse is essentially gesture,' albeit 'always a gesture of being at a loss in language' (1999, p.78). Furthermore, the effort at getting at the substance of the world sounds like the gestures of reaching or groping that form Carrie Noland's concept of 'gestural meaning,' which derives from Merleau-Ponty and Bergson the premise that 'the body is a source of sensory feedback that intervenes between the external world and the internal world' (2009, p.7) and is predicated on movement and congruent with what we will later explore as the proprioceptive. Noland develops the idea of the groping of the hand as the original heuristic movement, where 'the first tool is also a gesture that produces kinesthetic, proprioceptive, and haptic knowledge' (p.10). This would suggest that 'testing and eliciting belief in some truth about the world' (Altieri 2018, p.16) is not incompatible with gesture, whether poetic or proprioceptive. Indeed, it is hard to read the act of looking 'outward with the activity of self-consciousness that looks at how its own capacities might be grounded' (p.16) as anything but a gesture, albeit a reflexive one.

In framing the poet's work as a sort of scientific investigation of abstracted truths, Altieri's reading is not quite in keeping with Gizzi's phenomenal syntax, assigning an altogether Adamic⁵⁸ significance to the act of naming that succeeds in both ignoring its gestural quality and attributing to Gizzi's work a concern with naming that is arguably more central to its own. Interactions with the things of the world in Gizzi's poems are exploratory, as the previous section argued, and their limited use of names tends to signal recognition rather than imposition, in keeping with the proprioceptive gesture of groping.

In Noland's formulation, the groping is both proprioceptive and heuristic: it is a means for agency to come into being through engagement in the world, while also enabling it to come to

⁵⁸ Gibbons uses this term to describe English poetry's 'impulse to evoke the visible world by naming it' (2015, p.93)

an understanding of that world (2009, p.10). However, she also suggests that this gesture can be autotelic, ‘movement for the sake of experiencing more movement’ (p.106), and this idea has bearing on Altieri’s own use of the term ‘proprioceptive.’ *Particulars of Rapture* claims that, in experiencing kinetic sculpture, ‘we feel strange conjunctions between pure proprioceptive states and a rush of imaginative projections’ (POR, p.52). In the same work, readings from Stevens and Bishop that had been labelled ‘conative’ (2001, p.275) have been recast as ‘proprioceptive,’ with Stevens’s ‘Examination of the Hero in a Time of War,’ previously also used to explicate the grammar of ‘as,’ credited with ‘the most proprioceptive of feelings’ (POR, p.151). This folding of the conative and the proprioceptive into one another is suggestive: Agamben has posited the *conatus*, in the sense used by both Deleuze and Spinoza, as expressing the idea of ‘an immanent movement, a striving that obstinately remains in itself’ (1999, p.236). In its self-contained quality, it comes to resemble the ‘autotelic movement’ for its own sake that Noland (2009, p.106) distinguishes from the haptic and proprioceptive gestures through which agents come to know the world and themselves.

In naming his rereading of Elizabeth Bishop’s ‘Sonnet’ ‘Proprioceptive Adjustments,’ Altieri draws on the faculty of proprioception, the body’s sense of itself and its location in space, and defines his own use of the term as ‘matters of momentary attunements to changing situations,’ (POR, p.250).⁵⁹ In the abstract, this suggestion of responsiveness to the text’s movements offers promising heuristic potential, regardless of whether it carries the label ‘conative’ or ‘proprioceptive.’ In practice, lack of attunement to the text’s particulars means that this reading remains autotelic, existing in and for itself, rather than proprioceptively engaged in knowing the

⁵⁹ It has been defined as ‘[T]hat continuous but unconscious sensory flow from the movable parts of our body (muscles, tendons, joints), by which their position and tone and motion is continually monitored and adjusted, but in a way which is hidden from us because it is automatic and unconscious. ... it is only by courtesy of proprioception, so to speak, that we feel our bodies as proper to us, as our ‘property’, as our own.’ (Sacks 1986, p.42)

world. However, it does suggest a juncture where an autotelic reading, moving around texts for its own sake, has the potential to reach out into the world, becoming properly proprioceptive.

In *Parables for the Virtual*, Brian Massumi attends to the dynamic, co-ordinating nature of proprioception, while emphasising the role of this sense in mediating the body's reciprocal interactions with the world:

Proprioception translates the exertions and ease of the body's encounters with objects into a muscular memory of relationality. This is the cumulative memory of skill, habit, posture. At the same time as proprioception folds tactility in, it draws out the subject's reactions to the qualities of the objects it perceives through all five senses, bringing them into the motor realm of externalizable response. (2002, p.59)

This definition highlights the relationality of proprioception: it is not a feeling or a sense in its own right, but a way of translating and co-ordinating the five senses and their interactions with the world.

Charles Olson, in his looser formulation of the concept, emphasised its mediating role between body and world, locating in this 'intervening thing' the soul ('the soul is proprioceptive,' 1965, p.2), while also foregrounding action or movement as the means by which the body discovers a self and the soul builds a home. This 'mid-thing between,' in which the self originates in movement (p.2), has much in common with the 'striving that obstinately remains in itself' of Agamben's *conatus*. It also echoes Olson's own definition of meaning: 'that which exists through itself is what is called meaning' (in Creeley 1989, p.128). McCaffery, drawing on Bernstein and gesturing at Olson, distinguishes between reading that deflects attention to an abstracted meaning and reading that keeps moving through the writing, focusing on the process of reading (2001, p. 271). All of these concepts, *conatus*, proprioception and meaning, are united in their immanence. They cannot be abstracted from the movements in which they come in to being.

If we take a step back to *Enlarging the Temple* we see that Altieri himself proposed a poetics of immanence as one postmodern means of 'rejecting modernist emphases on the mind reflecting on its own structures' (ET, p.21). This poetics was initially sketched out through a polarisation between Coleridge's 'symbolist' and Wordsworth's 'immanentist' positions:

I call the alternative logical model represented by early Wordsworth an essentially *immanentist* vision of the role of poetry. Here poetic creation is conceived more as the discovery and the disclosure of numinous relationships within nature than as the creation of containing and structuring forms (p.17).

While I would argue that Altieri's work from the 1990s on has taken refuge in a Coleridgean 'creation of containing and structuring forms' centred on 'the mind reflecting its own structures,' his immanentist poetics of the late 70s constitutes a seam where his own poetics could be deterritorialised,⁶⁰ opening it to reciprocally productive engagements with postmodern and contemporary poetry to which it has heretofore been methodologically unsuited (as in the case of Gizzi) or temperamentally unreceptive. *Enlarging the Temple's* approving citation of Olson's definition of meaning (p.42) and the postmodern poetries his contemporary poetics so often pits itself against it, is striking. So is its reading of Creeley and Olson's famous enfolding of form and content ('Form is never more than an extension of content,' in ET, p.96), which prefigures the reciprocal presuppositions of expression and content in Deleuze's 'abstract machine' as well as his insistence on the body as site of this unfolding:

Olson's entire poetics and ontology follow from his redefinition of form and content. One might notice first of all what becomes of the idea of reconciling opposites. For Olson, such an idea is at best empty, at worst destructive. In so far as the full event is realized, it contains within itself the opposites and hence determines their true relationship...Olson returns to the most physical aspect of the poem – its rhythm – and redefines that to fit his sense of experience. Our bodies are the place where our fullest union of man and world take place, and it is within them that the unity of experience can be grasped. (pp.97-8)

Not only does this formulation conjure a Deleuzian abstract machine of interpenetrating and mutually generative form and content, it sites its operations within the folds of the body, source of Olson's 'proprioceptive self.' It does so via a proprioceptive gesture of grasping, establishing purchase on the world in a way later 'irritable reaching after' will not. The need to perform a similar operation in Altieri's late poetics emerges in the disembodied view of proprioception proposed in the appendix of *The Particulars of Rapture*, which points back through a cloud of abstractions to a passage from William James quoted fifteen pages previously:

⁶⁰ Deterritorialisation is a feature of the field of immanence. Rather than being the opposite of territorialisation, it is a 'transformative vector' immanent to the territory itself, in which it has the power to transform itself. In the literary context most relevant here, Kafka's deterritorialisation 'mutates content, forcing enunciations and expressions to 'disarticulate' (Parr 2010, pp. 69-70)

In my view the most interesting proprioceptive adjustments occur in the register of feelings articulated in the famous statement I quoted from William James on our awareness of linguistic operators as affective forces. (POR, p.251)

That statement contains no reference to the physical body, its senses, or the coordinating function of proprioception. Rather, it refers to the feelings inherent in the ‘linguistic operators’ ‘and...if...but...by’ (p.236), and his conception of ‘proprioceptive adjustments’ as a function of such conjunctions suggests a substitution of rhetorical positioning for the ‘double translation of subject and object into the body’ through which proprioception takes place. In the preceding discussion of ‘spatially organised feelings,’ he considers how viewers engage with boundaries in visual art, and ‘the force of the relational fields that these boundaries activate’ (p.241). This sense of relational fields operating in response to boundaries recalls the translational movement present in Olson and Massumi’s proprioceptive sense. However, the reading of ‘proprioceptive attunements’ in Elizabeth Bishop’s ‘Sonnet,’ via which Altieri attempts to realize the proprioceptive syntax of the aforementioned ‘linguistic operators,’ eschews even said operators entirely to focus on the poem’s present participles (p.251-3). This autotelic syntax fails to activate those participles to establish the movement in which meaning comes into being.

For this reason, it is worth exercising caution when proposing a move ‘towards’ a proprioceptive poetics. The choice of preposition suggests that this abstract concept is situated somewhere beyond the text where it can be approached, assimilated and applied in other readings. What this thesis is seeking to establish, however, is that meaning is immanent to the text as proprioception is to the body. Neither can be abstracted from or make sense without its medium. This is supported by Deleuze’s warning that ‘an abstract machine that would operate purely on the level of language is an absurdity’ (TP, p.145): while it is possible to abstract content from language, the activation of the abstract machine proceeds by recognising the immanence of meaning to language. This process involves content and expression translating into one another in reciprocal movements underpinned by the diagrammatic function that exists *in* language but cannot be expressed *by* it: ‘the height of abstraction but also the moment at which abstraction becomes real’

(pp.145-6). For this reason, rather than abstracting an adjective ‘proprioceptive’ that can be applied to other examples, this reading seeks to enact the ‘minute adjustments’ of proprioception through which meaning makes itself in a text.

The final section of this chapter will consider adjustments in rhetorical positioning at the threshold of Altieri’s engagement with ‘radical poetics’ (1999, p.411), seeking points where the stalled potential of his proprioceptive syntax could be reanimated, opening itself to the kind of reciprocally generative gestures within which meaning becomes possible.

2.3: ‘...what can one mean by agency, when the field becomes the fold...’⁶¹

Altieri delivered a paper entitled ‘Some Problems about Agency in the Theories of Radical Poetics’ at a conference dedicated to Blaser in Vancouver in 1995. Revised versions of the paper were subsequently published in *Contemporary Literature* (1996), *The Recovery of the Public World: Essays in Honour of Robin Blaser* (1999), and *Postmodernisms Now: Essays on Contemporaneity in the Arts*.⁶² The revisions made to these published versions, as well as the tone of the exchange between Altieri and Blaser that follows the article in *The Recovery of the Public World*, suggest a somewhat negative reception to Altieri’s paper which I will focus on in an attempt to clarify his position with regard to the work he labels ‘radical poetics,’ and to explore the function of position itself in his thinking.

The opening paragraphs of both versions of his paper published in book form allude to the need to reconsider his position in the light of criticisms directed at his conference presentation. In *The Recovery of the Public World*, Altieri claims that the experience lead to him ‘modifying my positions, as well as my sense of position’ (p.411), while in *Postmodernisms Now* he elaborates on this dilemma, stating that ‘I no longer know how to assume a position from which to make the criticisms, and I am convinced that my own ways of valuing poetry are woefully inadequate for dealing with the most innovative contemporary writing’ (p.167). What is particularly striking about

⁶¹ From Altieri’s opening formulation of his question to ‘radical poetics’ (Altieri and Blaser 1999, p.428)

⁶² This reading will focus on the latter two versions, hereafter referred to as RPW and PN.

both introductions is the decision to reframe his original argument with a brief consideration of the nature of position itself, rather than revisiting or revising his own ‘woefully inadequate’ positions. In this sense, his consideration of position is both proprioceptive and rhetorical: its concern is with his own stance and attitude in relation to the poetics he has delimited as outside of, or oppositional to his own. One of the suggestive corollaries of this method is that, while the definitions of agency employed in his thinking are, as we have seen, resolutely self-reflexive, his methodology seeks always to position his thinking in relation to others, offering unexploited potential for reciprocity.

Given that the initial premise of the paper was ‘to use Blaser’s links to Duncan and to Olson (and Dante) as a means of criticising the diminished role agency plays in contemporary radical poetics’ (p.411), this technique of focusing attention on the concepts of ‘position’ and ‘stance’ themselves, while steadfastly clinging to one’s own initial stances and positions, raises further questions about the responsive nature of Altieri’s process that this chapter has been teasing out.

Blaser and Altieri’s exchange grows out of discussion following the paper, partially reproduced in *The Recovery of the Public World*. Altieri asks, ‘But what can one mean by agency, when the field becomes the fold and when density of language stages both the possibility of and the limits of the person?’ (RPW, p.428) and offers a possible response to his own question:

So the agency of language becomes less traditionally lyrical and worldly in a direct pragmatic sense, at the same time that the sense of the agent moves away from choice, or even away from Olson’s ‘selection,’ to a sense of *who one becomes* as one actively pursues or publishes the play of folding and unfolding. (p.428, emphasis added)

These questions and positions appear to hinge on a view of becoming as a final, irreversible state: the field is no longer available once it has become fold; the ‘who’ that one becomes through folding and unfolding replaces who one was before.

Blaser’s response begins by reframing the question in terms that suggest the coexistence of fold and field as the complex terrain of contemporary poetry, immediately twisting their relationship from one of transformation to one in which ‘the agent is existentially given to the poetic act’

(p.429). From this position, the agent is a product of the poetic act as much as the poetic act is a product of the agent: they are reciprocally generative. Blaser gently dismisses the notion of contemporary poetry as representing a break with modernism and other traditions, in terms that echo McEvelley while reducing many of Altieri's cherished starting positions to 'just Christian apocalypitics turned into linguistics' (p.429):⁶³

We do not break anything. The tradition is not gone...The responsibility to that tradition is not the issue. The issue is that this agent, the existentially given of the poetic act, the existentially given 'I,' is not an 'I' in control of anything. (p.429)

Here, Blaser declares allegiance to a continuing poetic tradition that Altieri would appear to have folded away in his question, while positing an agent that, rather than representing a fixed 'who we become,' is instead the site and source of a polarity that Miriam Nichols describes as 'a Möbius-like relationship between the perceiving self and the world' (2006, p.370). If the previous chapter suggested movement between poles as one of Altieri's favoured rhetorical devices, his version of the concept provides for a more passive, restricted position than Blaser's 'twisting of inside and outside into porous, mobile forms' (Nichols, p.371).

Blaser's polarity is located at the threshold of the self, opening it up to the outside. Although it shares many of Altieri's starting points and thinkers, this crucial difference in positioning yields a contrasting conception of agency worth exploring in detail. His long essay on the work of Jack Spicer, 'The Practice of Outside,' centres on a 'polar logic' whose origins are traced to Coleridge, in opposition to whom, as we have seen, Altieri conceived of his early 'immanentist poetics.' Via Barfield's *How Coleridge Thought*, Blaser traces Coleridge's thinking back to roots in Heraclitus and Giordano Bruno (Blaser 2006a, p.142), and projects its polarity that 'is dynamic, not abstract' (p.142) forward towards modern physics and field theory (p.143). In addition to summarizing Barfield's lucid and suggestive exploration of Coleridge's key ideas ('[w]here logical opposites are contradictory, polar opposites are generative of each other,' p.143),

⁶³ McEvelley notes the Christian undertones in much Hegelian 'end' theorising: 'when its self-awareness was complete, history would end in an ecstatic state of restored oneness' (1996, p.122).

Blaser seizes on two further aspects of his thought pertinent to our concerns with the interaction between agency and boundary. Firstly, he quotes Coleridge on the critical distinction between immanent form and imposed shape, in terms that suggest that his thinking is not as inimical to immanence, or to Olson's form/content, as Altieri may have proposed (p.142). Secondly, he equates polar logic with the figure of the 'flowing boundary,' which he names with allusion to Poe and Coleridge. This figure, which crops up at several points in this essay, and in his poem *Image-Nation 9* (Blaser 2006c, p.169), is posited by Nichols as the nexus between perceiving self and world, the aforementioned 'twisting of inside and outside into porous, mobile forms' (Nichols 2006, p.371). Later in the same essay, the poem and the body itself are presented as twisted together in such flowing form, in this particular instance the live Spicer intertwined with the dead Lorca in the former's *After Lorca* (p.145).

Blaser emphasises the particularity of each instance of the flowing boundary: it is not a single, transcendent image; rather it is generated in the particular dynamic of each folding together of bodies and constellations of poetry. Recalling the lines quoted from Coleridge's "On Poesy or Art," this folding does not impose a discourse or 'superinduce a shape;' in keeping with the 'form as proceeding,' from which arises the 'self-witnessing and self-effected sphere of agency,' it unfolds and discloses what is already present and alive within its form:

One has the peculiar sense that the body is neither material nor spiritual. That it is the alembic itself. Any unity or disunity takes place there. For now, one may take the curious entangling I've argued apart and make it elemental. The issue then is a meeting of the elementals and intelligence. I borrow a Blakean word to say they fold. I seek here to draw attention to a poetry at the gates of existence because it is there that the polarity begins, elemental and inescapable. This is the necessary laying of oneself alongside another content, which brings form and keeps it alive—the double of language, where it holds to both reason and unreason, thought and unthought...And that begins a retying of intelligence, the folding, which is not an imposition of a discourse, fixed or silent. The folding contains that constellation which commands us. The ceremony or composition of it is the disclosure of a new discourse, and it is the public poem. (Blaser, 2006a, p.154)

For Blaser, then, this boundary is, more than a layer or a location, a plane of immanence (Deleuze and Guattari TP, p.254-5). The divergence between his stance and Altieri's regarding the relationship between agent and fold is captured in their Vancouver exchange. While Altieri positions the agent outside of the process of folding, for Blaser there is no distinction between the agent and the work; the agent arises through the poetic act: 'the agent is *in the folding*, or the field,

according to the difficulties of those two metaphorical-sounding conditions’ (RPW, p.429, emphasis added). The final section of this chapter will attempt to restore the exiled agency of ‘who one becomes’ to its rightful and originary position ‘in the folding.’

2.3.1 ‘What abstract machine emerges?’⁶⁴

Steve McCaffery’s contribution to the 1995 Blaser conference (‘Blaser’s Deleuzian Folds’) proposed to elaborate a reading of Blaser based on a detailed explication of the concept of the fold as defined in Deleuze’s work on Leibniz (McCaffery 1999, p.374), and defines the fold as ‘an agency that repudiates antagonism and opposition as the basal coordinates for change’ (p.374). His definition is suggestive for the present argument in that it explicitly frames agency as defining itself without, rather than through, opposition; furthermore, it emphasises the tendency towards movement as well as inclination to persevere in existence that characterise the *conatus* (p.375). In so doing, it makes mobility and a paradoxical opposition to opposition central to the unfolding of agency, which, like Olson’s proprioception, emerges through action (‘The self – itself – is not a subject but a “fold” of force,’ p.374) rather than initiating or directing it. This is consistent with Blaser’s view of agency as immanent, the ‘existential given’ of the poetic act, and makes it possible to consider agent and act as entwining one another in a relationship of reciprocal presupposition.

While this concept is, as we have seen, used to describe a range of interdependent relationships in Deleuze’s work,⁶⁵ its application in the domains of expression and content are most germane here. Massumi has summarised it as ‘content and expression...in a state of what Deleuze and Guattari call “reciprocal presupposition.” One does not exist without the other. They are mutually determining’ (1992, p.13). This quality of mutual interdependence is also a feature of meaning, or rather meanings, which are always multiple and entangled:

⁶⁴ Title adapted from Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p.148

⁶⁵ Concepts bound together in such a relationship include the visible and the articulable (F, p.57), seeing and speaking (p.69), forces (p.60), intensities (DR, p.329) and, most importantly in this context, expression and content (TP pp. 46, 57, 70, 87)

The unity, duality, and multiplicity of meaning are not mutually contradictory. They are moments or aspects of a process. They are mutually determining, in reciprocal presupposition. (p.21)

These mutually generating meanings are unfolded in ‘interpretation,’ in the case of the poetic act the process of reading, but this act itself is subject to its own relationships of reciprocal presupposition: Massumi’s overview makes clear that the ‘abstract machine’ that is the act of interpretation is also the means by which the disparate lines of causality that constitute meaning are brought together:

If meaning is a meeting between asymptotic lines of causality which have no common form or correspondence, who or what introduces them to each other? What brings these formations together is the “abstract machine.” The abstract machine is interpretation. It is the meaning process, from the point of view of a given expression. Any sign, quality, or statement, as the trace of a process of becoming, can be considered a de facto diagram from which a formal diagram of the operative abstract machine could be developed. In the case of “meaning” as commonly understood (that is, as restricted to the conceptual or linguistic planes) the abstract machine is the subject of meaning (in the sense of the agency responsible for its unfolding), and the “meaning” is the formal diagram of forces extracted from the encounter in question. (p.17)

This exploration of the ‘meaning process’ comes close to the sense of ‘meaning as verb’ proposed in the last section, which will be elaborated in the next two chapters’ readings. Deleuze’s concept of the ‘diagrammatic,’ alluded to by Massumi in the construction of the ‘abstract machine,’ will be central to this discussion.

Although the diagram is by no means a uniquely visual phenomenon, some of Deleuze’s clearest thinking through its nature and function takes shape in *Francis Bacon: the Logic of Sensation*. The diagram, which Massumi succinctly defines as ‘the trace of a process of becoming,’ is a ‘given’ of that process (FB, p.70) which the process will erase. The example Deleuze uses is the fate of mouths and heads in Bacon’s painting: they are the ‘figurative givens’ from which the image originates, but the essential act of his work requires them to be stretched, deformed and painted over (p.70-1). Deleuze frames this act of erasing the originary diagram as ‘catastrophe overcoming the canvas,’ (p.71), and through this catastrophe a new world emerges from the diagram, made of traits that are ‘nonrepresentative, nonillustrative, nonnarrative. They are no longer either significant or signifiers: they are asignifying traits. They are traits of sensation’ (p.71). The emergence of ‘traits of sensation’ from the undoing of the figurative diagram will feed back into

the work of the abstract machine's 'meaning process,' and this dynamic will be considered in relation to poetic acts of meaning in the next two chapters.

The diagrammatic has two further relations with the abstract that have implications both for Altieri's conception of abstraction and for the potential of the abstract machine to generate relationships of meaning for and through poetic language. Firstly, Deleuze suggests a dynamic other than the diagrammatic at the heart of abstract painting:

[W]hat abstract painting elaborates is less a diagram than a symbolic *code*, on the basis of great formal oppositions. It replaced the diagram with a code. This code is "digital," not in the sense of the manual, but in the sense of a finger that counts. "Digits" are the units that group together visually the terms in opposition. (FB, p.73)

This 'symbolic code,' based on binary oppositions rather than reciprocally generative relationships, corresponds closely to the dynamic of polarisation, definition through position and opposition, that we have examined in Altieri's work. This dynamic is based on a subject position outside of the terms under consideration, whereas the subjectivity Deleuze considers is immanent to the process itself,⁶⁶ the reciprocal presupposition of the act of becoming or the 'existential given of the poetic act,' to return to Blaser's term. The implications of the divergence between these stances can be seen in their positions relative to visibility. Altieri's 'grammar of constructivist abstraction' places the seeing 'eye' outside the artwork, and focuses on the further abstraction of 'conditions of visibility' (PA, p.396). Deleuze's consideration of the visible, on the other hand, places visibility within the folds of the artwork itself, emerging from the relationship of sensation and force. Sensation emerges in the catastrophe of the painting's becoming, and is depicted as facing both subject and object:

Or rather, it has no faces at all, it is both things indissolubly, it is Being-in-the-World, as the phenomenologists say: at one and the same time I *become* in the sensation and something *happens* through the sensation, one through the other, one in the other. And at the limit, it is the same body which, being both subject and object, gives and receives the sensation. (FB, p.25)

⁶⁶ In Deleuze's formulation, the subject is inextricable from the folds and the action of folding: 'Subjectivation is created by folding' (F, p.86) 'There never 'remains' anything of the subject, since he has to be created on each occasion, like a focal point of resistance, on the basis of the folds which subjectivize knowledge and bend each power' (p.87).

This definition gives a proprioceptive dimension to the reciprocal presupposition of sensation and body, and Deleuze will go on to emphasise sensation's dynamic quality:

Force is closely related to sensation: for a sensation to exist, a force must be exerted on a body, on a point of the wave. But if force is the condition of sensation, it is nonetheless not the force that is sensed, since the sensation "gives" something completely different from the forces that condition it. How will sensation be able to sufficiently turn in on itself, relax or contract itself, so as to capture these nongiven forces in what it gives us, to make us sense these insensible forces, and raise itself to its own conditions? It is in this way that music must render nonsonorous forces sonorous, and painting must render invisible forces visible (FB, p.71).

While it would be tempting to read painting's task of 'rendering visible' as a point of convergence with Altieri's 'making visible the conditions of visibility,' in Deleuze's model the painting confers visibility on forces that arise through a complex dynamic that is immanent to the artwork, taking place within its becoming. In Altieri's model, the mind locates itself with relation to the artwork from *outside*. In Deleuze, external forces exercised on the body are modulated by sensation, which is produced by these insensible forces which it then goes on to translate into sensible form. The examples used are music and painting, and the final chapters will build on these examples to consider the implications of sensation and meaning in verbal arts. While Altieri extended his own thinking from *Painterly Abstraction* to consider the potential of force as a frame for modernist poetry in ways that allow for a degree of immanence, reciprocity and polar logic (1998), Deleuze's conception of force is more generative, integral and dynamic than any frame. Once again, Deleuze's ideas allow potential for the opening and mobilising of some of the static rigidities of Altieri's thinking.

The reciprocally generative dynamic between meaning and the non-semantic elements of language will be central to subsequent chapters. In the case of painting, the diagrammatic process consisted of erasing and defacing the recognisably figurative originary elements of the work; in the case of language, the process entails the extraction of particles, 'asignifying signs' or 'traits of sensation' (FB, p.71), from the text's expressions, decomposing expressions into traits and particles that are free to recombine. This decompositional, self-generating poesis will form the abstract machine that will unfold meaning in the contemporary poetries studied in the next chapters. In those case studies, we will need to bear in mind that the abstraction of forms of content requires

the abstraction of forms of expression, as those poles reciprocally presuppose each other, and that this relationship of reciprocal presupposition requires us to attend to the non-discursive components of the language-diagram's traits: sound and shape. In 'Literature and Life,' Deleuze explores the potential of syntax itself as a 'set of necessary detours' (p.226) allowing for the revelation of the life in things through a process of decomposition and recombination that hollows out language to make room for 'visions and auditions' (p.229) to enter it from outside:

These visions are not fantasies, but veritable Ideas that the writer sees and hears in the interstices of language, in its intervals. They are not interruptions of the process but breaks that form part of it, like an eternity that can only be revealed in a becoming, or a landscape that only appears in movement. They are not outside language, but the outside of language. (p.230)

The next two chapters' readings will consider citation and contradiction as two of contemporary poetry's syntactic detours, hollowing out language to make space for meaning to move in.

2.3.2 Conclusion

This chapter's reading of Gizzi's *The Outernationale*, although it began from a phenomenological perspective, demonstrated those poems' use of their own 'detours of syntax' to open themselves to the other side of the fold of language. In *Foucault*, Deleuze emphasised the non-discursive nature of the statements hidden inside the discursive elements of language, and the need to follow the example of Raymond Roussel and 'break things open' to reveal their 'flash, sparkle or shimmer' (F, p.45). The next two chapters will attend to the 'abstract machine' that is the process of meaning in the act of reading. These readings of work by Peter Gizzi and Peter Manson will draw on the potential of syntax to open language to its outside and explore the dynamic of becoming generated by this opening and the relationships of reciprocal presupposition discernible in the abstract machine and its constituent poles. This machine operates through proprioception, the sense that is, as Massumi puts it, 'attuned to the movements of the body' (2002, p.179), mediating between its movements, its surfaces and its depths as it 'folds tactility into the body' (p.58) in a relational translation that turns process into meaning and vice versa. The last chapter considered the significance of Altieri's repeated allusions to Keats' counsel against 'irritable reaching after' facts

and reason; this chapter explored an Altierian poetics that could justifiably be characterised as an ‘irritable reaching after’ the eternally displaced agent, ‘who we become.’ Through an engagement with the gestures of territorialisation through which Altieri has paced out the boundaries of his poetics, I have sought to suggest possibilities for reopening them to, and through, reciprocally generative enfoldings with contemporary poetry. Olson’s encapsulation of negative capability as a means of ‘staying in process,’ a way ‘not to slip into the error of trying to fix things by an irritable reaching after fact and reason’ outlines the gestures of a mode of reading that attends carefully to the text itself, tracing the movements of its development without falling into patterns of classifying and categorising (1970, p.42). Despite Altieri’s frequent echoing of Keats’s refusal of ‘irritable reaching after’ his thinking operates through a series of efforts to ‘fix things’ through the imposition of frames and boundaries.

A reading of his review of Sianne Ngai’s *Ugly Feelings*, ostensibly written from a position of deep admiration,⁶⁷ confirms this urge to fix texts in abstract categories, and willingness to hollow out key terms as part of a process of ‘irritable reaching after.’ This is especially striking in his proposal of ‘proprioceptive or conative feelings’ (2006, p.145) as a counterargument to any of the ‘ugly feelings’ (including irritation) explored by Ngai. Proprioception is, as we have seen, neither ugly nor a feeling but rather a co-ordinating sense complex. The *conatus* fits even less well into the framework of ‘ugly feelings,’ since it could be described as a tendency, a striving or a source of movement, but not as a feeling. Rather than serving as ‘clear indications that at least some simple affects require a subject,’ or indicating ‘that the agent is exercising some control over his or her environment’ (Altieri 2006c, p. 145), they constitute the means and movements through which agency and subjectivity themselves emerge. In attempting to adapt these terms as concepts around which to build a counterargument to Ngai’s, Altieri strains them beyond their limits in service of

⁶⁷ ‘Wow! That is almost all that I have to say about Sianne Ngai’s *Ugly Feelings*. This is an amazing book, stunning in its depth and range, *exemplary in its learning*, and almost continually surprising in its inventiveness.’ (Altieri, 2006c, p. 141, emphasis added)

a reading that seems determined to mark its appreciation of, and objections to, her text in terms of his own categories and key terms, despite their lack of fit with Ngai's argument.

The next two chapters will draw on the responsivity and movement that underpin both the proprioceptive and the conative and attend to the ways these qualities establish and manifest themselves in the work of Peter Gizzi and Peter Manson. Rather than resorting to unexplored 'proprioceptive feelings' as a countermeasure to the 'hopeless hope that art can produce significant political resistance' (Altieri 2006c, p.147), it will attend closely to the 'apparently arbitrary or uncaused leaps of proprioceptive activity' (Altieri 1996, p.785) through which meaning establishes itself in this work. By remaining mindful of 'the power of the finite and iterable to resist formal concepts and categories' (Ngai 2005, p.272), it will follow the trajectories of meaning's multiple and dynamic ways of persevering in its being. It will exercise the mode of reading learned through the last two chapters' apprenticeship in abstraction; the intensive, experimental tracing of 'flows meeting other flows' that Deleuze called 'reading with love' (1995, pp.8-9). As the ideal teacher does not provide 'gestures to reproduce' (Deleuze DR, p.23), the readings that follow will not seek to reproduce the gestures they have just traced, but rather repeat them differently in response to the poems they encounter. The movement from apprenticeship to a praxis based on an ethics of reading will emphasise that abstraction is a heuristic practice, concerned with gathering and adapting guiding concepts in response to the texts it reads.

Chapter Three: ‘A resonant, intertextual practice of assemblage’— Practicing the Outside in Gizzi and Manson⁶⁸

This chapter will begin by proposing that both poets work at sites of productive interplay between inside and outside, creating and responding to an abstraction that is ‘the negative dimension of the within-without relation’ (Altieri 2018, p.41) while extending the dimensions of this relation in ways clarified by a brief reading of such reciprocally generative interrelation in Blaser and Deleuze.

A shared concern with liminal states and spaces, and the role and nature of voice in such space, is reflected in the titles of Gizzi’s 2008 volume *Threshold Songs* and Manson’s *Threshold Ballads* of the same year. These concerns are central to the mode of reading established in the last two chapters, where the threshold is a crossing point between zones of inside and outside, but also the point of intensity that must be reached and surpassed in order for sensory data from one zone to become perceptible in the other. Karla Kelsey (2012, n.p.) has suggested that ‘thresholds are...potential states of intensity, modes of relationality that have the capacity take fixed systems...and...deploy them otherwise.’ This image of the threshold as both zone and mode of relationality, what Massumi described as the ‘dynamic threshold’ where polar terms ‘flip over into each other’ (1995, p.99) will guide this chapter’s readings.

These will begin with a return to Gizzi’s *The Outernational* where, rather than interrogating the text in search of ‘selves as representative’ or ‘types that will carry exemplary value’ (Altieri 2018, p.41) it will seek to follow the movements it finds there, building on the previous chapter’s exploratory readings. This will lead to a consideration of the interplay of modes of citation and contradiction in Gizzi’s *Artificial Heart*, both in eliciting and maintaining such movements and in creating conditions for the emergence of meaning within them. It will go on to engage a similar

⁶⁸ Title adapted from ‘Jack Spicer, Bruce Conner and the Art of Assemblage.’ (Gizzi, 2008a)

mode of reading in relation to texts from Manson's *Between Cup and Lip* and some of his earlier poems. Throughout these readings it will bear in mind a conative dimension to such practices, which allow meanings and matter from poetic tradition to persevere in the materials of contemporary poetry, and a proprioceptive dimension whereby contemporary poetry gains a sense of threshold and self through this intertextual practice.

Finally, it will focus on the emergence of meaning and a sense of self in Gizzi's 2008 poem 'True Discourse on Power' and Manson's 2012 poem 'raven A.' Throughout, it will posit the reader as a third party in Quartermain's relationship between poem and poet ('the poem is the place of transmutation and evolution, in which the poet follows the orders of the poem,' 1992, p.163), guided by a methodology for following the poem's orders patterned on Duncan's mode of gathering meaning as one goes.⁶⁹

3.1 'A reopened language lets the ... outside in again ...'

As outlined in the previous chapter, Robin Blaser makes a sustained and lucid exploration of the dynamic potential of acts of opening and emptying in his essay on the work of Jack Spicer, 'The Practice of Outside,' whose title makes praxis the central force in the generation and mediation of inner and outer space. In outlining Spicer's discussion of his 'poetics of dictation' in the first Vancouver lecture, Blaser contrasts Spicer's open language with public language, which is forced to '[close] itself in order to hold meaning':

Jack's lively and storied language pushes us into a polarity and experienced dialectic with something other than ourselves. It involves a reversal of language into experience, which is not a dialexis between ourselves or a discourse true only to itself, but a broken and reforming language which composes a "real." (2006a, p. 117)

Having considered the gestures and limitations of a critical language that proceeds by fixed polarities, closing off and limiting possibilities the better to hold onto a pre-established meaning, the gains made possible by reversing the polarity from 'experience into language' to 'language into experience' are promising. This dynamic operates within the grooves of a polar dialectic, but one

⁶⁹ Quartermain goes on to quote Duncan's lines from *The H.D. Book*, 'I gather what I mean as I go..' (p.164)

in which the point of origin lies on the outside: experience is not translated into language, rather it emerges from and in it, and the polarity is experienced by the reader in the process of reading. It is a movement that is reanimated in the act of reading, where broken language forms and reforms itself into meaning much as in Deleuze's claim that '[w]ords paint and sing, but only at the limit of the path they trace through their divisions and combinations' (ECC, p.113).

Blaser emphasises the importance of voice to this process, in terms that prefigure Gizzi and Manson's vocal 'thresholds,' while cautioning against the 'reduction' of thought inherent in closed, fixed language:

A reopened language lets the unknown, the Other, the outside in again as a voice in the language. Thus, the reversal is not a reduction, but an openness. The safety of a closed language is gone and its tendency to reduce thought to a reasonableness and definiteness is disturbed. (2006a, pp.117-8, emphasis original)

This view of the dynamics of open language has much in common with Deleuze's. Colebrook claimed that while Deleuze was, in many respects, at odds with phenomenology, he shared Husserl's view that transcendence emerges from a dynamic threshold with immanence. For him, 'the differentiation between inside and outside, between self and world...emerges from dynamic life, and should not be accepted as some original difference....' (Colebrook 2006, p.116), and this dynamic keeps language itself in a condition of 'perpetual disequilibrium' (ECC, p.111), but one where 'the asyntactic limit is not external to language as a whole: it is the outside of language, but is not outside it' (p.113). This complicating of the notions of inside and outside, folding them together in a permeable boundary, is further thickened by implicating the reader in the action. Gizzi puts pressure on Quartermain's assertion that 'it is through boundary that we can imagine a beyond, a sense of further' (1992, p.78) by having these acts of imagining and sensing take place within the body of the reader. Introducing Spicer's poetics, he and his co-editor Kevin Killian describe it as 'a striving for a somatic poetry that allows so much to invade the edges of its song that we hardly know where it ends and we begin,' (2008, p. xix) and this formulation of poetry as a practice acted out in the body is articulated in his own work which puts its reader on unstable footing, in 'perpetual disequilibrium' at and as its threshold.

3.2 ‘Who will live inside the song?’: Peter Gizzi’s resonant assemblage.

This section will return briefly to the ‘strange title’ of Gizzi’s *The Outernationale* to unfold more of the implications of its presentation of the ‘within-without relation’ identified in the previous chapter. It is worth noting that the relation in question is one of *betweenness* and exteriority (inter/outer) rather than straightforwardly ‘within-without,’ and this section will attend to the modulation from betweenness (inter-) to exteriority (outer-) through which the collection’s two eponymous poems define themselves, and the emergence of subjectivity in the procedural form of the palindrome poem ‘Vincent, Homesick for the land of Pictures.’

Stephen Collis’s review of *The Outernationale* reads its title as direction to read ‘the lyric-from-without’ (2008, p.1), highlighting the importance of Spicer, via Blaser’s ‘The Practice of Outside,’ in establishing the space of lyric exteriority in this collection. While Collis deftly unfolds several aspects of Gizzi’s prefix-switching, he overlooks some implications of the title’s origin in song.⁷⁰ As Collis makes clear, song’s embodiment in voice as source and medium of the lyric is a central concern of Gizzi’s poetics⁷¹ and it is noteworthy that this title is derived from a song invoking the utopian coming-together of workers through the medium of song itself (‘The Internationale unites the human race,’ Pottier 1973, n.p.). There is also more to the substitution of ‘outer’ for ‘inter’ than invoking Spicer and Blaser’s ‘practice of outside,’ although this is certainly important. If the ‘inter’ of ‘Internationale’ emphasises the betweenness of the nations’ coming together in song, the ‘outer’ of ‘Outernationale’ hints at the potential to transcend nationhood itself, to ‘unite the world in song’ through a substitution of suffixes that renders individual nations irrelevant, signalling the politically transformative possibilities of morphology and syntax. Collis too finds in this formulation ‘the possibility of us all singing—if not the “Internationale”—then a

⁷⁰ A song with a complex lineage of its own, written as a reaction to the defeat of the Paris Commune and becoming a workers’ anthem as well as the first anthem of the USSR (Marxism.org).

⁷¹ The generative potential of song as poetic source and process is a central trope both in Gizzi’s discussion of his own practice (Gizzi 2012, Dueben 2015, Rubeck 2011) and in recent scholarship on it (see, for example, Herd 2018 and Noel-Tod 2018).

simultaneity of “Outernationales” (2008, p.3). However, his hope requires acknowledgement that the switch from inter to outer necessitates the fragmentation of song into a multiplicity of simultaneously-sung ‘Outernationales,’ while I would suggest the possibility of uniting the world by rendering boundaries permeable, allowing a simultaneity of voices to interpenetrate in a shared song. This dissolving of boundaries is reproduced in the multiple interpenetrations of mind and world, singular and multiple selves, at play in the two poems that share the title.

The opening of the first ‘Outernationale,’ (Out, pp.20-22), the collection’s sixth poem, is notable for its exploration of versions of selfhood that originate in the world rather than the poetic subject. If the previous chapter considered the mutual interpenetration of mind and world in the lines ‘there are things larger than understanding// things we know/ cannot be held in the mind’ (Out, p.4), this is enacted in the agency, even consciousness, assigned to things and stretches of time in this poem. The sun ‘deploys its shadows’ and ‘Leaves arch over everything/ they are so democratic/ to us our viewer in a world of secrets’ (p.20). Here, the sun is depicted as consciously *deploying* shadow rather than merely casting light, and the democratic leaves are *our viewer* rather than objects of our viewing, a position that proceeds from the opposite pole to Altieri’s universalizing viewing ‘we.’ In the same stanza, sand is ‘contesting’ and ‘The day blooms in its self-knowledge.’ Before this poem reveals its questioning ‘We’ (‘Who can we turn toward[?]’) or ‘I’ (‘How can I answer[?]’) it follows the unfoldings of agency and self-knowledge in a world outside the lyric ‘I’ or even the political ‘we.’ In the question ‘How can I answer/ not to inhibit/ any single point in this ray?’ it is the light that constitutes the day’s blooming self-knowledge, and the ‘I,’ rather than shaping or controlling this knowledge, is wary of disturbing its independent movement. Knowledge both exceeds the boundaries of the body and originates beyond them, enacting both the immanence of abstraction and the agency of such ostensibly external and impersonal entities as ideas and light in Deleuze’s essay on T.E. Lawrence:

But the Idea, or the abstract, has no transcendence. The Idea is extended throughout space, it is like the Open: "beyond there lay nothing but clear air. " Light is the opening that creates space. Ideas are forces that are exerted on space following certain directions of movement: entities or hypostases, not transcendences. (ECC, p. 115).

In Gizzi's poetics, here and elsewhere in the collection, a 'beyond, a sense of further' is immanent to the poems' boundary with the outside, and such external agents as light are as likely as the lyric 'I' to dictate the direction its movement will follow.

Although the second 'Outernationale,' (pp.92-102), the book's penultimate poem, is structurally and syntactically more complex than its namesake, it too opens on such extrapersonal forms of agency as trees and days. Its epigraph, William Carlos Williams's 'One has emotions for the strangest things,' prepares the reader for the complicated feelings engendered by objects in this poem, but not necessarily for the active role the objects themselves will play in those feelings. The poem's first 'I' is spoken by trees ('I love you, said the wood,' p.92). and the 'one' who has emotion is as likely to be a bird, a tree, a day or a system as a person. In this poem 'one,' as a human agent, has emotions *with* the strangest things: the second 'Outernationale' seems to suggest that things we feel can also not be contained by the mind or body, and that emotion settles in and arises from objects outside the body. This dynamic does more than complicate the inside/outside relation: it recalibrates the poles as mutually generative, in constant movement and transformation rather than fixed points of reference, 'developing and continuous things,' as Olson put it (1970, p.42).

The tension put on language by this constant modulation between 'The signal and its noise' (Out, p.93) causes and is expressed through fragmentation. This is marked by the incursion of detached suffixes throughout the poem ('-itsy, -ancy, -oid,' '-ing, -ed,' '-less, -let,/-like, -ly,' '-obic, -etic, -istic,' '-archy, -ology, -ocracy') where markers have come adrift from the words they are modifying. In most instances the suffixes are derivational, providing lexical, often scientific, information about their missing beginnings. While these can sometimes be guessed at, there are usually too many options to allow for certainty. David Herd has diagnosed this as a kind of stuttering (2018, p.132), but the gesture is, in a sense, the opposite of stuttering. While stuttering balks at the obstacle of the word's beginning, here Gizzi avoids that possibility by severing the beginning, a swerving movement of a kind that will be explored later in the chapter, that obviates the necessity for the kind of Deleuzian stuttering in language (ECC, pp.107-114) that will be

explored in Manson's work in the next chapter. These detached suffixes are a feature of fragmentation unique to this poem, a swerving rather than a stuttering in language.

Two instances follow a slightly different pattern, however. In the lines 'To live certainly/ on the surface -ing, -ed, or/ things pinging off/ the metal empty core,' the suffixes are inflectional rather than derivational,⁷² marking the present continuous and past participles respectively. The incursion of these tense-marking suffixes undercuts the possibility of living 'certainly on the surface,' and the marker of the continuous present echoes in the phonemes of 'things pinging' as sound would off an empty core. Here, the undoing of tense-markers prefigures the line 'unseen and undone/ by the no time/ I was raised into,' suggesting the structure of grammar itself as one of the 'strange things' one has emotions for and with. The second instance occurs in the poem's penultimate stanza:

If we could say
the world has changed,
it has changed. If we say
the world is the same
then so it is. But nothing
changes everything
and we know this.
We earn this the hard way.
Even the beloved
evolves into nothing
-unction, -iction
for all its iron and science.
(Out, p.101)

This stanza pulls together threads explored throughout the book, and returned to in Gizzi's other work, notably 2017's *Archeophonics*: the transformative capacities of language and the generative power of nothingness. Saying that the world is changed, or not, is enough to make it so. Herd suggests that in this stanza 'we are called on to contemplate...what occurs in the act of saying, where the difference we are looking for is not so much an alteration in the world as an alteration in the relation between speaker and language' (2018, p.123). I would suggest, however, that the

⁷² Derivational suffixes change words' meaning, often changing them from one part of speech to another, while inflectional suffixes add grammatical information (e.g. tense) (Department of Linguistics, University of Oregon 1998)

difference enacted in this stanza *is* an ‘alteration in the world’ effected through and in the matter of language. The medium and motor of change is language itself in both its written and spoken forms, in slight contrast to Herd’s emphasis on voiced language as the work’s medium (p.119). This is further complicated by the assertion ‘*nothing*/ changes everything/ and we know this.’

Throughout this poem, and the collection, ‘nothing’ is endowed with a powerful agency of its own, akin to Dickinson’s ‘Nothing’ is the force / ‘That renovates the World’ which Gizzi referenced in a later interview, adding that ‘I feel that that ‘nothing’ is generative, opening up a dynamic space’ (Gizzi 2012, n.p.). The act of opening space is one of the central movements of this poem: ‘start from nothing and be-/ long to it’ becomes ‘Start from nothing/ and let the sound reach you.’ The splitting of belong across a line break emphasises both the longing and the being inside the word, and the second exhortation to ‘start from nothing’ clarifies that it is *sound* that will rush to fill the void created by nothingness. The origin of Gizzi’s sound in engagements with centuries of poetic tradition, from troubadour to modernism, will be returned to in the next section. This poem’s engagement with tradition is subtly marked: the stanza directly addressing a skylark, Shelley’s own ode to the generative power of song, asks it ‘Have you a single/ new idea?’ to which it responds ‘Yes/ I carry the oldest ones.// Who will live// inside the song?’⁷³ Not only does this line offer a glimpse of a potential abyss of older songs about songs alive inside songs about songs, but Gizzi’s poetics in this collection seems to offer the tentative response that objects and spans of time, light and darkness, a united ‘we’ and a fleeting, stuttering ‘I’ can all live inside this song, and that this abyss or ‘nothing’ is the centrifugal force that makes the space to bring them all inside. This is signalled in the evolution of the beloved in the lines ‘Even the beloved/ evolves into nothing/ -unction, -iction’ where the role of the ‘beloved,’ central presence in the troubadour poetics that will be explored in the next section, is suggested as a f-unction or f-iction,

⁷³ Drew Milne notes the liminal status of the ‘immortal bird’ itself: ‘The immortal Bird of lyric poetry may sing beyond death in the aching dreams of lyric illusion, but romanticism’s birdsongs are already sung at the limits of imaginative projection’ (2014, p.363).

one which has evolved into ‘nothing.’⁷⁴ The replacement of the poetic function of ‘the beloved’ by ‘nothing’ is enacted in the effacing of the beginning of the words that signal her purpose, a technique also audible in the seeming malapropism ‘We *earn* this the hard way’ that turns learning into a financial transaction. Thus what initially appears to signal failure or fragmentation of language can also be understood as the complex interaction of ‘nothing’ and ‘sound’ through which space is made for whoever wishes to ‘live inside the song,’ a ‘single new idea’ that is also a reiteration of ‘the oldest ones.’

In the introduction to his review, Collis outlines a distinction between traditional poetics, associated with the personal lyric, which ‘presupposes a self who sees, feels, experiences, thinks and reports’ and avant-garde poetics, associated with procedure, which ‘does away with the same, excising the perceiving subject by making the procedure the motor of the poem’ (2008, p.1). Gizzi’s poetics throughout the collection call into question, as we have seen, the interiority and even the personhood of the lyric subject, and Collis’s formulation ‘lyric from without’ acknowledges the exteriority of the lyric self. However, there is no further exploration of the procedural poem, although a consideration of the lyric possibilities of avant-garde procedure would seem central to understanding the complex processes of folding and unfolding through which Gizzi opens procedural and lyric poetics to each other. The next section will examine Gizzi’s apprenticeship in constraint and citation in his earlier collection *Artificial Heart*, so this section will focus on some of the implications for lyric selfhood of this collection’s most sustained procedural work, the palindrome poem, ‘Vincent, Homesick for the Land of Pictures’ (Out, pp.47-53).

Given the scope and ambition of this poem it is surprising that Altieri should classify it as a poem of frustration and failure (2018, p.30) in a reading that does not engage with the poem’s form or structure but presents it as an effort ‘to make language have the same supplemental

⁷⁴ It is of relevance here that commentators including Van Vleck (1991, pp.17-24) and Galvez (2012, p.88) posit a metapoetic function for the beloved and the quest for love in troubadour poetics, and Spicer’s ‘Textbook of Poetry’ claims ‘Nothingness is alive in the eyes of the beloved’ (2008, p.302).

extension of seeing as brushstroke can give a painted image' (p.31). This seems an unnecessarily polarised depiction of the poem, whose considerable strength lies in its use of language *as* seeing, rather than as an extension of it: as van Gogh's brushstrokes *are* the painted image, Gizzi's movement in language is its verbal equivalent, not a supplement to it. Altieri claims that this poem 'has to grapple with darkness and stress questions rather than celebrate images,' (p.31), an assessment that falls some way short of capturing the exploratory, questing interplay of question and answer, darkness and light through which the poem generates its moving image.

This poem marks the mid-point of the collection, seventeenth poem of 34, thus the turn at the centre of the palindrome forms a hinge in the heart of the book. It consists of fourteen eleven-line stanzas, with the poem twisting back on itself at the end of the seventh stanza, reversing the reader back through the lines that have gone before. As in the two 'Outernationale' poems, the sun and leaves are granted agency and knowledge. The poem's 'I' comes into itself through its relationship with its addressee, 'Vincent,' but also through its interactions with these extrapersonal agents, particularly light and colour. The productive qualities of light play out along the lines of the poem, with light as subject and object of acts of mirroring and exchange between the inside and outside, visible and invisible:

that the sun can do this to us, **every** one of us,
That the sun can do this to everything inside
 The broken *l*ight refracted through **leaves**.
What the ancients **called** peace, no clearer example
What our fathers **called** the good, what better celebration.
Leaves shine **in the** body and **in the** head *al*ike
 The sun touches deeper than thought.
 (pp.47-8)

This stanza uses uneven patterns of repetition with variations (in bold), to trace its lines of thought. The assonance of the '*i*' sound [in italics] threaded through the stanza voices the emergence of an 'I' within the movement of leaves and light, an 'idea that is extended through space' (Deleuze ECC, p.115) that also reaches inside the body, the head and the poem itself to find a place 'deeper than thought.'

The next stanza gives *The Outernational's* fullest expression of the dynamic threshold between world and artwork (both instances of the 'actual seen thing') and some implications of their reciprocal generation:

O to be useful, of use, to the actual seen thing
to be in some way related by one's actions *in* the world.
There might be nothing greater than this
nothing truer to the good feelings that vibrate *within*
like *in* the middle of the flower I call your name.
To correspond, to be *in* equanimity with organic stuff
to toil and to reflect and to home and to paint
father, and further, the migration of things.
The homing action of geese and wood mice.
The ample evidence of the sun *inside* all life
inside all life seen and felt and all the atomic pieces too.
(p.48)

The complex of relations woven into these lines can be momentarily disentangled to identify some threads, but it is in their interweaving that the stanza acts out its meaning. The opening wish to be useful, rephrased for emphasis, is directed at 'the actual seen thing': whether world or artistic representation of it, the urge is towards the 'actual,' in which arise the feelings and correspondences of the 'virtual.'⁷⁵ That these terms are as enmeshed in each other as the inside is with the outside, is suggested by the choice of the preposition 'in' in the line 'to be *in* some way related by one's actions *in* the world', a preposition threaded throughout the stanza (in italics) and emphasised in the repeated 'inside all life.' By emphasising being related *in* the world rather than *to* it, 'one' is made immanent in the 'actions in the world,' related *by* them like a story, as well as *to* them. These actions also resonate with and represent the 'good feelings that vibrate within,' doing so in a line adapted from the chain of 'In the middle of [article/noun] I call your name' locutions from John Lennon's 'Oh Yoko.'⁷⁶ This brief allusion suffuses the vibrating 'good feelings' with love, while placing the 'I' in an impossible location, the middle of 'the' specific flower.

⁷⁵James Williams (2010, pp.130-1) describes this relationship as 'the necessary interrelation of virtual and actual through a reciprocal determination. Neither is independent of the other and cannot therefore be said to enter into a relation of transcendence,' which supports Daniel Katz's point that in Gizzi's work 'body and mind both remain ever present but also virtual' (2018, p.225).

⁷⁶These variations run 'the night/ a bath/ a shave/ a dream.' (Lennon 1971)

Multiple acts of being ‘related by one’s actions in the world’ take place in the following lines’ chain of infinitives, actions that serve to ‘father, and further, the migration of things,’ generating movement in the world. These actions establish a dynamic of relationships with the inanimate (“To correspond, to be in equanimity with organic stuff”) and artistic and domestic labour (‘to toil and to reflect and to home and to paint’) whose chain of breathless ‘ands’ renders them both childlike and Deleuzian.⁷⁷ The ‘migration of things’ being fathered and furthered by this chain of actions is presented in a pair of end-stopped, verb-less noun phrases. ‘The homing action of geese and wood mice,’ freezes one of its generating verbs into a noun phrase (‘to home’ into ‘the homing action’) reflecting, perhaps, the transformation of migrating animals into ‘things.’ The final lines recall the generative agency of light. Here again, a paradoxically static formulation (‘ample evidence’) presents what has been generated through action in a noun phrase, demonstrating that the ‘migration of things’ also involves the transformation of ‘actions in the world’ into the composing elements of the ‘seen and felt’ interior, akin to what Daniel Katz has described as ‘the immanence of how things lose their outlines and names’ (2018, p.226).

The sun, captured in the form of ‘things’ that provide ‘ample evidence’ of its existence, is reanimated three stanzas later and restored to movement:

The deep abiding sun touching down and making its impression
 making so much more of itself here than where it signals
 the great burning orb installed at the center of each and
 every thing.
 Is not it comforting this notion of each and every thing
 though nothing might be the final and actual expression of it
 that nothing at the center of something alive and burning
 green then mint, blue then shale, gray and gray into violet
 into luminous dusk into dust then scattered now gone.
 (p.49)

These extraordinary lines enact the folding of the sun inside ‘each and every thing,’ pleating its light into the nothingness central to this source of movement and life. While Upton suggests that ‘the external – the light – is internalized’ in Gizzi’s work (2018, p.212), in this poem, and

⁷⁷ Rajchman describes Deleuze’s thought as one that ‘puts “And” before “Is”’ (2000, p.6), yielding a mode of relation ‘not of negation but of connection – of “and” rather than “not.”’ (1998, p.75).

throughout the collection, light and other ‘things’ of the world are depicted as both internal and external phenomena, existing in both domains and emphasising that the permeable boundary between the two is a site of perpetual movement. Throughout this poem, ‘nothing’ is the central, generative power or presence at the heart of ‘every thing,’ equated with the sun, but also with the ‘I’ who calls ‘your name’ from the vortex ‘in the middle of the flower’ that foreshadows light’s disintegrating vortex of colour. This ‘nothing,’ emerging from the light at the centre of every thing, is origin, centre and endpoint of the poem’s process and ‘actions in the world.’ While ‘comforting’ is a strange adjective to apply to the dizzying sensation of staring into the abyss at the heart of everything, there is something both proprioceptive and paradoxically reassuring in the way the poem’s palindrome structure folds the abyss and its revelation back into itself.

The constraints of the poem’s procedure allow for the unfolding of a lyric ‘I’ within the movements expressing the ‘nothing at the centre of something alive and burning.’ The ‘I’ initially emerges through questioning Vincent’s ‘you’: ‘who and how am I made better through struggle./ Or why am I I inside this empty arboretum.’ The ‘I’’s questioning of its own existence is fourfold: who am I made through struggle? how am I made better through struggle? why am I inside this empty arboretum, and not somewhere else or someone else? These questions underline the contingent immanence of selfhood: individual selves emerge in complex interactions of struggle and space; in a plural we and in a particular place. The ‘I’ is not the seeing, directing and reporting entity that Collis associates with the traditional lyric, but nor is it entirely absent. Rather it emerges in the movement of the poem’s procedure as the ‘nothing at the centre of something alive and burning.’ The closing stanza’s refolding of the same lines find dignity in the groundedness of this hollow and contingent ‘I’:

Or why am I I inside this empty arboretum
 saying, who and how am I made better through struggle
 nestled into our portion beneath the bird’s migration
 that we take our rest at the end of the grove
 is this what you intended Vincent.

The 'I,' while still questioning its nature and purpose, is comforted through its 'nestling' beneath the bird's path, one of the 'migrations of things' it has 'fathered and furthered,' and finally finding rest in the grove and in the 'we' it establishes with Vincent. The poem's procedural structure has allowed it to emerge proprioceptively, to question its own existence, to get close to the nothingness at its heart and to fold itself back into the things and relationships from which it originated. The next section will explore contradiction as one of the forms of citation used by Gizzi in his interactions with other poems, and this poem enacts a kind of formal contradiction, reversing each of its own terms in an exploratory chain of movement. Rather than the subject being absent from the procedural poem I would suggest that it is, to return to Blaser's formulation, the 'existential given' of this poem, originating from and residing in its structures and movements. The next section will trace the genesis of the procedural subject in Gizzi's 1998 collection, *Artificial Heart*, attending to the 'acts of keeping, copying, reciting, and building' that Hannah Brooks-Motl proposes as the 'ethical orientation' of the Gizzi poem (2018, p. 64). Guided by her assertion that Gizzi's is 'a writing practice fundamentally concerned with reading [that] also suggests reading as a kind of writing,' (p.57) it will unfold some implications of this reciprocal presupposition of writing and reading in some of Gizzi's earlier work, guided by Upton's riddle 'Is the poem itself the reader? Is the reader the poem?' (2018, p.213).

3.4 Rewriting the Other and the Others: Collaboration and Contradiction in Gizzi and Manson

Nerys Williams has described Gizzi's poetry as 'densely musical, incorporating citation, digression, meditation, and a provisional self- reflexive testing of the lyric,' (2018, p.168) and notes that:

The poem's process of composition, as well as the impetus toward movement, travel, and interruption, causes the reader to consider the network of associations that make the poem; how any poem must be read as retaining a degree of mobility and momentum at the time of its reading. (p.175)

This section will consider Gizzi's use of citation, in particular a mode of citation via contradiction, as a vector of 'mobility and momentum' in his poems. It will then posit the function

of contradiction in Manson's homophonic translations from Cavalcanti's Italian as a means of mobilising meaning in densely constrained work. In both cases this could be considered a mode of citation as *mouvance*, employing the dynamic of changing, restoring and retransmission that Van Vleck has identified as a feature of the troubadour text (1991, pp.6, 71). In this respect it enacts the tendency to persevere in its being of the *conatus*, 'an immanent movement, a striving that obstinately remains in itself' (Agamben 1999, p.236). It also serves as a way of engaging and maintaining contact with the traditions in which it is grounded, functioning both as 'an offering, exhortation, curriculum, and virtual community' (Nichols 2006, p. xv-xvi) and a reanimation through voicing that serves as 'the exteriorization of complex proprioceptive stimuli' (McCaffery 2001, p.49). Given the centrality of troubadour tradition to Gizzi's poetics, particularly in *Artificial Heart* and *Some Values of Landscape and Weather*, it is striking that Altieri makes no reference to this in his discussion of the latter collection's 'Fin Amor,' whose title he glosses as 'the intricacy of the title, which involves the end of love as something passing and the end of love as an ideal part of loving, with echoes also of "finally love" as a partial private resolution for a volume tormented by what seem insoluble public issues' (2018, pp.23-4). This attempt to marshal the poem's title in support of a polarising public/ private distinction is undermined by its failure to recognise its clear reference to the troubadour's 'fine' or 'courtly' love, or what Aaron Kunin, in his subtle exploration of Gizzi's correspondences with earlier traditions refers to as Gizzi's reanimation of 'a conventional phrase in a dead language' (2018, p.265). Altieri's urge to abstract aspects of Gizzi's poems to support his polar model precludes the attention to the text's materials and their origins that would render these details legible.

Gizzi credited Spicer with establishing a 'unique correspondence with literary tradition, one that would further evolve into a resonant intertextual practice of assemblage,' (2008a, n.p.) and the readings that follow will trace similar practices in the work of Gizzi and Manson, noting the ways they 'leave us not with a lack of meaning but rather an excess of meaning, with figures echoing and bumping against each other from widely disparate places and times' (Gizzi, 2008a).

Gizzi develops the idea of poetry as a movement with its own asynchronous sense of timing in his introduction to Barbara Guest's *Collected Poems*, which claims that this poetry 'makes us reconsider tradition—not as a fixed canonical body that exists behind us or bears us up but as something we move toward' (2008b, p.xvii), and Gizzi's poetry shares with Manson this quality of 'rising to the occasion' (2008b, p.xvii) of the preceding literary traditions with which it is in correspondence.

*Reading Gizzi reading*⁷⁸

In order to consider the emergent subjectivities of *Artificial Heart*, it will be useful to turn to a formulation of Collis's, in this case his description of Robert Duncan's work as 'derivative collaboration' (2012, p.xiii). In framing Duncan's work as 'a reaching back to a particular notion of the author not as an originator but as a deriver of texts who collaborates in the unfolding of the written work over time,' (p.xiii) the model that Collis proposes offers the possibility of reading Gizzi's writing as a long engagement of reading, and continuing the cycle of Brooks-Motl's concern with '[h]ow we read ourselves into the works of others, how we write that reading,'(p.63) to encompass how we read that writing and write that reading in our turn. This reading will propose that the 'reading against' and 'thinking against' implied in contradiction's act of 'speaking against' incorporates powerful dynamic potential in the poem.

Gizzi's work thrives on acts of deriving and unfolding over time, and these acts are particularly clearly marked in *Artificial Heart's* apprenticeship in tradition and procedure.⁷⁹ Collis has noted that

Duncan's description of the genesis of "Poem Beginning with a Line by Pindar" in "The Truth and Life of Myth" can stand as an example of derivative collaboration -as well as the "several causations" that go into making a poetry that is as much a reading (of others) as it is the writing (of an individual). (2012, p.xv)

The extent to which Gizzi's own process is collective, collaborative and derivative is attested by the fact that both of the Duncan titles Collis cites here have yielded titles or procedures for poems of Gizzi's: 'Beginning with a Phrase by Simone Weil' (SVLW, p.95) and 'The Truth & Life of

⁷⁸ This title is adapted from Collis and Lyons' *Reading Duncan Reading* (2012).

⁷⁹ I employ this term as *Artificial Heart* is the last of Gizzi's collections to explicitly note some, if not all, of its textual and procedural engagements with its company (p.95).

Pronouns' (AH, p.82). The readings that follow will attend to Gizzi's collaborative procedures, analysing the gestures and processes of contradiction in 'A Textbook of Chivalry' and 'Fear of Music.' Nerys Williams has distinguished between Duncan's citational practice, which draws the reader's attention to itself, and Michael Palmer's practice of layered, irregular or partial citation that 'strives to create a constellation of meaning' (2007, p.119). As both Gizzi and Manson's practice resembles this mode more than Duncan's, it is worth attending to Williams' cautioning against an attempt to 'exhaustively reclaim the primary sources,' (p.188) and for a reading that attends to what citation does in its renewed context. McEvelley reminds the reader that quotation is a factor of all communication without which the transmission of messages is impossible, but notes that work foregrounding citation 'in full certainty that the quotation will be recognized' (1996, p. 226) focuses attention on procedure and material rather than the message itself. This focus on citation as action will underpin this section's readings.

'A Textbook of Chivalry' demonstrates the procedures at the heart of Gizzi's complex, interactions with source texts. Unlike Blaser's, his poems do not mark their borrowings with italics; nor are they a collage of citations from multiple sources. His engagement with poetic tradition is spatial as well as citational; it builds a space for itself within the forms and shapes of preceding poems,⁸⁰ building on and inhabiting what he describes as 'community, context, ground' (1999, p.3). One way of doing this is employing techniques of contradiction and negation as forms of citation. *Artificial Heart* acknowledges a debt to several named source poems in its end notes (p.95), but many poems fold in references to a constellation of other sources less directly marked. The notes to the collection state that 'A Textbook of Chivalry' 'was inspired in part by Frank O'Hara's poem 'Hôtel Transylvanie,' (AH, 95), but the title also enfolds reference to Jack Spicer's book poem 'A Textbook of Poetry' with the chivalric traditions of medieval Europe.

⁸⁰ Both Katz (p.228) and Herd (p.130) note Gizzi's spatializing of voice, with Katz in particular noting this as a space of communication with 'ancestors' or 'inheritance.'

Gizzi acknowledges the troubadour process of reversal as one of this collection's dynamics ('a renovated *trobar* emerges – an attraction to reversals (negation)... to reach through to the hollow/hallow places that inscribe themselves, that there could be music there,' AH, p. 95), and the inscribing of these *trobar* themes and gestures within others sampled from contemporary song echoes the process he described as Spicer's use of 'the medieval reframed within the folk revival' (2008a). It is also in the tradition of the troubadour *mouvance* itself, the "text in the process of creating itself" (Van Vleck, p.27).

'Mirroring' was a central technique of Spicer's poetic process which Gizzi, has described as being built on repetition and/or reversal:

Spicer's mirroring of other texts occurs as a narrative gesture throughout his books and is not limited to a process of mere repetition. The distancing, reversals, and intimacy of mirrors inform many of his most significant letters, provide much of his "critical" vocabulary, and reiterate his view of poetry as a tradition based in copying. Spicer writes from his reading as a way of engaging in discourse with what is otherwise isolated, keeping poetry in play by simultaneously borrowing, copying, critiquing, and adoring the living, the dead, peers, and legends. (1998a, pp.218-9)

Artificial Heart also 'writes from its reading,' not least in that it contains three poems written through acts of mirroring works from Spicer's *After Lorca*: 'Toy' mirrors 'Ballad of the Terrible Presence', 'Reed' mirrors 'Forest', and 'Salt' mirrors 'Debussy,' working with reversals to the extent that they read as poems of pure contradiction. 'Salt' (p.57) translates 'Debussy's' (Spicer 2008, p. 112) opening lines 'My shadow moves silently/ Upon the water in the ditch' into 'Your outline stalls loudly/ under the sky above a rock,' and Spicer's concluding 'Upon the ditch reflected' becomes 'above a rock, dividing,' emphasising the splitting as well as doubling at the heart of reflection.

There is a particularly rich example of this 'keeping poetry in play' in 'Fear of Music,' (p.85) which mirrors both Shelley's 'Mont Blanc' and lyrics from Talking Heads to complex tonal and dynamic effect. The first hint of mirroring as reversal is the phrase 'in static reverie,' seemingly crafted to contradict and internalise the 'ecstatic reverie' produced by the Romantic sublime. Shelley's opening lines ('The everlasting universe of things/ Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves,/ Now dark—now glittering—now reflecting gloom—') are mirrored in Gizzi's 'The

perpetual wheel turns inside,/ spins inside a head, and waves vibrate into rings/ first seen- then unseen,' which transform Shelley's rapid waves into vibrating rings, and their movement in the mind from flow to wheel turn. This translation suggests that poetic tradition itself is replacing or at least supplementing nature's poetic function, converting its flows into the revolutions of a man-made wheel. The tangibility of friendship ('The tribute of friendship worn as a necklace') is disconcerting in a stanza whose locations and persons remain resolutely abstract, places and creatures of pure voice:

That many - voices blend
 into a sequence, turn them round your head,
 thread them through your head, making it up
 as we go, is where we live.
 (p.85)

The 'manyvoicèd vale' with its 'pines, crags and caverns' (Shelley 2018b) becomes an intangible and abstract space of friendship, where the romantic singular 'I' has become the more social 'we' and, by 'making it up,' 'we' can build a place to live. These lines reinforce the spatial dimension of the stanza, the 'room' constructed of and constructing the poem's own many voices, as well as Gizzi's commitment to the construction of shared experience through the social, collaborative 'we.'

The second stanza reworks some lines of Shelley's to effect an abrupt change of scene and person, in which the comforting shawl of voice has been whipped away: 'Dizzy Ravine! and when I gaze on thee/I seem as in a trance sublime and strange' is rendered 'Dizzy building! and when we look upon you/ we will know we are home, when the voices fail us.' The voices that wove the first stanza's abstract location together have fallen silent, leaving only 'a lone sound/ that will not be tamed,' lines that repeat without reversal Shelley's 'A loud, lone sound no other sound can tame.' These lines turn Shelley's romantic sublime into something both domestic and fallible, vulnerable to the frailty of its own proprioceptive voicing. This urbanisation of the sublime continues, with Shelley's 'limits of the dead and living world' becoming 'the limits of the dead and the living city,' positing a liminal zone between parallel cities where borders are porous and the

odd, lone voice from the other side can echo across. The abstract space, with its friendly, almost tangible voices, has become an urban landscape whose sounds are echoes, or distant hammers. The 'I' who saw and wanted and invented in the first stanza has been absorbed into an urban 'we,' addressing a 'you' whose song lies outside the bounds of the living city. These stanzas use contradiction to call Shelley's certainties into question and keep these questions open.

This Spicer-inflected practice of 'borrowing, copying, critiquing and adoring' pulls Spicer himself into the final stanza, once again calling across to 'Debussy:'

See your fairest shadow
floating there, and calling say, depart- not yet.
The name of the pond is echo, echo is the name
of the pool where nothing happens. The image pales.
Why look there? Beyond the dream is told.
(AH, p.48)

This reworks the lines, already mirrored in 'Salt,' 'My shadow moves/ Upon the water in the ditch//The shadow demands from my body/ Unmoving images' and addresses their shadow, turning the 'water in the ditch' upon which it moves into a 'pool where nothing happens.' The lines 'The image pales./ Why look there?' seem to question that shadow's demand for 'Unmoving images,' pointing instead to a 'beyond' that lies outside the body. By invoking and enacting echoing ('echo, echo')⁸¹ in lines that also recall Michael Palmer's *Notes for Echo Lake*, the poem creates a doubled location for 'beyond,' where the dream is told, beyond the body but originating both outside and inside the threshold of the poem's soundwave.

Gizzi unfolds some of the implications of this poetics of ventriloquism in Spicer's practice:

Instead of channeling one frequency, one system of representation, one portrait, he displaces the personal content of the poet with a larger range of frequencies to bring the poem to a "higher level of abstraction" (I, 29) without a loss of humanity. This "channeling" of multiple narrative surfaces makes his work collage-like in structure, but without the pristine surface of a seamless fit...(1998a, p.179)

What is striking is that the process does not replace personal content or the persona of the poet; rather, it displaces them by making room for a range of frequencies and systems of representation. Instead of excising the subject, acts of 'channeling' decentre the subjective 'I,' making it one voice

⁸¹ This doubled echo is sounded out in the shell of 'Talking Heads' 'Heaven/ heaven is a place/ A place where nothing/ nothing ever happens'

among the many working together in the poem that bring it to a ‘higher level of abstraction.’ This section will focus briefly on the role of contradiction in displacing the subjective ‘I’ in ‘A Textbook of Chivalry’ before turning to similar processes of reading as abstraction in Manson’s work.

‘A Textbook of Chivalry’ is a particularly rich nexus of enfoldings, fittingly for a poem that has been designated as following the arc of the *trobar ric*.⁸² It has been suggested that this term, closely associated with Arnaut Daniel, describes a poetic style rather than categorising a form, representing an objective assessment by the troubadour himself that his style is elevated and ornate, without necessarily adhering to a particular form (Paterson 1975, pp.180-2). This designation on Gizzi’s part claims complexity and value for the work thus designated, while retaining the flexibility that comes of a form without rigid constraints.

As the notes emphasise that this poem was ‘inspired in part’ by O’Hara’s ‘Hotel Transylvanie,’ it is necessary to consider what of O’Hara’s poem it brings across and how, and contradiction forms the key mode of transposition. Acts of negative inspiration characterise the poem’s engagements with O’Hara’s themes and diction: the opening line ‘Learning how to give in to hate, or how to take in love’ (p.88) recast the concerns of O’Hara’s opening lines:

Shall we win at love or shall we lose
can it be
that hurting and being hurt is a trick forcing the love
we want to appear, that the hurt is a card (2003, p.170)

Where O’Hara casts love as a game to which one learns the rules through trial and error, Gizzi reframes it as a more deliberate learning process, and links ‘giving in’ to hate with ‘taking’ in love in a manner that recalls O’Hara’s ‘trick’ of ‘hurting and being hurt.’ This kind of allusion through contradiction is central to the poem’s movement: O’Hara’s ‘doubt is the father that has you kidnapped by friends’ is subjected to a process of almost word-by-word contradiction to yield ‘imagination creates a mother/ letting you go free amidst the enemy’ (p.88), crediting the imagination with a generative force to counteract doubt’s negativity through negation. This process

⁸² Gizzi outlines the links between *Artificial Heart*’s poems and troubadour forms (1999, p.2).

transforms ‘I have never loved myself/ but I hold on’ (O’Hara 2003, p.170) into ‘one despises, or despises oneself, let go’ (p.90). The conclusion of Gizzi’s poem (‘it takes another lifetime to read it/ never to understand why one is here, or why now,/ or who or what they shall become whence written down,’ p.90) appears to directly take up O’Hara’s conclusion (‘It will take them a long time/ to know who am I/ why am I here/ what and why I am and made to happen,’ p.170⁸³), harmonising with its wonder at the unknowability of the lived life, but casting doubt on O’Hara’s hope that, given ‘a long time’ readers will, eventually, understand the poem’s ‘I.’ In Gizzi’s twist on O’Hara’s questions, the ‘written down’ self is not synonymous with the writing ‘I,’ and becoming continues after death through the interlinked processes of writing, reading and being read in which both poems and this reading are engaged.

The possibility of knowing ‘what and why I am’ is further complicated by the multiplicity of voices from which the single ‘I’ is woven. The richest example of this polyvocality is the line ‘I am waiting for my man, my man has a number in it’ (p.89). This line folds together two New Yorks: The Velvet Underground’s ‘I’m Waiting for the Man’ yields to O’Hara’s ‘In memory of my feelings’ (‘My quietness has a man in it,’ 2003, p.105) whose multiple men Gizzi folds into each other by putting a *number* in his man. This line also responds to its other source of inspiration, Spicer’s ‘A Textbook of Poetry,’ (‘I can write a poem about him a hundred times but he is not there. The mere numbers prevent his appearance...’ 2008, p.302), suggesting that the speaker’s waiting may be in vain, as the ‘man’s’ own multiplicity may be ‘prevent(ing) his appearance.’ The dizzying feat of citational polyphony with which Gizzi populates this figure emphasises the extent to which his singular subjects, ‘I’ and ‘you,’ are always already composite beings, weaving themselves out of many voices before ever merging into a ‘we’ in the act of reading.

While ‘A Textbook of Chivalry’s’ relationship to Spicer is not flagged in the notes, it is clear in the title’s reworking of ‘A Textbook of Poetry.’ The replacing of the word ‘poetry’ with ‘chivalry’

⁸³ These lines pre-figure ‘Vincent’s four-fold question ‘who and how am I made better through struggle./ Or why am I I inside this empty arboretum.’

further highlights the poem's, and collection's, debt to troubadour tradition while emphasising the abstract dynamic through which this debt manifests itself. In the second section of his 'Textbook,' Spicer's speaker queries his interlocutor:

"Personify," you say. "It is less abstract to make a person out of a sound." But the Word was the Word not because he was personified but because he was a personification. As if he were human (2008, p.299).

Here personification is linked with the hypostatic union, the incarnation of Christ in human form that will be returned to in the next chapter. The citational procedure through which this text is woven into Gizzi's also recalls McEvelley's dictum 'In the beginning was the Word – and since then there's been the quotation' (1996, p.255). Multiple questions unfold in Gizzi's poem and poetics more broadly to do with the relationships between sound, citation and abstraction. One line of questioning opens to a possible commentary on troubadour poetics. As has already been mentioned, much recent scholarship suggests that the figure of the 'beloved' itself was often deployed as a personification of an abstract concept, an act of making 'a person out of a sound' as the embodiment of a scientific or philosophical argument, rather than singing the praises of an idealised but actual loved one. Van Vleck (1991) argues that 'the Provençal poets' "lexicon of love" is in large part a lexicon of poetry—that the verbs *amar* and *trobar* are almost interchangeable,' (p.17) and makes the case for the 'implied lady' as object of the poet's desire to 'make the best possible song' (p.17). In support of this case she quotes Zumthor's assertion that 'the poem is a mirror of the self...which is the song,' (p.17), a line that reflects the complex mirroring between speaker and addressed 'you' in Spicer's poem and Gizzi's as well as claiming this mirroring as a hallmark of the troubadour tradition.

Lerner has described this mobile relationship between singer, song and addressee (the conative 'you' in Jakobson's sense) in Gizzi's *Threshold Songs* as 'songs in which the singer has been abstracted' (Gizzi 2012, n.p.). In that interview, Gizzi acknowledges elements of apostrophe to the beloved, the world or an idea in his form of address, but also proposes a 'you' that is an abstracted version of the speaker, a way '[t]o embrace the amplification of self by standing next to oneself, outside of one's life, to look at one's self in and through the world—a form of discovery within

the baffles of pronominal reality' (2012). The centrality of sound to the externalizing of the 'I' is highlighted in the emphasis on 'amplification,' and in the linking of 'pronominal reality' with acoustic baffles and will be considered as a feature of Manson's poetry in the next chapter. Further, it suggests, in answer to the exhortation of Spicer's interlocutor to 'make a person out of sound,' that the resultant, doubled 'you', abstracted as it is from the speaker's own self, has the potential to be more rather than less abstract than whatever concept it was invoked to replace. While this seems compatible with Lerner's view of the poems as 'songs in which the singer has been abstracted,' his use of the perfect tense implies a completeness belied by the poems' own *mouvance*.

I would read the lines Lerner quotes from 'The Eye of the Poem' ('A bright patch... singing itself') as another example of the agency of light and the natural world, previously discussed in relation to *The Outernationale*, and that rather than demonstrating the abstraction of the singer as a completed act, it suggests the multiplicity of agents, human and non, living and dead, inside and outside, whose song is 'the text creating itself.' The singer, who is always many singers, is always *becoming* abstract in the reflexive act of singing itself/ themselves into being. Gizzi's reply to Lerner implies an opening out of the self-containing action of a reflexive verb ('singing itself', 'creating itself') to amplify the self through externalisation. This distancing manoeuvre offers a productive refolding of Altieri's 'who we become,' by suggesting that the poem's own speaker is one of the selves who is 'becoming' in relation with the poem's threshold. In Gizzi's dynamic version of this relationship, the use of the reflexive pronoun 'oneself' to constitute the 'baffles of pronominal reality' through which the poems' 'I' and 'you' are amplified ensures that the 'who' is always linked in action to the poem's speaker and that their becomings are mutually generative, linked in the ongoing relationship of reciprocal presupposition that is the act of reading.

The poem's apostrophe to a personified '*book*' continues this intensely reflexive abstraction, performing an address to its company that also addresses itself:

Oh *book*, you are a strange friend
but a good one, definitively a path opening on all sides,
as all eyes open, and do not merely gape, but dilate and focus
as with the apertures of the heart. Open, to receive, *become*

to see, and is it only for honesty in letters that the will founders
 before it immolates. Who cannot die, continuing to die,
 who has become dead, becoming dead, who will never be dying,
 as the hard copy corroborates a twin and the emptiness
 creates a slave
 and the wood recorder releases a sweet note ascending
 to embrace these actual clouds in an actual landscape
 unwittingly there to coax joy out of air? (p.89)

The book, as a ‘path opening on all sides, / as all eyes open,’ recalls the ‘abstract line’ of Deleuze and Guattari:

On the other hand, *a line that delimits nothing, that describes no contour*, that no longer goes from one point to another but instead passes between points, that is always declining from the horizontal and the vertical and deviating from the diagonal, that is constantly changing direction, a mutant line of this kind that is without outside or inside, form or background, beginning or end and that is as alive as a continuous variation—
 such a line is truly an abstract line, and describes a smooth space. It is not inexpressive. Yet is true that it does not constitute a stable and symmetrical *form of expression* grounded in a resonance of points and a conjunction of lines. It is nevertheless accompanied by *material traits of expression*, the effects of which multiply step by step. (TP, p. 498, emphasis added)

The opening of the eye (recalling Spicer’s ‘The eye in the weeds (I am, I was, I will be, I am not)’ 2008, p.312) is compared to the systole/ diastole opening and closing of the heart⁸⁴ and both forms of movement, dilation and focus, are necessary to ‘Open, to receive, *become* to see,’ with the eye only gaining the ability to fulfil its function through the movements of opening itself and becoming. The abstract lines of this section of the poem multiply the dead, Spicer and O’Hara (whose line ‘o *hôtel*, you should be merely a bed,’ (2003, p.74) provides a model for Gizzi’s apostrophe to an italicized inanimate object) but also an unnamed ‘Who’ who cannot die, continues to die, has become dead, is becoming dead, will never be dying. These conjugations of the verb ‘die’ refuse, like the abstract line, to go directly from one point in time to another, or to settle on one point of the negative/ positive binary. Instead they oscillate through stages and states of dying and becoming dead, refusing to ‘form a stable and symmetrical *form of expression*.’ This line is drawn into a field of song that is ‘action in the world,’ (Out, p.48) releasing ‘a sweet note ascending/ to embrace these actual clouds in an actual landscape,’ in a movement that brings us

⁸⁴ Gizzi agrees with use of the term ‘diastolic’ to describe the dynamic in his own work (1999, p.4), and Deleuze sees a similar movement at work in the surfaces of Bacon’s paintings where ‘the coexistence of all these movements in the painting . . . is rhythm’ (FB, p.24).

back to Spicer, where ‘the real birds, they seemed like seagulls, were nesting on the real rocks’ (2008, p.313).

Spicer’s ‘Textbook’ evokes these ‘real birds’ in order to decry the failure of the textbook of poetry’s mission to explain. ‘The real poetry is beyond us,’ (p.313), out where the real birds nest on real rocks in a language of ‘Ununderstanding’ (p.313). But Spicer’s ‘failed and fake’ poem allows the ‘nothing beyond it’ to be seen (‘Like a false nose where a real nose is lacking,’ p.313), and Gizzi suggests a similar end to the opposite movement, with the ‘actual clouds in an actual landscape/ unwittingly’ coaxing ‘a sweet note’ ‘out of air’ from ‘material traits of expression’ drawn from O’Hara and Spicer in movements that are not isolated snippets of sample or citation but rather ‘The real sound of the dead’ (Spicer, p. 313). It is entirely in keeping with the folk idiom with which Gizzi has inflected his troubadour song (1999, p.2) that Spicer’s angelic trumpets have been replaced with a ‘wood recorder,’ and that the multiplied, amplified voices of the dead are brought from the ‘nothing beyond’ into the poem where they can be remade out of sound. The mechanics of Gizzi’s artificial heart are complex: his ‘derivational poetics’ is not content to patch other names and lines into its own self-contained mechanism; rather, his machine is an assemblage⁸⁵ of parts that animates itself through opening and closing, sounding itself out in its movements of diction and contradiction. This movement traces a ‘line that delimits nothing’ and the resulting amplified self is, like the line in which it lives, ‘alive as a continuous variation.’

These readings have tried to remain responsive to Gizzi’s work, not just to his own representations of it in interview, or models of reading gleaned from his engagement with Spicer, but responsive to the movements of its ‘always declining,’ ‘constantly changing’ abstract lines. If ‘[s]yntax is the set of necessary detours that are created in each case to reveal the life in things,’ (Deleuze LL, p. 226), these readings hope to pay close enough attention to the detours to make out the meanings animating them.

⁸⁵ In this respect it is a hybrid of the kinds of art assemblage he has compared Spicer’s work to while retaining the dynamic qualities of the Deleuzian assemblage, more appropriately rendered ‘arrangement’ or ‘organisation.’

*Peter Manson 'is eclectic: he swallows none of his authors whole'*⁸⁶

These words of Pound's, written in praise of Guido Cavalcanti, signal at a mode of 'intertextual assemblage' that summarizes Manson's 'undigestive' approach to sources in the homophonic translation from Italian, 'Canzon – (for singing) – after Cavalcanti,' that will form the main subject of this section. Craig Dworkin proposes a 'reversal' of digestion, 'a play between the breakdown and dispersal of material into fragments and the reabsorption of those fragments into new, undifferentiated wholes' (2007, p.173) as the dynamic animating citation in Manson's *Adjunct: An Undigest*. 'Canzon' models slightly different gestures: in threading unfragmented sonic and visual matter from Cavalcanti's poem it allows for the reabsorption of these materials into a contemporary context where a conative perseverance becomes possible for much of their form and meaning.

In this work, an 'excess of meaning' derived from 'provocative and incongruous combinations' (Gizzi 2008a) is amplified by a fidelity to the visual and sonic material of multiple source texts that ensures that excess of meaning comes folded in an excess of matter. Deleuze claimed that 'a foreign language cannot be hollowed out in one language without language as a whole being toppled or pushed to a limit, to an outside or reverse side...not outside language, but the outside of language' (LL, p.230), and Manson's hollowing and reversing of English out of Italian complicates the syntactic and semantic boundaries between the two languages, allowing for unexpected swerves between them. Foucault noted a similar reversal in Deleuze's work:

[W]e must articulate a philosophy of the phantasm construed not through the intermediary of perception of the image, as being of the order of an originary given but, rather, left to come to light among the surfaces to which it is related, in the reversal that causes every interior to pass to the outside and every exterior to the inside' (1970, n.p.).

This relational emergence of the image, mobilised in a reversal between interior and exterior, not only corresponds to the process of reversing one language into another, but is also remarkably

⁸⁶ Title adapted from Pound's 'Cavalcanti': 'Guido is eclectic, he swallows none of his authors whole' (1968, p.159).

similar to the experience of writing a series of love poems described by Manson in the short essay ‘Love Poetry’:

Impressions, not exactly of the woman but of the spaces we had met in, and of the physical postures of the people in those spaces (an abstraction of posture, without any image of the people holding them), and of the almost physical folding and distortion of another space created by the shifts of attention between one person and another – at one moment a clear flow of attention from A to B, then its pinching off, withheld, or its splitting in two, or joining with another flow. (BCL, pp.53-4)

He describes attempting to derive a visual image from this abstraction as ‘push(ing) my own perception beyond this strangling manifold’ until ‘the manifold was replaced by what I nevertheless “knew” to be peripheral to it, which was language’ (BCL, p.54). This reversal of image into ‘artefacts of language’ (Manson 2003, n.p.) that ‘didn’t describe the image but...were it’ (p.54) not only models the gestures of the abstract relation between language and image in Manson’s work, it also primes his reader for the shifts of attention and perception they will need to engage in order to follow the movements of meaning in his work. These movements follow the multimodal arc that Massumi has outlined as ‘lived abstraction’:

The feeling of seeing the abstract line of the event is a vision-effect...It expresses that differential in an abstract perception of the dynamic unity of the event, as you feel you saw it with your eyes, or perhaps eyed it into feeling. In other words, the dynamic form of the event is *perceptually felt*, not so much “in” vision as *with* vision or *through* vision: as a vision-effect. It is a lived abstraction: an effective virtual vision of the shape of the event, including in its arc the unseen dimensions of its immediate past and immediate future. The lived abstraction of the event is an *amodal* perception, in the nonsensuous shape of a line, of change taking place. It is direct perception of an event. (2011, p.17)

In framing events as a ‘dynamic unity’ that is felt through abstract perception, Massumi’s ‘lived abstraction’ also parallels Gizzi’s tracking of the ‘phantom poem’s many origins, ‘an experience in the mind both heard and as Cavalcanti would suggest, “tis felt I say”’ (1999, p.1), which itself tracks back to Pound’s Cavalcanti translation, and his praise for its ‘world of moving energies...magnetisms that take form, that are seen, or that border the visible’ (1968, p.154). Lived abstraction, the virtual vision of the shape of an event, traces the very shape that is being mapped here in reading intertwined ‘artefacts of language.’ Reading poems which are material and procedural abstractions of a generative event, the reader engages a similar virtual vision, and the ‘amodal perception... of change taking place’ is a responsive abstraction, generated by the reader’s encounters with the text.

‘Canzon – (for singing) – after Cavalcanti’ appears in Manson’s 2007 collection *Between Cup and Lip*, followed by a note marking it ‘*after Ezra Pound and Louis Zukofsky.*’ This acknowledgement of poetic lineage in part serves to mark this poem as what Collis called a ‘serial collaboration...resulting from successive elaborations of an idea or text by a series of creative workers, occurring perhaps over years or decades’ (2012, p.xvi). This mode of collaboration certainly fits Manson’s process, which draws its visual and sonic material from Cavalcanti’s poem while adapting formal and procedural elements from Pound and Zukofsky’s earlier approaches. In particular, his version replicates Pound’s division of lines into two- and three-step segments which Sieburth has identified as one of the great innovations of his translation:

Pound translates the minute scribal marks on the Laurenziano manuscript into typographical lineation, setting off the internal rhymes as two- or three-step lines and thus achieving what Zukofsky would define as the crux of writing: “audibility in two-dimensional print.” (2004, p.7)

From Zukofsky, Manson adapts what Quartermain has described as the ‘generative incoherence’ (1992, p.116) of a mode of translation that cleaves so closely to the source text’s sounds and textures that ‘the writing creates the situation to which it refers’ (p.116).⁸⁷ Quartermain proposes, in passing, an ethical dimension to this mode of autotelic writing: ‘Like the world, the text must stubbornly resist the straitjacket of determined meaning and the singularity of intellectual order’ (p.118). Manson’s procedure in this poem resists the straitjacket of meaning by constructing a far more constraining garment of sonic, visual and semantic fidelity to a source text in a language he does not speak. Its paradoxical effect of ‘forcing movement’ (Quartermain 1992, p.118), which will be developed in more detail, returns ‘meaning’ from its fixed status as noun to a present participle verb. The poem is meaning only while someone is reading.⁸⁸

Manson’s translation makes a feature of Pound’s stepping lines, laying bare the visual effect of the poem’s rhyme structure that complements its auditory qualities:

⁸⁷ This is drawn from Quartermain’s discussion of Zukofsky’s homophonic translation ‘Catullus,’ rather than his Cavalcanti-derived A-9, which adapts Cavalcanti’s rhyme structure rather than sonic material.

⁸⁸ ‘This present continuous ‘meaning’ owes a debt to Sarah Hayden’s ‘**What I meant**, before it all got messy, what I am still **trying to mean**, is that constraint can be hard to fix’ (2018, p.99, emphasis original)

My donna prays, 'Say' -
 such is my volition, dearly!
 'of one accident,
 which so vents
 itself, ferociously
 to alter old Guido'.
 It is amatory. Ah, more, eh?
 Some chill nay-
 sayers even perceive it clearly
 and I'm at present
 cognisant
 their old
 hope's gone where old
 hopes go. Old story!
 (BCL, p. 2)

The opening lines of this homophonic translation feature the most rigid cleaving to the source poem's sound patterns (Cavalcanti 2006, p.20) with 'voglio dire' becoming 'volition, dearly', 'accidente' 'accident', 'sovente' 'so vents' and 'amore' 'Ah, more, eh?' Cavalcanti's 'fero' can clearly be heard nestling inside 'ferociously', and 'alter old Guido' runs together to sound out his 'altero', as well as providing (with the lines 'one accident/ which so vents/ itself ferociously/ to alter old Guido') a guide to the process being enacted in the poem. These lines bind themselves in the further constraint of maintaining the complex rhyme scheme that J.H. Prynne described as 'the elaborate structure of internal/end-rhyme, the carapace of its sound shape as actively forming the links of thought with speech and song' (2007, p.7). This fidelity to the sound of the source poem denotes Manson's desire, hinted at in the title's 'for singing', to return the music to Cavalcanti's song, reviving the air of internal rhyme that Pound had praised as 'keeping the sound sharp and light in the throat' (1968, p.170).

The triple constraint, recreating the sound, rhyme and sense of the source poem in the translation, was initially woven with a fourth strand, that of maintaining sight-rhymes to the original by splitting the homophonic translations across lines, adopting the kind of cleaving that is

splitting to further emphasise the poem's cleaving as sticking to the source poem's sound and shape:

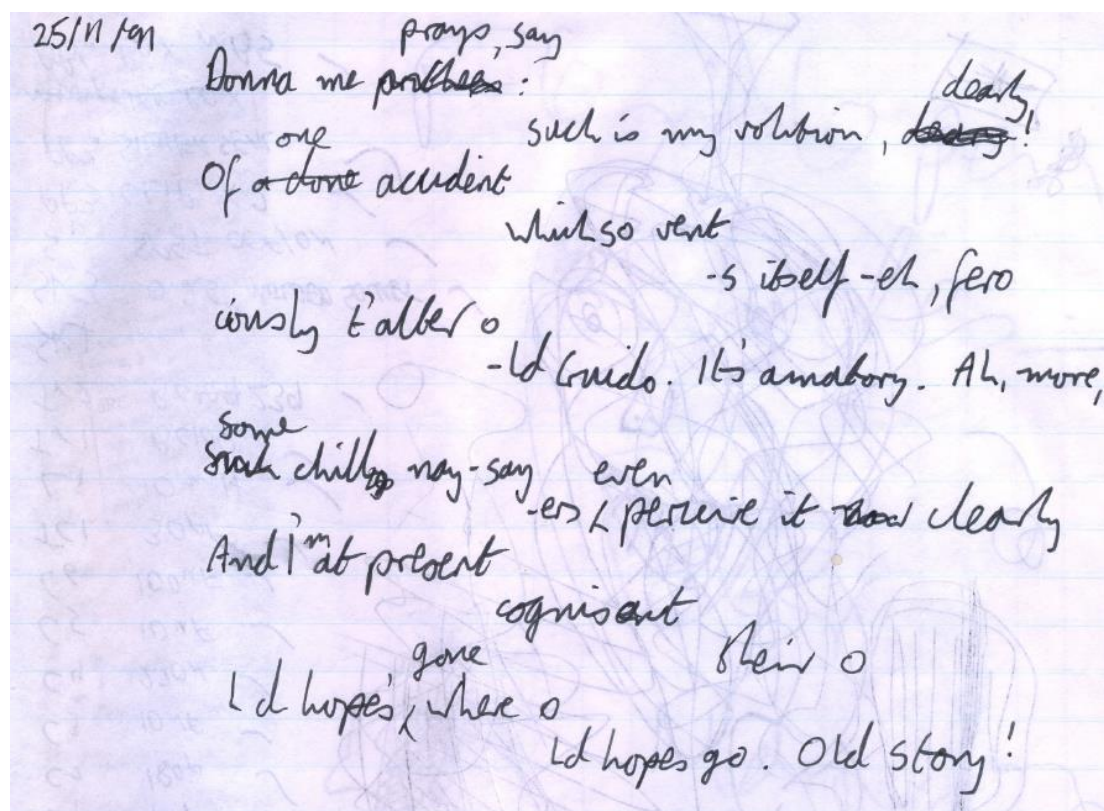


Figure 1 (Manson, 1992, p.1)

In this version 'so vents', 'ferociously', 'alter old Guido' 'their old' and 'where old' are split across the line to maintain visual as well as sonic kinship with Cavalcanti's 'sovente', 'fero', 'altero', 'chero' and 'spero.' This virtuosic feat of musical quadruple-constrained fidelity takes a slight swerve from the source poem in rendering 'perch'io no spero/ ch'om di basso core' ('because I do not hope/ that man of low heart') as 'hope's gone where o/ld hopes go. Old story!' before petering out mid-line, on 'his virtue, lack of impotence/ or essence.'

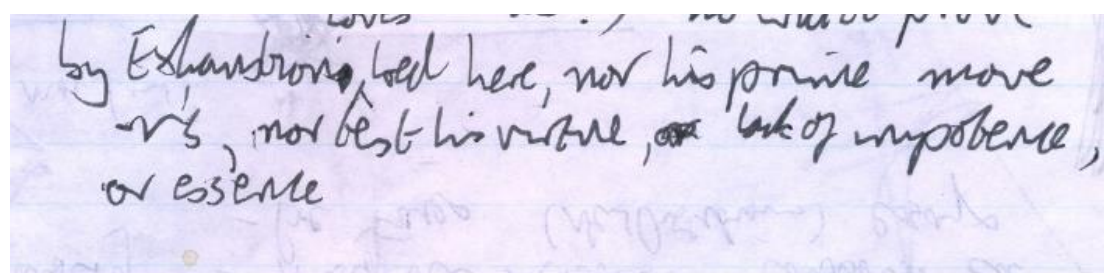


Figure 2 (Manson, 1992, p.2)

This manuscript version of most of the *canzone*'s opening stanza, dated November-December 1991, is rewritten on the following page, but Manson will not return to his translation for over a year. The poem's multiply constrained procedure appears to have immobilised itself, and a swerve that enacts, at the formal level, the semantic swerve from 'low heart' to 'old story' will be necessary to restore it to movement.

The swerve

The swerve is a central gesture in contemporary poethics (Joan Retallack 2004, p.3) and Cavalcanti has been proposed by Italo Calvino as both symbol and proponent of a similar mode of relational movement. Calvino proposed lightness as a means of escape from 'the weight, the inertia, the opacity of the world – qualities that stick to writing from the start, unless one finds some way of evading them.' (1988, p.4), outlining a poetics of indirectness that acknowledges the constraints imposed by the world but seeks, and indeed revels in, an elliptical approach that allows writing to wriggle out from under their weight. His essay 'On Lightness' exemplifies this 'thoughtful lightness (that) can make frivolity seem dull and heavy' (p.10) in the person and poetics of Guido Cavalcanti.

Cavalcanti is initially presented as an anecdotal figure, author of a human swerve reminiscent of the Lucretian physics Calvino earlier described as 'the first great work of poetry in which knowledge of the world tends to dissolve the solidity of the world, leading to a perception of all that is infinitely minute, light, and mobile' (p.8). Calvino, sharing Lucretius' 'chief concern ... to prevent the weight of matter from crushing us,' (p.9) shows us his 'unpredictable deviation from the straight line' (p.9) scaled up from the atomic level to the persona of 'Guido Cavalcanti' as depicted vaulting to freedom over tomb tops in Boccaccio's *Decameron*. In Manson's poem Cavalcanti, far from personifying a Lucretian swerve, provides the weight of verbal, visual and semantic matter threatening to crush the reader, and the swerve via which meaning can be made 'infinitely minute, light and mobile' in this matter must be sought elsewhere.

Joan Retallack and Lisa Robertson both draw on Lucretius to propose the swerve as a vector of responsibility or relationality in an ethics of reading. Retallack identifies ‘a certain poetics of responsibility with the courage of the swerve [which is] necessary to dislodge us from reactionary allegiances and nostalgias’ (2004, p.3). She proposes that this movement allows the reader to engage with the ‘intertwining trajectories of pattern and chance’ (p.46) within which meaning emerges in a text. Robertson initially focuses on the swerve’s material context, suggesting that it is a feature of the text itself that needs to be honoured in reading, via which ‘I enter a relational contract with *whatever* material, accepting its fluency and swerve’ (2012, p.15). In reading Manson’s poem, this contract is complicated by the doubling effected by homophonic translation, where the reader’s work of ‘accepting (the material’s) fluency and swerve’ follows the material traces of the poet’s own ‘relational contract’ with the source material. Robertson, too, derives a potentially ethical vector from the movement of clinamen or swerve:

If reading could be said to have broader, worldly effects, they might be modelled on the random agency of the Epicurean clinamen, that wide-open and troubling proposition of utterly uncaused and spontaneous material change. (p. 23)

In Manson’s poem, as in Gizzi’s, the swerve is initiated by movements of contradiction which, in this case, trigger material changes in the multiply constrained matter of the poem that allow meaning to emerge in its reading. However, it is important to note that in the work of both poets the movement initiated by this contradictory swerve does not resolve itself into a fixed pattern but remains something akin to what Bal has described as ‘relentless wavering between positions... [where] unlike in Hegelian dialectic, this wavering never stops to fade away in resolution’ (2013, p.56).

From constraint to the ‘contraria via’⁸⁹

Manson’s 1997 booklet *me generation* features the poem *Progressive Vocalic Lipogram* (i.m. Italo Calvino), which explores and enacts the beauty of constraint as a spur to poetic creation in direct homage

⁸⁹ The ‘opposite way’ that Pound translates as ‘swinging counterweight’ (2011, p.177).

to the *Oulipian*, playful side of Calvino. The lure of extreme constraint for the writers of *Oulipo* has been described as ‘rigidly constraining formal organization...in the belief that this will engender texts of exceptional merit, another avatar of the aesthetic of *difficulté vaincue*’ (Motte 1998, p.11), an aesthetic that is central to Manson’s process in ‘Canzon.’

The constraint for which Manson’s poem is named is certainly rigorous, being based on a staged pattern of exclusion and reintroduction of vowels. This is the pattern followed in the first stanza, which opens with ‘Enunciators’, containing all five vowels, gradually giving way over the course of the line to the univocalic ‘art.’ The second line’s ‘up’ is steadily built up to ‘housewarming.’

Enunciators’ memorial gleanings date art
but groups outwit eruptions’ housewarming
plans. Aye, Maggie, toil-laden Ur-leipograms
outpraise yourself-ish mouthings

(MG, p.3)

In the lines ‘toil-laden Ur-leipograms/out-praise yourself-ish mouthings,’ the poem’s constraint yields as distinct a defence of the supremacy of constraint to self-expression as Calvino’s ‘a game that is invested with unexpected meaning’ (1988, p.22), antidote to ‘the vertigo of what is countless, unclassifiable, in a state of flux’ (p.17). However, Manson’s second stanza departs from the eponymous constraint, working instead with univocalics, leading to three of the stanza’s four lines featuring only the letter ‘e,’ visually and sonically recalling Christian Bok’s *Eunoia*. This stanza’s coded commentary on its process’s constraint is ‘Drouth burns. The leerer/ meets meeker seekers here, levels her revels.’ (MG, p.3). Here, Manson appears to be acknowledging a poverty of expression imposed by the tightening of the poem’s lipogramatic structure, depriving the work of the flexibility of expression allowed by the opening stanza’s more mobile form. Of course, in the lament ‘Drouth burns,’ Manson has permitted himself a brief dodge outside the univocalic constraint in order not to completely sacrifice meaning to structure. This vocalic shimmying can also be noted in the opening stanza, where the addition of an extra ‘e’ to ‘lipogram’ yields the convincingly Scottish-tinged ‘ur-leipograms,’ fulfilling the requirement for a word containing all five vowels. By these means, Manson

incorporates swerves outside of the poem's formal constraints in order to make room for meaning to move within the poem, recalling Robertson's 'spontaneous material change.'

The poem 'Perma Sonnet,' which follows 'Canzon – (for singing) – after Cavalcanti' in *Between Cup and Lip* and was composed during a break in its translation (Manson, 2014c), addresses the potential inflexibilities of a more traditional suite of poetic constraints: the rhyme and metre of the sonnet form. The poem consists of fourteen lines of ten syllables each, whose metrical structure is outlined in the opening line 'Off on off on on on on off on' (BCL, p.7), two iambs followed by two spondees and an iamb. The rhyme scheme, a-b-a-b-c-d-e-e-c-d-f-g-g-f does not, after its opening quatrain, conform to any of the standard sonnet models. The key of 'ten,' for the syllabic code, is inserted parenthetically in the fourth line, and expanded in the fifth:

Person, whose name, writ(ten) on time, in words
Not water, splits in ten in time, giving
Pih-ee, tih-uh, rr-mm, ah-nn, ss-nn
(BCL, p.7)

The line into which the key is slipped alludes to Keats's epitaph 'Here lies one whose name was writ on water,' rewritten to comment on the poem's process. The 'ten' gestures at the poem's syllabic code while enacting the process it describes: the inscribing of the poet's name on time, in words. The expansion of each sound of the poet's name to fit the poem's syllabic structure uses time, in the form of each sound's extended duration, to give the poet's name an enduring presence in words that contrasts with Keats's description of a more fleeting inscription. Line ten employs a form of word-splitting across lines reminiscent of 'Canzon,' 'Voice, place and mann/ -er vie for mind's eye's fovea.' This splitting highlights the constraints imposed by the artificiality of the poem's syllabic structure, while providing a rhyme for the poet's surname's last syllable ('ss-nn') that is a homophone of its first ('mann'), further inscribing his name on time, in words. Further, it describes a process similar to that outlined in 'Love Poetry,' where abstractions (voice, place, manner) are transformed into images. Once again, swerves within constraint, often concerned with the nature of their own restrictions, are vectors that allow for the persistence of meaning within the text's constrained material.

'Perma Sonnet's embodiment of the constraints of the sonnet form in its structure and sense is extended in 'Canzone.' In his cover version of *Donna me Prega*, Manson signals his intention to return the *canzone* to 'cantabile virtue' with the insertion of 'for singing' into the title. In order to achieve this virtue his strait-jacketed lines will be mobilised through contradiction. During the break between writing the first stanza of 'Canzon' and completing the poem in late 1992, Manson began work on a series of what he called 'contradiction poems' (Manson 2014c), the only surviving published example of which is 'If by dull rhymes our English must be chained' (BCL, p.17), a word-by-word contradiction of Keats' late sonnet on the shortcomings of the sonnet form. Scott suggests that, in this work 'Keats attempts to write his way out of the sonnet, as if it was indeed the prison Wordsworth so blithely denies it to be' (1994, p.771). Manson's writing through of Keats's sonnet bulldozes the prison walls, leaving jagged, unrhymed line-ends where once stood delicate rhymes against the tyranny of rhyme. The lines 'the Sonnet sweet/Fetter'd, in spite of pained loveliness' (Keats 1978, p.368) become, via contradiction, 'the sour text/ Unleashed because of pleasing tawdriness' a line where, once again, Manson provides insight into the process being enacted in his poem.

Let us inspect the lyre, and weigh the stress
Of every chord, and see what may be gain'd
By ear industrious, and attention meet

becomes

Do not bother to ignore the hammer, or estimate the laxity
Of any note, or hear what will be lost
To lazy eye or unfocused attention.

It is notable that the blunt and practical 'hammer' is chosen as opposing term for 'lyre,' musical instrument from which the 'lyric' originated, and that the inevitability of loss of meaning to a lack of attention on the reader's part is acknowledged. If, as Quartermain has it, 'the poem is an act of attention for the reader as it is for the writer: an attendance on language' (p.15), this poem seems to acknowledge the danger of its own procedures yielding inattentive reading. This, too, is a potential gesture of swerving, a refusal to follow the text in its movements akin to Ngai's

‘stuplimity,’ the passive resistance entailed in ‘formulating a resistant stance by going limp or falling down, among the bits and scraps of linguistic matter’ (2006, p.297). In the concluding lines, Keats’ ‘So, if we may not let the Muse be free,/ She will be bound with garlands of her own’ reverses into ‘Nevertheless, because you will force the examiner to be detained/ he will not be released without the chains of his comrades.’ These lines transform the muse’s garlands into chains, such as those borrowed here from Keats, or in ‘Canzon’ from comrades Cavalcanti, Pound and Zukofsky, among which meaning can ‘go limp and fall down’, or by means of which it can release itself.

This use of contradiction, literally ‘speaking against,’ to provide the momentum through which poetic constraint can be escaped enacts a gesture similar to Altieri’s procedure of definition through opposition, but to very different ends. Manson’s debt to Keats in these two procedural experiments provides a counterweight to Altieri’s poetics, which references Keats’s negative capability but falls into the very gestures of ‘irritable reaching after’ certainties against which Keats counselled. ‘Perma Sonnet’ and ‘If by dull rhymes...’ engage with Keats’s texts by means of such constrained procedures that the reader expects a high degree of abstraction in the resulting work. Yet both poems reveal flashes of lucid meaning on the nature of their own poetics: meaning demonstrates its tendency to persevere in being, its *conatus*, even in the most densely procedural and apparently unsemantic texts. Where Altieri’s ‘irritable reaching after’ attempts to fit poems into abstract and predetermined frames, Manson’s process demonstrates that even in the most tightly shackled poetic forms, procedurally derived from prior sources, meaning will persevere in its being.

In the manuscript of ‘Canzon’, Manson has written and then scribbled over a contradiction poem of Pound’s *Canto XXXVI* version of *Donna me prega*:

26.10.92
 No gentleman tells you
 You listen unacceptingly
 He escapes irrationality for no reason, some seldom
 That has no attitude towards having hate for a name
 Nobody who agreed ~~could not~~ see the lie then
 Spontaneously you listen to the absent innocents
 Being certain that the high-minded
 Cannot take hearing from any irrationality
 When there is artificial reputation
 You have apathy towards reduction-bringing
 And hear there it has no birth
 What is not its name and or weakness
 Its nothingness or no stasis
 And despair spontaneously it is not called 'to hate'
 And because woman cannot keep it from earshot.

Figure 3 (Manson 1992, p.3)

In a technique startlingly similar to Gizzi's mirroring of Spicer, it begins by transforming 'A lady asks me' into 'No gentleman tells you' and goes on to rework the stanza word by word, contradicting as it goes. The troublesome second lobe, where the first effort at translation sputtered out on 'essence', is switched from

I have no will to try proof-bringing
 Or say where it hath birth
 What is its virtue and power
 Its being and every moving
 Or delight whereby 'tis called "to love"
 Or if man can show it to sight. (Pound 2011, p. 176)

to:

You have apathy towards reduction-bringing
 And hear there it has no birth
 What is not its name or weakness
 Its nothingness and no stasis
 And despair spontaneously it is not called 'to hate'
 And because woman cannot keep it from earshot. (Manson 1992, n.p.)

The 'essence,' subsumed into 'being' in Pound's version, is evaporated into 'nothingness' by Manson's process of contradiction, to be followed by 'no stasis,' a contradiction of 'moving' that is also its synonym, and a call to get moving again. Although this 'contradiction poem' was never published and none of its lines found their way into the completed version of the 'Canzon,' it marks a swerve, a material turning point in Manson's struggle against his self-imposed web of constraint. The 'contradiction' is dated 26/10/92, ten months after the first stanza ground to a

halt. Less than two months later, on 14/12/92, Manson takes up a blue pen and takes off again in mid-line, following that dangling ‘essence’ with ‘or what indeed/ he’s sent to do or bent o/n I can’t say/ and you’ve no stylus for this groove’ (1992, n.p.).

These lines proceed within the established framework of constraint: they maintain the internal and end rhyme schemes, with the splitting of ‘on’ serving to preserve a visual link to ‘*piacimento*’. However, Manson has leapt clear of the strict sense of the source poem, releasing another layer of meaning from the shackles of Cavalcanti, Pound and Zukofsky. There is a ‘t’ing in a groove’ in Jerry Riseman’s translation of *Donna me Prega* included in the 1940 version of Zukofsky’s A-9 (Zukofsky 1940, p.34) and Manson’s process of contradiction transforms the thing into the stylus that releases the music trapped within the grooves of this palimpsest poem, returning it to ‘cantabile virtue,’ fit for singing.

The following stanza transforms Cavalcanti’s ‘*diaffan da lume*’ (‘diafan of light’) into the lines ‘make it silken spume/ spilled out from dark which charts/ a path from Mars,’ a feat of alchemy transforming light into the spun matter of the alliterative, assonant, densely rhyming poem itself. Pound attempted to explicate Cavalcanti’s *Donna me Prega* as a treatise on the generation of light (1968, p.161) and Manson’s translation of light into the substance of the poem itself makes the poem’s material both the site and act of meaning. In the final lines of lobes and stanzas, virtuosic swerves take place that, in several cases, gesture to the poem’s own lines and their conative attempts to persevere in meaning. The line ‘a comb for thought... the kind of thing you won’t catch in a poem’ (BCL, p.3) pokes fun at its own attempts at thinking with and through translated material, but also at more traditional readers’ or readings’ efforts to comb poems for thoughts. This is developed in the next stanza:

<p>It’s not rational: you just sense it. I did!</p> <p>It’s past solution: forces</p> <p>Invention to be Reason’s end.</p>
--

Figure 4 Canzon, p.3

These lines make clear that meaning, the poem's elusive 'it,' must be creatively engaged via the senses and cannot be resolved definitively, regardless of whether the 'end' denotes a purpose, a finish or both. However, even this relatively stable sense of meaning comes under pressure in the following stanza ending, where the power of contingency is checked:

'Chance'
 doesn't govern the life you lead.
 If your needs
 outrun your authority,
 don't blame the dice. Love spoiled your party.

Figure 5 'Canzon' p.4

The evocation of 'Chance' and the dice recall Manson's long engagement with Mallarmé, subject of the next chapter. However, these lines seem to be contradicting the aleatory process of the poem itself, swerving out of fidelity to the poem's sonic material the better to render its semantic content: that despite fate or chance, one retains authority over one's life. The injunction 'don't blame the dice' suggests that chance is the generative event that sets life and meaning in motion, but the paths taken thereafter are open to the individual reader. This recalls one of Deleuze's literary framings of subjectivity:

At the most profound level of subjectivity, there is not an ego but rather a singular composition, an idiosyncrasy, a secret cipher marking the unique chance that *these* entities had been retained and willed, that *this* combination had been thrown and not another. (LCC, p.120)

The poem that will go on to '[spray] the ego/ down a groundless hole' celebrates the 'unique chance...that *this* combination had been thrown and not another' which has yielded its 'singular composition,' while reminding the reader that she is free to move proprioceptively through the poem.

'The Dialect of the Tribe,' a short story by American *Oulipo* member Harry Mathews, described the difficulties of translating from an untranslatable (imaginary) language:

[It] *was* the very process of transforming language that I expected it to be *about*. It was not an account of the process, it was the process itself. And how can you translate a process? You'd have to render not only words, but the spaces between them - like snapshooting the invisible air under the beating wings of flight. An impossibility. (Mathews 2006, n.p.)

Manson's poem, like much of his work on Mallarmé, *is* the process itself, transforming the sounds and sense of Italian into English while visually preserving the spaces and steps that show Pound

and Zukofsky's preparatory stages in revealing 'the outside of language.' This faithful transformation allows their forms, and Cavalcanti's materials, a conative perseverance in being.

3.5 Songs and ballads at the threshold

In a review of Gizzi's *Threshold Songs*, Karla Kelsey describes its reader as a 'text-based thing who is in the moment of reading defined by the process of reading' (2012 n.p.), and this holds equally true for the reader of Manson. The work of both poets' autotelic artefacts of language is always engaged in its own moments and processes of reading. Kelsey goes on to emphasise the relationality of thresholds, in terms that are apposite to the ballads and songs of both Manson and Gizzi:

While perfectly common, thresholds are also potential states of intensity, modes of relationality that have the capacity take fixed systems ("sweatshirt") and turn them, deploy them otherwise ("a shirt from the sweat of children"). Far from proposing that such turning is "merely poetic" or "merely figural" or abstracted from the stuff of lived-life, *Threshold Songs* insists through and through that process and material compose life[.]

In reading this work, the poem itself is always also a threshold, and the reader navigates its states of intensity and modes of relationality in proprioceptive movements of lived abstraction. Manson himself has gestured at the ethical implications of such a mode of reading and its potential for generating a multiplicity of meanings:

I suppose my basic working fantasy as a language artist is that I might be able to make a work of some complexity whose meaning would largely arise from the shared matter of the language, the meanings of words that we could all be expected to know and their patterned interaction as the poem, a thing to be sounded out time and again but never completely known, not replaceable by anyone's idea of it. (2017b n.p.)

The final section of this chapter will sound out meanings in the shared matter of a recent poem of the threshold by each poet.

'the intro haunted by the outro'

The focus of this section is Manson's 2012 poem 'raven A.' Tom Betteridge has written perceptively on this poem in an essay highlighting the resistance of Manson's work to 'the reader's proprietary will to disambiguation' as a feature of a carefully constructed language surface whose

‘foregrounding of the acoustic, oral, sculptural or visual elements of language’ place semantic meaning in a subsidiary position (2018, p.2). As a consequence of this material resistance, ‘[a]mbiguity cannot be negotiated down till it dips below some threshold of ‘adequate’ shared meaning’ (p.3). However, if the poem’s surface cannot be persuaded to yield a single, shared meaning, the threshold of ambiguity itself becomes a paradoxically social site, a common space where each reader is alone with a text that figures its writer among its readers (p.9). Nerys Williams has identified a similar dynamic in the writing of Michael Palmer, which ‘hints at a threshold of guidance’ in his work suggesting that ‘the reader completes the circuit’, indicating that there is a ‘matrix of meaning to be connected in his work’ (2007, p.138). Her formulation suggests an in-built pedagogy as a feature of the work, pointing the reader to the existence of this matrix and her role in its completing. If Manson’s work strains against the notion of completeness, it does at least offer the threshold of ambiguity as a site of guidance.

It is testament to the range of ‘dynamic subject positions these surfaces solicit’ (Betteridge 2018, p.10) that the reading that follows connects a ‘matrix of meaning’ in ‘raven A’ that diverges substantially from that taken in Betteridge’s reading. The title itself places the poem in relation to two artistic traditions. Ravenna and its mosaics, also invoked in ‘Sourdough Mutation’s’ ‘a raven mosaic/ was art then//aired alea// Tory quoof,’ (PFR, p.49), suggests a surface composed of tesserae whose dice-like (*alea*-tory) form gestures at a degree of randomness in their placement. In reversing and switching the articles of Poe’s ‘The Raven,’ the title renders *his* raven indefinite while effecting a physical translation on the title of a poem translated into prose by Mallarmé.⁹⁰

it begins Softest car, abattoir batch
because I cannot speak
speech placed completely and verifiably beyond use (Manson 2012)

In the opening stanza the ‘it’ that signals the poem itself and its thwarted act of communication begins in ‘ostensibly poetic material’ (Betteridge, p.6) as a response to loss of speech. Betteridge

⁹⁰ Whose modest assessment of his attempt reads ‘voici un calque se hasarder sans pretention que rendre quelques-uns des effets de sonorité extraordinaire de la musique originelle’ (Mallarmé 1945, p.229) or ‘here is a copy chancing no pretension other than rendering a few of the extraordinary sound-effects of the original music’ (author’s translation).

flags the origin of the phrase ‘completely and verifiably beyond use’ in media coverage of IRA arms decommissioning. It is worth noting that this process was a voluntary one, involving relinquishing rather than destroying weapons (*Irish Times* 2005, n.p.) and that its language and methodologies were subject to intense scrutiny both prior to inception (De Breadun 2001, n.p.) and following completion (*Irish Times* 2005). In invoking this process, Manson is therefore enacting a gesture that is self-chosen, potentially reversible and subject to an external scrutiny through which it is never completely verifiable.

This external scrutiny is implicated at points which deploy error or catachresis (Gardner 2017) to ‘make a problematic transition from textuality to the establishing of productive relationships’ (Williams 2007, p.76), where such locutions as ‘imagine *disowning* that//breath *withheld* between quotes’ (emphasis added) cue the reader to query their torquing of fixed phrases. How does one imagine *disowning* rather than owning something? How would one ‘own’ breath anyway? Does *withholding* one’s breath between quotes imply giving up ownership, or refusing to acknowledge it? In either case or both, is it an act of yielding the speech that has been put beyond use to other voices, as this poem seems to be doing? Such points thwart all hope of completing the circuit of the poem, and the ‘intro haunted by the outro’ sounds out the reader’s repeated movements of looping back.⁹¹

To avoid the danger of falling into an infinite loop, the rest of this reading will limit itself to tracing the movements of the seventh and eighth stanzas:

you know where the writing ends
and the thing typing enters the mid-part of
if I could caw

to you across the intrusive spur
to understand
to me as an infinitive

If the poem has begun as a thing that ‘seems to happen/ outside my head,’ this is the point where a self re-enters its decommissioned speech and the reader is implicated in this re-entry colloquially

⁹¹ Stivale has proposed ‘a constant looping back’ (2008, p. 36) as the defining gesture of Deleuze’s pedagogy

and epistemologically ('you know'). However, this act is interrupted by an if clause, itself interrupted in a gesture more typical of Gizzi's poetics.⁹² The verb 'caw' once again evokes Poe's raven, but also a transliteration of 'call' into the Glasgow dialect Manson shares with W.S Graham, of whom he has written:

By sending his words to Bryan Winter in the body of a poem, Graham surrenders them to that same material condition to which Winter has returned. His words cease to be those of a living man, becoming rather the voice of a poem which might talk to the dead. (2003 n.p.)

Manson's thwarted 'caw' surrenders his own words to a material condition, and the contingency of their potential to 'talk to the dead' is highlighted in the blank space of the stanza break into which its sound falls, gesturing at the impossibility of crossing the 'intrusive spur' to 'you.' The ethical and ontological imperatives of this act, despite its potential to end in failure or silence, is spelled out in grammatical functions: 'to understand/ to me as an infinitive.' Understanding is equated with an act of linguistic self-creation: the words of the poem enact an effort at communicating with the tenuous potential 'to me,' to become someone in those words. The verb 'to me,' so close to 'mean,' enacts meaning's striving to persevere in the poem.

'The undertow and its threshold'

The opening lines of Gizzi's 'True Discourse on Power' also channel the 'voice of a poem which might talk to the dead,'⁹³ or maybe with and through the dead, and implicates the reader in its understanding:

When I say the ghost has begun
you understand what is being said.
(TS, p.61)

The title of the collection from which this poem comes, *Threshold Songs*, is the clearest statement of what we have seen as Gizzi's ongoing concern with borders and liminal spaces, where places

⁹² Several readers, including Altieri (2018) Perloff (2018), Brossard (2008) and Kunin (2018) have commented on Gizzi's incomplete if-clauses.

⁹³ Gizzi's 'A history of the lyric' takes its epigraph from W.S Graham opening up a place that Noel-Tod has described as 'as a dark, oral one of synesthesia and longing' (2018, p.82).

and dimensions intersect and voices can call across divides of space, time and mortality. Its epigraph comes from Samuel Beckett's 'Company': 'A voice comes to one in the dark. Imagine.' This imperative to imagine sets the tone for the entire collection. The act of imagining is one in which each of the collection's poems is embroiled and they, in turn, are the polyphonic voice in the dark exhorting us, as readers, to imagine.

So what's this about?
A horse and a castle, a tree
 and its leaving?
What's this about in solitary
 splendor?
The undertow and its threshold,
a door and the opening sky?
(TS, p.62)

This reading will start from the juncture, more than half way through the poem (“So what’s this about?”) where the poem seems to stop and question its own ‘aboutness,’ before pulling back to place these questions within the larger movement of the poem’s acts of meaning. The ragbag of possible answers (horse and castle, undertow and threshold, door and opening sky, all still posed as questions) signals the impossibility of saying *what* the poem is about, and this final section turns instead to sketching *how it came* about, with a reflection glimpsed while driving, a snatch of song lodged in the mind. The way these samples from the actual world are folded into the poem (‘a play of reflection’, ‘I fell into song’) gestures at the process by which the ‘absolutely real’ becomes an actor in the ‘act of the imagination’ (Gizzi in Bernstein, 2008).⁹⁴

Circling back to the title, the juxtaposition of the terms ‘True/Discourse/Power’ suggests Foucault, and the opening paragraphs of ‘Orders of Discourse.’ Beginning ‘I would really like to have slipped imperceptibly into this lecture...’ it goes on ‘speech would proceed from me, while I stood in its path – a slender gap – the point of its possible disappearance’ before invoking the voice of Molloy speaking words from ‘The Unnameable’ “maybe they’ve already said me; maybe they’ve already borne me to the threshold of my story, right to the door opening onto my story;

⁹⁴ In a radio interview with Bernstein, Gizzi describes poetry as ‘absolutely real, and absolutely an act of the imagination’ (2008).

I'd be surprised if it opened'" (1971, p.7). It opens, of all places, across the threshold of Gizzi's poem. The tyranny of beginnings; the desire to enmesh oneself in the cadences of pre-existing voices; the presence of Beckett among these voices; thresholds and opening doors: these elements are central to the movement of Gizzi's poem. Moreover, Foucault's lecture goes on to describe the process whereby, in sixth century Greece, 'True Discourse', which held the power to contribute to the shape of reality, 'weaving itself into the fabric of fate,' was side-lined in favour of a view of discourse where truth resided not in what discourse *did* but what it *said* (p.10). In this poem Gizzi lays claim to the power of the ritualised act of enunciation, rather than the content or semantic meaning of *what has been* enunciated.

Looking at the 'what' of the poem, there is a meditation on the nature of time, on belief and questioning, on seeing, feeling and imagining. But even 'meditation' is the wrong word here: the reader is not being asked to contemplate these phenomena as abstract objects of attention. From the poem's opening lines, the reader has been invited to involve herself in the poem's acts of imagining and meaning and is credited with already understanding 'what is being said,' and there is any number of pathways to follow: tracing the movements of time's 'adverbial bursts,' following belief and questions as they deepen into shadows, studying the snatches from the visible world folded into the poem, including a Stevensesan forsythia ticking in the evening air.⁹⁵

All of these elements are structured by sound, via which they become part of the poem's act of meaning, 'this talking in space.' Throughout the poem's flow, acts of audible and visible imagining call forth responding acts of imagining from the reader, who is called upon to be 'absorbed in the ongoing,' a Beckettian trudging on made meaningful by the state of absorption it produces, looping back again to the lines from *The Unnameable* quoted in Foucault's lecture: 'I cannot go on, you must go on, I'll go on, you must say words, as long as there are any...' (1971, p.7). 'To be awake. This talking in space./ To be

⁹⁵ See Stevens (1917) 'The leaf that has fallen from the branches of the forsythia/Beside you...' and (1990, p.385) 'Gay is, gay was, the gay forsythia'

absorbed in the ongoing' is, like Manson's 'to understand/ to me as an infinitive,' a call on the reader to mobilise these static infinitives into the present continuous that is meaning.

The 'voice coming to one in the dark' pipes up again at the opening of the next section in its own conditional cawing: 'If I say it can you feel it now?/ Imagine.' The poem's saying demands an imaginative response in the form of feeling. Over the next couple of lines, a complex interchange between seeing and hearing, feeling and imagining, plays out. The zen koan of the tree falling in the forest is replayed on the silent movie screen, and the question becomes: is a sound that is imagined or felt the same as silence? Woven into this song-line of saying and imagining, are a time-line and a shadow-line. The time-line dispenses with the notion that time is even linear ('time is not how we keep it or measure....It twitters and swerves like the evening news'), and with the notion that it is ongoing ('This *was* time....And you were part of it'), with the poem's final plaintive subjunctive calling its very existence into question ('If there *were* time, would it be ours?')

The play of shadows takes the speaker from 'belief's a shadow to be looked into...until relief is gone,' to questions deepening into shadows, to the speaker left 'Alone here with my shadows drawn.' Whether the shadows are belief or questions, whether they're drawn like curtains or a gun is left, like so much else in this poem's acts of meaning, open. This openness invites the reader in to participate in the 'social experience of reading':

The author is 'othered' by submitting themselves to the material properties of language: the compulsion resulting in the solitary act of writing becomes displaced, as a kind of relief, by the social experience of reading; 'the total process of writing... is a social one at every stage other than the "siege in the room"' Manson insists, following Beckett. (Betteridge, p.10)

The reader becomes one link in a loop of readings, a 'text-based thing' related across time and space to other text-based things joined and 'defined by the process of reading' (Kelsey 2012).

This movement of abstraction can incorporate the links of concepts gathered from Altieri, even as it reworks them into forms sufficiently flexible to respond to the movements and material properties of Gizzi and Manson's language.

Chapter Four: ‘am I in meaning yet’ —Moving through Meaning in Manson’s Mallarmé and *Poems of Frank Rupture*

...si l'on obéit à l'invitation de ce grand espace blanc laissé à dessein au haut de la page comme pour séparer de tout le déjà lu ailleurs, si l'on arrive avec une Âme vierge, neuve, on s'aperçoit alors que je suis profondément et scrupuleusement syntaxier, que mon écriture est dépourvue d'obscurité, que ma phrase est ce qu'elle doit être — et être pour toujours... (Mallarmé in Guillemot 1896, p.216)

[...if we⁹⁶ obey the invitation of this great white space left by design at the top of the page as if to separate from all the already read elsewhere, if we arrive with a virginal new soul, we notice then that I am profoundly and scrupulously a syntaxer, that my writing is deprived of obscurity, that my sentence is what it has to be – and be forever... (author's translation)]

The previous chapter followed ‘sets of necessary detours’ through the syntax of Gizzi and Manson in a practice of learning to read their process of reading. The final chapter will extend this apprenticeship in reading to Manson’s reading, writing through and writing beyond Mallarmé. In Manson’s work, as in Deleuze’s description of Bacon’s canvases, even the white page itself is not free of the ‘already read elsewhere,’ and there is no approach route to these poems via which one can arrive with a new, virginal⁹⁷ soul. Both reader and poem will always carry traces of the ‘already read elsewhere,’ and the syntax of his poems is always moving, at times ‘profoundly and scrupulously,’ at others playfully or even destructively, but always proprioceptively through the sounds, shapes and semantic content of these other readings.

This chapter will focus on the ways openness manifests itself in some of Manson’s work, paying attention to the emergence of meaning within, sometimes despite, these processes. Drawing on the previous chapter’s conclusions on meaning as movement, it will begin by considering Manson’s translations from and reworkings of Mallarmé. It will then go on to frame some of the verbal and sonic wordplay central to Manson’s poetics in terms of French traditions and ask what and how meaning is possible in work that attends so closely to the material aspects of language.

These questions will be elaborated via a close reading of his serial poem ‘Sourdough Mutation’

⁹⁶ The great difficulty of translating the French pronoun ‘on’ is that it can denote any or many of ‘one,’ ‘someone,’ ‘everyone,’ general ‘you’ and ‘we,’ what Deleuze described as ‘the splendour of the pronoun ‘One’’ (DR, p.xviii). In this instance I’ve chosen ‘we’ to maintain Mallarmé’s sense of relationship between reader, text and writer.

⁹⁷ ‘vierge’ denotes virginal but also, in the phrase ‘feuille vierge,’ a blank page. If Mallarmé is suggesting that the reader approach his text with an unwritten-on soul, this reading and Manson’s work suggest that no such state is possible.

which will seek to tease out some proprioceptive implications of this poetics, paying close attention to the emergence of meaning in movement and working through some ethical implications of this way of meaning.

In his 2003 essay 'Let it be: an essay on poetry in language,' Manson sets out an explicitly ethical view of the emergence of meaning in what he calls 'artefacts of language,' framing the importance of openness and respect in our engagements with texts as 'a significant test of our humanity,' one which it might be suspected that many readers would have difficulty passing:

It is reasonable to expect a human being to accept other humans for what they are: not rejecting or doing violence to their physical person, not imagining a narrative for them then restricting our sense of their potential to the limits thus placed upon them. The practice of accepting texts for what they are, in the fullness of their potential for branching off into realms of meaning unforeseen by any author, is analogous to the practice of human tolerance, and might be considered a useful rehearsal for it. (2003, n.p.)

Here, Manson invokes the modest virtue of 'reasonableness' to propose a responsibility on the part of the reader that serves as model and testing ground for the tolerance of our fellow humans. This appeal to engage with texts on their own terms puts pressure on the mode established in Altieri's readings, that operates via exemplarity and the imposition of limits, raising some difficult questions about the stance and attitude towards 'other humans' revealed in readings that take it upon themselves to limit and judge.⁹⁸ What Manson is proposing here is an ethics of reading based on acceptance of the unpredictability of meaning in poetic texts, which serves an apprenticeship in tolerance for other humans. This ethics of reading is, like the apprenticeship in reading proposed by this thesis, based on the gestures and movements of engagement with texts rather than any meaning or moral abstracted from the text. In this sense, while it is at odds with many aspects of Altieri's procedure, it shares his mistrust of ethical readings centred on abstracting codes or 'social uses' from literature at the expense of careful attention to the texts themselves (RI, pp. 160-1).

Furthermore, Manson's emphasis on 'realms of meaning unforeseen by any author' calls into question any insistence on the author as repository or final arbiter of the text's meaning.

⁹⁸ These questions follow Deleuze, following Artaud, in suggesting that '[j]udgment prevents the emergence of any new mode of existence...Herein, perhaps, lies the secret: to bring into existence and not to judge. If it is so disgusting to judge, it is not because everything is of equal value, but on the contrary because what has value can be made or distinguished only by defying judgment.' (ECC, p.134)

Manson goes on to explore the consequence for the writer of a mode that seems to deny him a privileged relationship with his text, or even agency in relation to it:

The writer who accepts this as a fact of life must accept the consequences. Her writing will no longer feel like an act of communication: she may even come to fear the act of writing, dreading the moment when, Midas-like, her living thought freezes into dead matter on the page. If it is unlikely that such a writer could experience her work as in any simple sense expressive or confessional, there are nevertheless levels on which it can still be a profound act of reconciliation with our status as material beings in a material universe, animate only for the time being. (2003)

This text emphasises the reorienting of writing away from the communication or expression of predetermined thought or meaning and suggests that its primary purpose is the generation of material. This chapter will explore various modes for the generation of material in Manson's work and the consequent 'realms of meaning' opened by and in this material, via a 'practice of accepting texts for what they are.'

Chapters one and two attended to the role of polar abstraction in Altieri's thinking, emphasising its basis in trajectories between fixed points. This chapter will trace the intertwined emergences of self and meaning in the material of Manson's engagements with Mallarmé and his long poem 'Sourdough Mutation.' Here, Olson's *Special View of History* outlines a possible path away from fixed poles:

...at least by this point in the 20th century we know two things: (1) that a methodology *becomes* the object of its attention, and (2) the reason why this is true: that there is no difference between process and reality, any more than there is any longer any allowable or essential difference between energy and matter (or finite and infinite, or being and becoming, etc.) - they are polarities only, of a greater movement[...] therefore, means or method is going toward and will become the object of its attention (nature or God, say, as of physics and logic). But the unadmitted further half of the truth is that, the moment this happens, the object is changed because it is revealed to itself as much a part of process as it is of being. So the poles, then, are not quite such fixed terminals as they appear but are also developing and continuous things... (1970, pp. 41-2)

While there is certainly scope to query Olson's synthesis of Heisenberg, Schroedinger, Heraclitus and Whitehead, what is compelling is his questioning of the role of the oppositions through which binaries are traditionally established. In keeping with the role of contradiction in the previous chapter, he suggests that the polar terms in each relation (process/reality, energy/matter etc.) are important, not in and of themselves, but as means by which movement can be established. He further complicates the dynamic by suggesting that, once the methodology becomes the object of

attention, this object too becomes part of the flow of movement between poles through which the proprioceptive self emerges.

Kylie Message proposes that Deleuze and Guattari's body without organs operates a similar dynamic, in that it proposes eschewing fixed poles while retaining the momentum derived from a binary method of organisation, a process that 'encourage(s) us to remove the poles of organisation but maintain a mode of articulation' (2010, p.39). This polar dynamic in the absence of fixed poles models Deleuze's philosophy of immanence, based on 'a connectivity between relations and not between different identities' (J. Williams, 2010, p.129). Deleuze proposes that difference exists in a constant movement of connections and relations, not as an opposition between fixed identities.

Blaser extends Olson's polarity of 'developing and continuous things' in a reading of Spicer that places the body physical and poetic at and as the threshold within which the movement of polarity originates:

I seek here to draw attention to a poetry at the gates of existence because it is there that the polarity begins, elemental and inescapable. This is the necessary laying of oneself alongside another content, which brings form and keeps it alive—the double of language, where it holds to both reason and unreason, thought and unthought. (2006a, p. 142).

This reading of the 'body on the line'⁹⁹ as a permeable site of flows of movement that allows inside and outside to commingle resonates with Dworkin's 'Poetry without Organs.' That essay situates Manson's *Adjunct: An Undigest* at the limit of Deleuzian movement, arguing that 'bodies in *Adjunct*, like those "without organs"...are again and again penetrated and transfixed, confused and commixt, absorbent and absorbed...' (2007, p.185), suggesting an unfixity of the literal and poetic body that renders them and their composing and associated objects 'permeable, fungible, fluid, commingled' (p.185). This contrasts with modes of reading such as Altieri's that establish and police their own impermeable boundaries, exiling thinking that is considered either chronologically or conceptually indigestible to the endnotes where it can be sealed off from the body of the text.

⁹⁹ This line is adapted from the refrain of Nicky Melville's *Abbodies* (2017).

The quality of permeability, and its resultant flows of movement, is equally legible in Manson's poetry and translation prior and subsequent to *Adjunct* which will be the focus of this chapter, complicating the very concepts of surface and boundary that are such useful starting points for an engagement with his work. Such dynamic, unfixed comminglings offer scope to view the act of reading itself as a movement within which the text becomes both means and matter of attention, establishing a reciprocally generative relationship between text and reader, extending Manson's ethics of 'accepting texts for what they are' into the more responsive and variable acceptance of texts in what and how they become. This chapter will propose that this mode of reading places the reader as a point of polarity with the text, participating in a movement within which reader and reading also come to commingle and reciprocally determine one another.

4.1 *English in Mallarmé and Mallarmé in English*

In 'The Stadium of the Mirror,' Blaser proposes an ethics of reading that mirrors Manson's own 'practice of accepting,' setting reader and text to mutually perceive one another in a space where the author, Mallarmé's 'master,' has withdrawn his authority:

I wish to let the reader loose in the invisibility where the text leads him. He is after all a perception of the text. He may find himself inside a distaste or disgust. He may be terrified to find himself an image of the action of a world-text where he is dispossessed. It is always possible "the Master," whom the centuries have come to know as ourselves, as Mallarmé noticed, may disappear from the language, but then the language goes on speaking news of his translation (Blaser 2006b, p. 51).

Blaser deftly folds together reader and author, condensing a half-century's worth of literary theory into the flourish 'whom the centuries have come to know as ourselves' and proposes a mode of reading within which the disappearance of the 'Master,' figure of absence from 'Sonnet en -yx,' (Mallarmé 1945, p.68) is translated into, or rather within, the language of the text. These readings of Manson's translations from and reworkings of Mallarmé will attend closely to the emergence of meaning within them as constituting its own act of translation of the texts' multiple absences. Richard Owens has noted a debt to Spicer in Manson's erasings and reworkings of prior texts, but makes a distinction between their perspectives:

Where Spicer sees forms of erasure and displacement, the eradication of the old by the new, Manson seems to see an opportunity for more firmly establishing historical continuity by way of recent cultural developments, practices and strategies. This difference allows Manson to attend...to our inexplicable relationship to the matter of history and identity (2011 n.p.).

This distinction allows Manson's process to enact difference that is not negation, or at least not only negation, but also a material historical continuity in which a relationship to the material of poetic history is preserved, similar to what Hardt described as Deleuze's 'negation that opens the field for affirmation' (2003, p.116). Owens has previously noted Manson's concern with 'the determining force of...philological rootedness,' (2011, n.p.), and by labelling the relationship between identity and the matter of history as 'inexplicable,' Owens draws attention to that word's origins, central to Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition*,¹⁰⁰ in 'folding,' and emphasises that in Manson's poetry, identity cannot be unfolded from the materials, practices and strategies in which it emerges.

Manson has lived a long time with the material of the poems of Stéphane Mallarmé, as attested in the afterword to his 2012 translation of *The Poems in Verse* which describes attempting his first Mallarmé translation in 1992, some 20 years prior to the publication of the collection (Mallarmé 2012, p.280). During this period, he published the chapbook *Before and After Mallarmé*, containing fifteen translations, adaptations and re-workings of Mallarmé poems. Further translations and adaptations appeared in various journals as well as in his 2007 collection *Between Cup and Lip*, culminating in *The Poems in Verse*, a complete translation of Mallarmé's *Poésies* that he describes as 'unashamedly semantic' in its approach to the source poems (2012, p.280).

In 2006, through UBU Editions' 'Publishing the Unpublishable' digital imprint, he brought out the exuberantly un-semantic *English in Mallarmé*, a collection of conceptual poems excavated from Mallarmé's *Poésies* by erasing letters until only English words remain. This was published as a book by Blart books in 2014. In light of the centrality of the material aspects of language to Manson's poetics, this section will begin by focusing on the process employed by Manson in the creation of the visual and sonic matter of these poems, while attending to some of the meanings

¹⁰⁰ Deleuze notes the importance of folding, 'implication,' for the perseverance of difference, which cannot survive the gesture of unfolding or explication: 'strictly speaking, difference should be "inexplicable"' (DR, p.300).

immanent in the resultant material. Rather than a 'resistant stance' based on 'going limp and falling down, amongst the bits and scraps of linguistic matter' (Ngai 2006, p.297), Manson reduces the monolith of Mallarmé's *Poésies* to 'bits and scraps of linguistic matter' that require a responsive, nimble readerly stance if they are not to be entirely resistant to the act of meaning. While poetry of the avant-garde prizes the sharing of meaning-making between reader and writer,¹⁰¹ Manson's gesture in this work is more extreme, surrendering all responsibility for meaning to the interaction between reader and fragmented text. In this mode of reading, the polar dynamic within which meaning emerges in 'the shared matter of the language' (Manson 2017b) is entirely particular to the person of the reader, rendering each variant reading somewhat unabstractable.

The opening poem of Manson's *English in Mallarmé* is anthologized in Kenneth Goldsmith and Craig Dworkin's *Against Expression*, where it is introduced in the following terms:

Of all erasure projects, starting with Tom Phillips's *A Humument*, Peter Manson performs one of the most interesting variations in *English in Mallarmé* (New York: ubu Editions, 2006); Manson read through Mallarmé's collected poems, eliminating everything that was not also an English word. He retains both cognates such as *solitude* and false cognates such as *chat* (French for "cat"), and he mines those English words hidden inside the French (e.g., *pet* or *tit* in *petit*). (2011, p.395)

The comparison with *A Humument* is a geographically logical, if procedurally somewhat misleading, one. While it could be seen as a precursor to Manson's work in that it, too, is created from an existing work through a process of erasure, the differences in process between the two works are more revealing than the similarities. Phillips's work takes a randomly chosen Victorian novel and creates an entirely new artwork by selecting individual words and phrases to retain and obliterating the rest of the text with drawings and collage. Manson's process is only very superficially similar: he starts with a text with which he has already been intimately involved with as a translator for a number of years; he erases (or rather conceals from view) those elements of Mallarmé's words that are not also English words. There is a degree of choice involved, in that decisions have to be made

¹⁰¹ Quartermain places this poetics of materiality/ indeterminacy in a vastly expanded historical context, stretching from pre-historic cave painting to Marshall Berman (1992, pp.5-7) and flagging a role for the reader that is both constructive and ethical: 'The act of writing, or rather enunciating, making "sense", articulating (or not), in constituting the poem becomes part of its 'content'...compositional procedures are part of the writing and the reader has her or his part to do' (p.7)

within individual words regarding which potential nugget of English to keep and which to occlude, with the cited ‘pet/tit’ providing an excellent example: not only are the two marked words present, there is also potential for ‘it,’ one of a relatively limited store of pronouns available for excavation from French. Despite an inevitable degree of individual choice at the level of the word-fragment, however, the project’s commitment to legitimate, accurately spelled English is applied with complete stringency, to the extent that a possible ‘hero’ is rejected on the grounds of an accented ‘é’ in the source word ‘*héros*.’ (2014b, p.39).

The spaces thus excavated are preserved and highlighted by maintaining the punctuation of the source poems,¹⁰² shaping and clustering the shards of words that remain (Dillon 2014, p.i). The lurking presence of the remains of words that have not, as will be established, been erased but rather whitened to invisibility, is signalled by the eerie sight of punctuation marks hovering in thin air, most striking in the case of ‘A (from Mallarmé’s ‘*L’Azur*’) which closes on the wordless repeated exclamation:

is ant . _ ! ! ! ! _ (2014b, p.18)

This non-erasure incorporates silence in the form of space (‘silence as both origin and aftermath,’ McGuinness 2009, p.816) within the body of the poem, leading to a paradoxical reduction of the text’s material possibilities: by encouraging the spread of silence along the lines of Mallarmé’s poems, they become difficult, if not impossible to read aloud; the imposition of blank space serves to silence the sonic dimension that is so essential to the proliferation of meaning in the source poems and, as shall be explored in the next section, in Manson’s own work. This leaves texts whose material is primarily visual and, unexpectedly in a work which enacts such violence on its source’s materials and meanings, semantic. Derrida’s *Double Session* ponders the complicated, multiply gestural materiality of Mallarmé’s ‘Mimique,’ ‘haunted by the ghost or grafted onto the arborescence of another text’ (1981, p.202), and Manson’s violent

¹⁰² Honouring, perhaps, Derrida’s musing on the work of white space in the necessary ‘decapitation and ungluing of the text’ and Mallarmé’s identification of the role of punctuation which ‘disposed upon white paper, already produces signification there’ (Derrida, 1981, p. 178)

exorcism or excision of his *Poésies* deprives its 'other text' of much of the matter of its sound and silence. What remains can still be read, but by other means.

Derrida's own reading of Mallarmé's '*Notes en vue du livre*' effects its own accidental whiting-out, presenting a version of the source text that has smoothed out many of its material difficulties visible in the more recently published transcription versions:

intellectuelle du
un de ses aspects. L'armature d'un concept
poème, tient dans l'espace qui isole les strophes et
se dissimule et a lieu
parmi le blanc du papier ; silence significatif qu'il
beau
n'est pas moins difficile de composer, que les
méritoire
glorieux
vers.

(Mallarmé 1998, p.1051)

The overwriting of Mallarmé's notes, with their stacked variant meanings, has had its difficulties rationalised, smoothed into these more readily meaningful lines:

The intellectual armature of the
poem, conceals itself and - takes place - holds in the space that
isolates the stanzas and
among the blankness of the white paper; a significant silence that it
is no less lovely to compose than
verse.

(Derrida 1981, p. 230)

One of Manson's tasks, in *English in Mallarmé*, is to do justice to the difficulty of composing meaningful silence, much as his 2016 translation *The marrying of Hérodiade* will honour the folds of potential meanings in *Les noces d'Hérodiade* (Mallarmé 1992, pp.275-94) left unresolved at Mallarmé's

death. The latter translation privileges no single choice among the variants proposed by Mallarmé but translates them all, preserving the original text's markings and underscorings:

As rupture
 That in ecstasy
 faith
According to a frank horror
At will
In the frank scission
 frank separation
 Rather Suppresses forgets and
Rather suppresses or cuts
 faith
A frank rupture
 horror
 The old discord

 With the body

(Manson 2016, p.18)

In that work, Manson enacts a fidelity to the text's construction that is in keeping with what Colebrook has proposed as Deleuze's 'ethics of reading':

If we take Deleuze's definition of life seriously – that it is not a given whole with potentials that necessarily unfold through time, but is a *virtual* power to create potentials through contingent and productive encounters – then this will relate directly to an ethics of reading. A text is immanent to life; it creates new connections, new styles for thinking and new images and ways of seeing. To read a text is to understand the problem that motivated its assemblage. The more faithful we are to a text – not the text's ultimate message but its construction, or the way in which it produces relations among concepts, images, affects, neologisms and already existing vocabularies – the more we will have an experience of a style of thought not our own, an experience of the power to think in creative styles as such. (2010 p.4, emphasis original)

The marrying of Hérodiade represents an extreme act of fidelity to the materials and relations of the source text's construction, modelling an ethics of reading that allows their potential meanings to unfold 'through contingent and productive encounters.' In what follows I will attempt a similar

act of fidelity to the materials and relations of his *English in Mallarmé* and attend to some of the stutterings of style that surface in the readings.¹⁰³

The collection's opening poem, a nameless take on 'Salut,' forms a striking shape on the page's surface. Uniquely in this collection, the original punctuation is dropped and this, combined with the severe whiting-out the source text must endure to yield English, leaves a stark structure inviting viewing as well as reading. On the pages of the anthology *Against Expression* it looks like this:

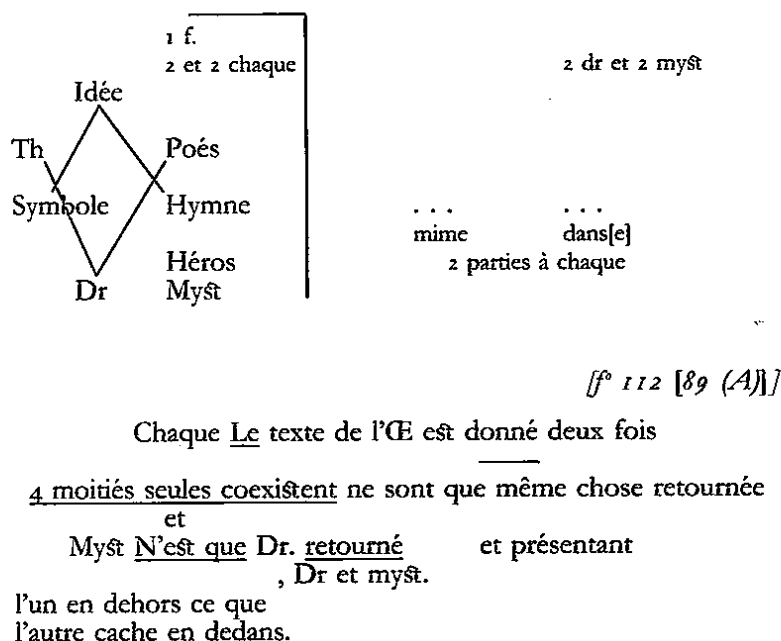
	cum	vie	
	sign		coup
	loin	no	troupe
sir	main		
No	on		diver
Am			up
us	ant fast		coup
lot			hive
	bell	age	
an	rain	me on	tang
porter	bout		
Solitude		toil	
import			
so	not	toil	

Figure 6 (Manson 'Salut' in Dworkin and Goldsmith, p. 395)

The first legible element is the shape of the work itself, inviting the possibility of what Massumi describes as the 'abstract opening of vision onto thought' (2011, p.137) that precedes and then coexists with the reading of the verbal matter forming the work's abstract surface. Massumi proposes that '[a]bstract art returns vision kinaesthetically to its own self-creative activity. Vision is remitted to the felt activity of its coming eventfully into itself: a proprioception *of* vision' (p.137,

¹⁰³ The implications of a Deleuzian 'stuttering in language' (ECC, 107-113) will be explored in the last section of this chapter.

emphasis original). This 'kinaesthetic' mode of vision captures something of the peculiarly haptic sensation of groping among the matter of this text (Noland 2009, pp.77, 100-1), feeling one's way through the poem in order to be able to view and thereby read it. In this way 'a proprioception of vision' allows vision to feel itself into being in the same gestures within which the text's meanings become tangible and visible. The shape of the poem invites the eye to read down and across the poem as well as left to right. The first stanza's 'cum vie/ sign troupe' is thereby dispersed into the half-rhyming groups 'cum sign loin sir' and 'vie coup troupe,' with the interfolded 'no main' emphasising that neither reading fully occludes the other. The final stanza's spacing similarly suggests parallel fragments of provisional meaning, 'solitude import so' and 'toil not toil.' The second stanza's parallel columns, with the fragments 'on' and 'ant fast' isolated in between, encourage the eye to weave back and forth, folding elements from each column together through one of the central fulcrums in a manner that recalls some of the complex foldings envisioned by Mallarmé for his *livre*.



(Mallarmé 1998, p.988)

These sketches emphasise that his book requires a double performance, and that each iteration of performance reveals one reading while hiding the other from view. What is striking in Manson's

poem is that the arbitrariness of the text's material form means that it is, and remains, open to a multiplicity of simultaneous possible readings. If Mallarmé's *Livre* was conceived as 'a given whole with potentials that necessarily unfold through time,' Manson's text comes closer to constituting a site and substance within which 'to create potentials through contingent and productive encounters.' The rest of this section will trace the ways in which meanings emerge and disperse within the matter of the text, an apprenticeship in reading that will then be extended to considering how such processes unfold in the very different material of 'Sourdough Mutation.' Looking at the outline of the poem again, the constellation rather than its constituent stars, the shape suggests a goblet, embodying in its own form the meaning of the lines that Manson will later render 'No thing, this foam, a virgin verse/ to outline nothing but the cup' (Mallarmé 2012, p.9). This desire to 'outline nothing but the cup' goes some way to explaining why this poem, unlike all others in the collection, does not preserve the source poem's punctuation, which would outline the shipwrecked source poem's lines as well as the cup itself. Looking at the same poem as it appears on the pages of *English in Mallarmé* reveals subtle differences in spacing that distinguish it visually from the version published in *Against Expression* while shedding light on the manner and matter of its outlining:

	cum	vie	
	sign		coup
loin	no		troupe
sir	main		
No	on		diver
Am			up
us	ant fast		coup
lot			hive
	bell		age
an	rain	me	on tang
porter	bout		
Solitude		toil	
import			
so		not	toil

Figure 7 (Manson, 'Salut' 2014b, p. 1)

The origins of these subtle differences in spacing become clear when the text is copied into a word document and it emerges that nothing has been erased from Mallarmé's poem, and the process or constraint described as 'erasure' is, in fact, a partial re-writing in white that retains, hidden in its spaces, all elements of Mallarmé's original.

This discovery forces the reader to question the very status of this work as an erasure project, in that it has blanked out or silenced much of the *Poésies* matter but removed nothing. The whiteness of Manson's overwriting of Mallarmé thus serves as a disarticulating rather than an articulate silence. Gavronsky posits Zukofsky's uses, acknowledged and otherwise, of Mallarmé in his own work as a 'translational mode of reading, ingesting and making the other one's own' (2000, p.72). While that mode of reading aptly describes the perfectly faithful, entirely transformative reading Manson performs in some of his other translations of these poems (2007 p.5, 2005) in this work he renders the poems indigestible through estrangement and if they are to be read at all, they demand readings that stutter their way through the text's shattered materials and potentially meaningful whiteness.

The opening poem's figure-8/ goblet/ constellation outline opens on the first iteration of 'cum,' a word that, given Mallarmé's repetitions of the word '*écume*' is destined to liberally sprinkle Manson's text. Mallarmé's '*écume*' has been interpreted in a Freudian light, linking it to ejaculation and, by extension, what has been called 'the disseminating power of language' (Wolf 1987, p.89) or 'SPERM, the burning lava, milk, spume, froth, or dribble of the seminal liquor' (Derrida 1981, p.266) In these circumstances it is both materially and conceptually fitting that a word that might, under a more semantic process of translation, be rendered foam, froth, spume or scum becomes, under Manson's self-imposed constraint, 'cum.' The process by which '*écume*' becomes 'cum' has the potential to shed further light on the material transformations at work in these poems. Manson has written, in the afterword of *The Poems in Verse*, of the magical qualities of the French poetic line:

There's something magical about French verse, the way in which a sequence of words like these from Mallarmé's 'Le Tombeau de Charles Baudelaire':

Contre le marbre vainement de Baudelaire

might be counted as eight syllables of prose, or twelve of verse (where the 'e muet', the silent or elided e, is artificially given full syllabic force). This feeling for verse as something which has been breathed into, inflated or made effervescent by the sighing of the mute e, lies behind the famous opening line of the *Poésies*,

Rien, cette écume, vierge vers

(Nothing, this foam, a virgin verse),

and, remembering that the only thing which makes a poet a poet (in Plato's *Ion*) is that she has been breathed into by the gods, the line of French verse comes to seem remarkably poet-like, more human than material.

(Mallarmé 2012, pp.282-3)

If the trick that turns a line of prose into one of poetry lies in breathing into the silent 'e' then the act of ridding the foam of its inflatable 'e's (by turning 'écume' into 'cum') knocks the air out of the French poetic line, returning the poetic process itself, and not just the words of the poems, from the realms of the human to pure material. In such instances, the blank space overlaid on Mallarmé's words proves a deadening rather than a resonant silence.

Nevertheless, where there are words the eye will seek meaning. If these poems put almost intolerable strain on the reader's access to the shared material of the language, they encourage a form of pareidolia, the act of discerning patterns or shapes in unrelated sense data, that is one of the mind's ways of abstracting meaning from otherwise indigestible matter. This mode of pattern-seeking allows the reader to remain faithful to the ways this text 'produces relations among concepts, images, affects, neologisms and already existing vocabularies' (Colebrook 2010, p.4) and what follows traces one possible set of relations and affects.

The text teems with creaturely movement: ants swarm the pages, along with more than one 'rat' and a 'louse tin,' before the poem's human characters (a 'son', a 'ma' and a 'pa') begin to muster. In 'TOAST FUN,' the line 'Ma son pa vain' (p.39) draws the reader into an entire family revealed in the poem's process of occlusion: from the foam of the possessive adjectives 'ma' and 'son' spring a mother and a son, tormented by a father, 'pa' who takes life from the negative particle 'pas.' This fractious, daughterless family forms, with 'po' (possibly the diminished shade of the writer whom Mallarmé would have rendered Edgar Poe) the main *dramatis personae* of these poems. The family's voyage ends in a poem excavated from one of the many sonnets (p.87):

SO NET.

Me quins refer no Pap
 amuse ire ave
 ruin ,pa mill cum
 So hyacinth , loin, ours trio ha .
 our id ave silences ,
 era pa vid
 an bat as so
 tout site ho pays .
 Ma aim fruits gale
 da doc man save gale:
 late chair hum in pa man !
 pied not our son ,
 pen plus lo temps per men
 , in antique am zone.

Here, the lines ‘Pa mill cum,’ ‘Ma aim fruits gale,’ the intrusion of a character called ‘da’ (a ‘doc man’), and the lines ‘ho pays’ and ‘pied not our son’ suggest that, beneath the threshold of the semantically legible, a drama of family origins is unfolding. The stuff of fatherhood and fertility has already cropped up in ‘OM AGE’ (p.75). Once again, we are in the company of Pa and son. References to ‘bar vari utile semen’ and ‘Sour Vas’ suggest an elliptical discussion of the benefits of vasectomy, possibly taking place (‘Pa son chant ref’) side by side on the terraces at a football match. However, in keeping with a mode of relation shared by these poems and common patterns of male conversation, there is much that remains indirectly expressed woven in the material of what is said.

There are passages of stark beauty in this work, all the more eerie for having been revealed by chance.¹⁰⁴ In ‘CANT SAINT AN’ (p.32) excavated from *Cantique de Saint Jean*, which will be returned to in the next section, the words appear to be on the point of drifting out of each other’s orbits altogether, in keeping with the source poem’s theme of decapitation:

so halt
 nature exalt
 sit redescend
 Incandescent
 me
 ploy
 Tout an frisson
 is on

¹⁰⁴ Foucault’s description of how chance speaks in Roussel’s work is germane here: ‘Chance does not speak essentially through words...it is the reserve from which the words flow, this absolute distance of language from itself, which makes it speak’ (2006, p.41)

These lines' rhymes and half-rhymes create a soundscape whose echoes call across the void between them, holding the poem and the reader in a space where matter, in the form of fragments of black pigment in white and the sounds released from them by chance, has meaning. In *L'action restreinte* Mallarmé observed that «on n'écrit pas, lumineusement, sur champ obscur, l'alphabet des astres, seul, ainsi s'indique, ébauché ou interrompu ; l'homme poursuit noir sur blanc» (1945, p.370) (or 'we do not write, luminously, on a dark field, only the alphabet of the stars reveals itself this way, sketched or interrupted; man pursues black on white,' author's translation) In *English in Mallarmé*, Manson imposes the alphabet of the stars on the *Poésie's* black on white, and its weird light reveals ants and rodents where once there were fauns and mermaids. Words are forced to come to some form of understanding with unfamiliar neighbours: 'an' precedes 'no,' 'chair' 'pain' and 'on' in the space of three lines, before finding a more comfortable spot before 'urn.'

The omnipresent, perhaps omniscient, ants, primarily derived from the present participle ending -ant, are by turns noun ('mend ants'), verb ('ant us') and adjective ('is ant'), before providing, in the penultimate SONNET, the whispered promise of ' an ant sir ' (p.81). All answers in this text are provisional, born in the reader's viewing and voicing of fragments that are, paradoxically, both a concrete rubble of linguistic material and language at its most abstract. Manson uses a parody of Mallarmé's own 'significant silence' to set an unauthorised version of *Les mots anglais* (1945, p.889) stuttering out of *Poésies*, creating a 'non-preexistent foreign language *within* his own language [which] makes the language itself scream, stutter, stammer, or murmur' (Deleuze ECC, p.109-10). If, following Deleuze, we understand the 'poetic comprehension of language' to engage with 'language stretched across an abstract and infinitely varied line' (ECC, p.109), it falls to the reader to pick her way, attentively and as faithfully as possible, along this wobbling line.

The rat-infested final lines of 'HO AGE' (p.74) offer tentative support to this mode of reading. Mallarmé's source lines read '*Le sens trop précis rature/ Ta vague littérature*' (or, 'too precise

sense scores out/ your vague literature,’ 2012, pp.180-1). In these lines, Mallarmé counsels against the imposition of meaning on the languid smoke-rings of his poems. This counsel applies at least as well to the fragments of flotsam forming Manson’s poems. Riddled with blanks as they are, they cannot withstand the pressure to yield stable meanings. If they are not to be completely erased, meaning needs the time and space to emerge in readings that move attentively within their material so that ‘our thought is – like the syntax – perpetually shifting from one perspective to another’ (Quartermain, p.71). Such a mode of reading is at play in releasing from the French’s ‘erasure’ and ‘literature’ a pair of English rats:

op précis rat re

Ta vague lit rat . (2014b, p.74)

The creature known as a book-worm in English is a *rat de la bibliothèque* in French, a library rat, gnawing through the stacks with his sharp incisors, as Manson’s whiting-out has gnawed through the *Poésies*, leaving the nest of fragments for which these lines give thanks. Simon Perril has proposed that, in Sean Bonney’s Baudelaire translations, ‘the poem’s formal reality is smashed up by the emergence of new content,’ and the resulting poems ‘graphically notate that smashed-up formal reality’ (2015, p.105). While a similar process of destructive emergence seems to mark the formal reality of Manson’s poems, it is one where fragmentation plays a paradoxical role: what appears to be a smashed surface is, in fact, one where white ink has concealed rather than destroyed the source poems’ matter. This complex interplay of apparent fragmentation and smooth surface, already noted in ‘Canzon,’ will also mark Manson’s ‘Sourdough Mutation.’

It could well be argued that these readings, by imposing a ‘too precise sense’ on these slight and fragmented texts, risk doubly erasing the erasures of this vaguest of literatures. However, through an open, mobile attention to the sense and substance of these poems, an ethics of reading emerges that allows meaning to unfold as and where it will. This mode of reading has the potential to move much more freely in some of Manson’s other work, in particular ‘Sourdough Mutation.’

4.2 Hollow rhymes and *holorimes*

This section will be guided by the idea of a *lecture en creux*, tracing the meanings hollowed into the text's written surface in the process of writing itself, reversing the space of the outside into writing that can only be read indirectly.¹⁰⁵ The reader gets a glimpse of Manson's own process of seeking patterns in the hollowed grooves of language's material surfaces in his readings of *Poésies* flagged in the title page's 'THEPOEMSINVERSE' that signals at their reversal of the source poems. The role of pareidolia in the hollowing of 'a foreign language within his own language' creates tensions that pull at the very notion of an 'unashamedly semantic' translation in *The Poems in Verse*. By attending closely to what Manson has proposed as 'a permissible minimum of pareidolia' (2012, p.285) in these translations, it is possible to get a sense of his own attention to the contingent interplay of matter and meaning in his readings of Mallarmé.

Manson suggests that 'the most contentious aspect of the book might, in the end, be its presentation as parallel text,' joking that 'given Mallarmé's penchant for seeing the book as a tomb for the writer's soul, I'm afraid that a parallel text might sentence him to eternal unrest' (Mallarmé 2012, p.285). However, by choosing to present the translations as parallel text (as Mallarmé did not in the case of his Poe translations, Mallarmé 2012, p.285; 1945, p.229), Manson is allowing for at least the possibility, if not the inevitability, of reading over and back between the two.

In *Diagrammatic Writing*, Joanna Drucker jokes (graphically) that:

¹⁰⁵ The image comes from etching or *intaglio* (Merriam-Webster), and has come to signify what can be read or inferred from absence (Wordreference, Linguee, examples 1,6), and cognates are employed to implicate absence and meaning in Derrida ('*La signification ne se forme ainsi qu'au creux de la différence*, 1967, p.101) or 'meaning can thus only form itself in the hollow of *différance*, author's translation) and Roland Barthes ('*comme support de l'inscription, le mur, le panneau contiennent le geste même qui incise, divise, met dans la matière pleine un creux signifiant*. (*Oeuvres complètes* II, 509)' in French, 2009, p.118) or 'as a platform of inscription the wall, the panel, contain the very gesture that incises, divides, puts into the whole matter a signifying hollow' author's translation.)

Juxtaposition pretends to parity. In actuality, the urge to competition belies this illusion. A strong tension between either/or struggles with the equally developed impulse towards both/and.

Juxtaposition pretends to parity. The sheer force of the space between in relation to the condition of alignment creates an unresolvable situation. These are not the same text.

(2013, p.14)

This is especially true in the case of parallel translations, where the eye is constantly drawn back to the original text even when, as is frequently the case, the reader does not understand the source language. In this way, the parallel texts become one bilingual text, read over and back across the gutter much as *Un coup de dés* is.

This type of shape-seeking reading is visible in the opening stanza of the opening poem,

‘Salut.’

SALUT

*Rien, cette écume, vierge vers
A ne désigner que la coupe;
Telle loin se noie une troupe
De sirènes mainte à l'envers.*

*Nous naviguons, ô mes divers
Amis, moi déjà sur la poupe
Vous l'avant fastueux qui coupe
Le flot de foudres et d'hivers;*

*Une ivresse belle m'engage
Sans craindre même son tangage
De porter debout ce salut*

*Solitude, récif, étoile
A n'importe ce qui valut
Le blanc souci de notre toile.*

Greeting

*No thing, this foam, a virgin verse
to outline nothing but the cup;
as, far away, a siren troupe
Is drowned, and mainly bottoms-up*

*My divers friends, we navigate,
me already on the poop-
deck, you the showboat prow that cuts
the winter flood-tide, thunder-struck;*

*a lovely drunkenness enlists
me, with no fear of pitch and toss
to bear upright this benison*

*Solitude, reef, star
to whatever this is that was worth
the white disquiet of our cloth.*

(2012, pp.8-9)

The mirrored endings of the opening lines are turned on their heads by the interpellation of ‘bottoms-up.’ This felicitous choice not only rhymes with ‘cup,’ it re-introduces the connotation of ‘cheers!’ lost when *Salut* was translated as ‘Greeting.’ The next stanza’s ‘divers’ offers a subject rhyme for the previous stanza’s plunging sirens, as does ‘showboat’ as a nautically-themed rendering of ‘fastueux’ (or ‘sumptuous’). These examples illustrate what David Lloyd has described as Manson ‘finding an alternative set of echoes and correspondences at the conceptual level of the

poetry that function at least partially as rhyme does for Mallarmé' (2012 n.p.), with the correspondences only made legible by the decision to present the texts together.

The third stanza avoids the traps lurking in the rhymes and beverages of the original, while signalling the bumpy ride ahead in its choice of the verb 'enlists.' The image of looking after a beverage in turbulent conditions is dispelled by the replacement of the 'toast' by a 'benison,' turning it from beverage to blessing but also, in its combination of *beni* (blessed) and *son* (sound), standing for the poem and the process of translating the poem, remaining attentive to its blessed sound throughout the turbulent process of translation. This act of attending carefully to the material of the poem in the process of translating it is fulfilled in the closing lines 'to whatever **this** is that was worth/ the white disquiet of our cloth,' where the word 'this' reaches across the gutter and includes the source poem in a common purpose, a shared reading that was worth the imposition of black worry-lines on the white of the page and that, in enacting the process of translation, 'is the thing itself,' recalling not only Mathews, Quartermain and Manson's own formulations of the poem or translation as autotelic entity outlined in the previous chapter, but Beckett's description of writing that is 'not *about something*; *it is that something itself*' (1972, p.14).

Manson's translations emphasise choices at the level of the word as a way of 'translating the process of translation,' (Mathews 2006 n.p.) with meaning emerging in the materials of both languages, making itself seen and felt in movement within and between them. I would argue that similar processes of emergence take place within and between modes in 'Sourdough Mutation,' in a manner that is inflected by Manson's long engagement with the interplay of sound and sense in French poetics, and that paying close attention to the ways of meaning built into his translations equips the reader to move more surely in the material of his own poems.

The pareidolia for which Manson excuses himself cues the reader into shapes found by Manson in his own readings, of which his choice of translation is the only remaining trace. This can be seen in 'Renouveau' ('Renewal') where the lines '*Et creusant de ma face une fosse à mon rêve,/Mordant la terre chaude, où poussent les lilas*' (p.34) are rendered 'digging my dream a grave with

my own face, biting the hot terrain where lilacs push' (p.35). The choice of 'push' emphasises the double meaning available in the French verb *pousser* (to push/ to grow), where the more semantically obvious option would utterly obliterate the original's doubling. Conversely, maintaining the sound of *terre* in 'terrain' effects a slight estrangement of the semantic meaning by choosing a latinate cognate over the more literally earthy 'earth.' 'Each language has different eyes sitting inside its words,' as Herta Müller put it (2012, n.p.), and these are points where Manson shows them looking back at the reader.

In the poem beginning '*Une negresse par le démon secouée,*' the line '*Ce goinfre s'apprête à de rusés travaux*' is translated as 'the glutton's dressed for cunning stunts' (p.25), yielding a spoonerism that exists only in the possible English synonyms for the source poem's sly or clever works. Manson draws on French literature's long history of word-play based on the transposition of phonemes in his creation of a poetics whose visual and sonic representations are in constant tension, undermining, over-riding, occasionally even clarifying each other. Pedagogical materials on the poetry of wordplay, covering homophonic poetry and forms such as *contrepèterie* (a more distinguished relative of the 'spoonerism' in English, as attested by the richly foot-noted twelve pages of its Wikipedia entry) and the mirroring of syllables in chiasmus, traces the development of these traditions from a 16th century sonnet by Pierre de Ronsard to a 20th century poem by Raymond Queneau (CNED 2016, pp.237, 252). Similar techniques flourished and proliferated in surrealist circles, in such works as Robert Desnos's *Rose Sélavy* and Gherasim Luca's *La proie s'ombre*, finding perhaps their most complex manifestations in the works of Raymond Roussel, whose processes Foucault described as imposing

a formless anxiety, diverging and yet centrifugal, directed not toward the most withheld secrets but towards the imitation and the transmutation of the most visible forms: each word at the same time energized and drained, filled and emptied by the possibility of there being yet another meaning, this one or that one, or neither one nor the other but a third, or none (2006, p.14).

This centrifugal anxiety, as will be explored in the chapter's final sections, will animate the reading of 'Sourdough Mutation,' where Manson's interlingual punning sets traps for the reader-aloud that keep them constantly alert to the abyss between languages and within language itself,

legible in the hollows of his wordplay's 'cunning stunts.' Alphonse Allais, an almost forgotten 'prodigy of word-play' (Noirot-Maguire 2006, p.62, author's translation), specialised in holorhymes,¹⁰⁶ 'couplets of lines that are written differently but become full homophones when read aloud' (Dillon 2017 n.p.). This practice, which will be a significant influence on the material doubling of 'Sourdough Mutation,' can already be heard at points such as these where Manson's translations hold a mirror up to their already doubled forms. The effect is what Noirot-Maguire described as a '*hypertrophie du signifiant*,' (p.62) an 'excessive growth of the meaningful' which she reads as a point of similarity between Allais' practice and Mallarmé's, and which the next sections will extend to 'Sourdough Mutation's' material conditions.

4.3 'jubilant/ assumption of a compound sonic icon': from reflection to echo(self)location

While the doubling of textual material will find its fullest expression in 'Sourdough Mutation,' it can also be clearly seen and heard lurking in 'The Baffle Stage's 'I is this constellated cupid stunt,' (PFR, p.8) and the 'formless anxiety' attendant on the emergence of meanings in Manson's *Poems of Frank Rupture* is mirrored in the complex and ultimately sound-based composition of 'The Baffle Stage's' 'histrionic "I" con/-structed in the air by jubilant/ assumption of a compound sonic 'icon' (p.8). Throughout the book, the poems' own sound structures seem to poke fun at the reader's urge to fill in gaps. Meaning-making is constantly stymied or deferred as one is forced to stop, adjust position, and re-consider: in its incessant modulations, it is both the movement of sound in 'an amodal in-between of hearing and proprioception on a border zone with thought' (Massumi 2011, p.145) and the groping of ear, eye and voice along and within the text's matter through which the space of this in-between zone is made.

¹⁰⁶ His most famous poem reads 'Par les bois du Djinn, où s'entasse de l'effroi/Parle et bois du gin ou cent tasses de lait froid.' (Allais 2018a) or 'Through the Djinn's woods where fright is piled/ Talk and drink gin or a hundred glasses of cold milk' (author's translation)

Betteridge's work on Manson's language surfaces emphasises an intentionality behind the doubled meanings of Manson's wordplay that recalls the 'centrifugal' anxiety Foucault traced to Roussel's transmutation of visible forms. Accidents of meaning do not arise serendipitously in textual play. These readings and hearings have been intentionally built into the material of the text's visual and sonic surfaces in order to 'stage a dynamics of concealment and disclosure' (Betteridge 2018, p.3). This painstaking crafting of layered, potentially perceptible, meanings in the poems' language surfaces both '(solicit) dynamic subject positions' (p.10) and force the reader to attend to the movement of her own subject positions within the text's material, allowing their surfaces to open into a 'flexible core' (Gizzi, 1999) within which meaning can take place. The following sections will attend to the movements by which words are 'energized and drained, filled and emptied' in *Poems of Frank Rupture* and the proprioceptive emergence of subject positions and meanings within these movements of abstraction.

Poems of Frank Rupture takes its title from Manson's translation of *Cantique de Saint Jean*, the second prelude to Mallarmé's unfinished play 'Les noces d'Hérodiade':

as frank rupture
rather holds in check or settles
the old argument
with the body (2012, p.86)

These lines trace the slowed-down arc of the trajectory of John the Baptist's head from the moment the scythe severs it to its bounce on the ground. The quiver in the vertebrae survives what should be the moment of death, the head stubbornly continues looking back at the backbone over which it was once the lonely watchman and, in the final act of sundering, frank rupture (which Manson elsewhere renders 'frank scission' 'frank separation,' 2016, p.18) is presented as settling, solving, holding in check, the head's 'old argument with the body.' The 'Free Poetry' pamphlet of Manson's translations of *The Marrying of Herodiade* from which these alternative translations come, offers the possibility that the act of rupture cuts 'The old discord/ With the body,' with the threads of the argument between mind and body pulled tight into a cord that can be solved by severing. This focus on some implications of the title *Poems of Frank Rupture* is offered in order to establish

that the title alerts its reader to the fact that similar acts of severing will take place, at the level of the phoneme, the syllable, the line and the stanza, within and between the poems of the collection and that, while these acts might be productively considered in the context of ‘the old argument with the body’ it is also essential to remember that this argument, within which meaning is made, takes place *within* the body.

Severing voids the word of its status as a fixed unit of meaning, making it instead a source of sonic material from which the poem generates itself, in keeping with the work of Mallarmé’s ‘Crise de Vers’: ‘The pure work implies the disappearance of the poet as speaker, yielding his initiative to words, which are mobilized by the shock of their difference’ (2001, p.25). Gizzi, refers to a similar tendency in his own poetics as ‘diastolic,’ a reference to the heart’s emptying itself of blood with every beat, creating ‘a core that is empty, a kind of holding open to allow poetic tendencies of cadence, form, tone, coloring to move through a flexible core—a force that is both a construction of self and an emptying of self—’ (1999, p.2), and these gestures of self-emptying mirror what De’Ath has described as Finelli’s proposal of abstraction as a movement of ‘emptying out’ the concrete rather than a concept that exists in opposition to it (De’Ath 2017, p.23). These acts of yielding and emptying create the material within which the construction of meaning and self becomes possible, with words jostled into meaning in the act of speaking.

‘The Baffle Stage’ precedes ‘Sourdough Mutation’ in *Poems of Frank Rupture*, its John the Baptist-like position and form offering ways of reading that poem’s materials and meanings. ‘The Baffle Stage’ takes its title from a play on Lacan’s ‘Mirror Stage,’ the essay in which Lacan traces the origins of the infant’s conception of the ‘I’ to the moment when, from the age of six months on, he recognises the image in a mirror as himself, adding that ‘It is an experience that leads us to oppose any philosophy directly issuing from the *Cogito*’ (Lacan 1980, p.1). This experience would appear, then, to directly repudiate Cartesian mind-body dualism, constituting an act of philosophical frank rupture in its own right. The pre-linguistic ‘I’ available to the reflected (though not reflecting) infant, is destined only to ‘asymptotically approach the subject’s becoming (p.2). By

overwriting the infant's 'jubilant assumption of his specular image' (p.2) with 'a histrionic "I" constructed in the air by jubilant/ assumption of a compound sonic icon' (Manson PFR, p.8) Manson flags that the self emerges through sound, emphasising 'proprioception's link to prephonemic vocalities' and the origin of a sense of self in pre-linguistic babbling (McCaffery 2001, p.48).

Furthermore, this 'I' is built (in a broken act of construction split across two lines) in the air, a 'compound sonic icon' that is abstract in Massumi's 'incorporeal' sense and built of sound in a manner that will, in the case of 'Sourdough Mutation,' come to mean in the way music does, in the 'in-between of hearing and proprioception' (Massumi 2011, p.147). In fact, Lacan's paper provides terms that 'asymptotically approach' a description of the sonic manoeuvres that will make up 'Sourdough Mutation': in outlining how the formation of the 'I' in dreams is symbolised by a fortress or a stadium, structures which are replicated in the mental plane via the 'mechanisms of oppositional neurosis – inversion, isolation, reduplication, undoing what has been done and displacement' (p.5), he brings us very close to mechanisms that, based as they are on 'a language technique,' prefigure the techniques Manson will deploy in 'Sourdough Mutation,' 'obsessive inversion and its isolating processes' originating in a stage that predates 'the time at which the specular *I* turns into the social *P*' (p.9). Manson's own obsessive inversion and isolating processes derive from a replacement of the specular *I* with an *I* whose origins are a compound of the sonic, visual and semantic matter of language.

Greg Thomas's review of *Poems of Frank Rupture* elaborates on the construction and deployment of these processes:

Manson seems to extract the cognitive logic of the paranoid episode – a kind of excoriating self-scrutiny – and explore its creative possibilities when turned on language itself: words and phrases attack and rebuild themselves, in an impersonal yet rejuvenative-seeming verbal play. 'The Baffle Stage' predicts this cycle of linguistic destruction and regeneration with its visions of self-perpetuating biological systems... (2015, p.56)

In the 'cycle of linguistic destruction and regeneration' identified by Thomas, the first organism to be destroyed, flagging the self-destruction necessary for self-perpetuation, broken down to produce the conditions for 'Sourdough Mutation,' is 'The Baffle Stage' itself, which self-digests to become matter from which the longer poem can generate itself. 'The Baffle Stage' consists of 44

four-line stanzas with an alternate rhyme scheme. The lines are mostly iambic pentameter, departing from the syllabics more typical of Manson's work. Folded within what Thomas refers to as its 'scatological preoccupations' (p.56) are lines that serve as commentary on the poem itself and the wider book: 'there is no point in doing what I do,' (p.5) 'the poem never wanted to mean shit' (p.6) and, in a foretaste of 'Sourdough's techniques 'a null canal, a plan, no palindrome' (p.4), taking poem, poet and reader to task for engaging in gestures of meaning-making seemingly invited by the poem's playful structure and surface.

In the lines 'the written word's dysmorphophobia/the arms, the legs, the ears, the eyes must go' (p.6), the poem is presented as a patient with such a severe case of body dysmorphia that only extreme acts of amputation will salve its psychic distress, once again emphasising the importance of cutting, sundering and decapitation in the creation of the work's visual and sonic material. The poem's pentameter will itself undergo such therapeutic amputations in 'Sourdough Mutation,' a 'disarticulation of the self' (Hillis Miller 1981, p.247) through which the dynamic recomposition of unpredictable other selves is made possible.

'The Baffle Stage' also gestures at the constellations of tradition drawn into the construction of the 'histrionic I's 'compound sonic icon': Yeats in 'things fly apart the centre will not be missed' (p.6); O'Hara in the e. coli's 'nostalgia for the infinite' (p.7); and Rimbaud in the heroically self-deprecating *contrepètrie* of 'I is this constellated cupid stunt' (p.8). The allusion to O'Hara's 'Personism' is particularly telling. He describes the process of abstraction in poetry as one which his own poetry is opposed to, and the implications of his conception of 'true abstraction' have already been considered:

Abstraction (in poetry, not in painting) involves personal removal by the poet. For instance, the decision involved in the choice between "the nostalgia of the infinite" and "the nostalgia for the infinite" defines an attitude towards degree of abstraction. The nostalgia of the infinite representing the greater degree of abstraction, removal, and negative capability (as in Keats and Mallarmé) (O'Hara 2001, p.592).

Manson's own process enacts an extreme version of the 'greater degree of abstraction' of the nostalgia *of* the infinite, in contrast with Altieri's nostalgia *for* the infinite whose central gesture is the 'irritable reaching after' certainties that it claims to eschew. By framing the series of increasingly

outlandish mutations by which ‘The Baffle Stage’s ‘one-eyed’ baby becomes a ‘compound sonic’ ‘T’ as the result of the lesser abstraction of an *E. coli*’s ‘nostalgia *for* the infinite,’ the breaking down of its forms and sounds to build ‘Sourdough Mutation’s phonemes constitutes a doubled act of emptying or ‘personal removal.’ The poet has already ceded place to the language of the poem (‘the poem was acquiring language then’ p.6), and by disarticulating that language, the following poem will acquire the ‘greater degree of abstraction’ of the ‘nostalgia *of* the infinite.’

From the outset Manson has drawn attention to the importance of sound to the reading of ‘Sourdough Mutation’ with the note ‘*The audience imagined for this is of speakers reading.*’ This prepares the reader for a text whose sonic manifestation will carry equal weight with the visual, with which, as has been established, it will find itself in constant productive tension. J.H Prynne’s ‘Poetic Thought’ provides a useful model here for how thought is formed through the movement of energy in the language of poetry:

The extreme density of the unresolved, which maintains the high energy levels of language in poetic movement, its surreptitious buzz, may resemble unclarity which it partly is; but strong poetic thought frequently originates here, in the tension about and across line-endings, even in functional self-damage or sacrifice as the predicament of an emerging poem determined not to weaken or give way. Thought in this matrix is not unitary (unlike ideas) but is self-disputing and intrinsically dialectical. (2010a, p.599)

The notion of ‘the extreme density of the unresolved,’ particularly as mobilised across line-endings, is a useful one in attempting to trace ways in which Manson’s language ‘vibrates on the page and in the mind of the reader’ (p.599). However, I would suggest that, while a ‘self-disputing and intrinsically dialectical’ image of thought is in keeping with what we have outlined as Altieri’s polar abstraction, movement within and through Manson’s language operates via a trajectory propelled by a combination of the self-disputing aspects of the dialectical and the staggering gait of language in a perpetual state of disequilibrium. As Betteridge’s reference to the ‘phonological ticks and stutters that comprise the peculiar, vibratory mobility of his language surfaces’ (p.10) makes clear, movement within these surfaces’ ‘zone of vibration’ (Deleuze ECC, p.109) eschews fixed paths for ‘dynamic combinations in perpetual disequilibrium’ (p.109), the abstract movement of the stuttering language surface itself.

Furthermore, while Prynne makes a distinction between the ‘interior perspective’ available to the poet and that available to the reader whose ‘way into the poems is by retrospect and from the finished outside, through the shell of the boundary layer’ (2010b, p.127), ‘Sourdough Mutation’ complicates the idea of the ‘finished outside,’ recasting the boundary layer as a site where the poem’s acts of meaning take place, rather than a shell that the reader can breach. For Manson, the outside is never finished and never really outside. Blaser’s term ‘flowing boundary,’ drawn from Coleridge via Poe to describe the site of mutual interpenetration of Lorca and Spicer’s poetics in the latter’s *After Lorca*, (2006, p.143) furnishes an apt image for Manson’s poetics of ‘baroque tributaries of eddying, non-laminar torque’ (Dworkin 2007, p168). Both Blaser and Dworkin would seem to support the thesis that such dynamic surfaces do not resolve into fixed meanings, but rather operate in a manner akin to what Foucault described as Deleuze’s ‘incorporeal materiality,’ where the phantasm of meaning is ‘left to come to light among the surfaces to which it is related, in the reversal that causes every interior to pass to the outside and every exterior to the inside...’ (Foucault 1970 n.p.).

The reversal that draws the outside into itself, an act of self-emptying akin to Gizzi’s creation of an open, flexible core, is linked with protein metabolism in the line ‘let ketosis be my kenosis’ (p.42). As has been seen, Loevlie (2012) makes a compelling argument for the ‘kenotic,’ which she parses as the emptying of the metaphysical God into ‘time, corporality and language’ as a ‘continuous movement, a ceaseless emptying’ (p.87). She reads it as a dynamic nothingness that emerges through the gesture of emptying, rather than a static void that stands in opposition to being, and suggests that poetry performs ‘a kenosis of language [that] weakens and empties the strong referential function’ (p.88). This ‘poetic function’ is evident throughout the work of Gizzi and Manson.

The procedure recalls Finelli’s abstraction as ‘emptying out’ and O’Hara’s ‘abstraction, removal and negative capability.’ It is also both superficially and structurally analogous to Spicer’s ‘emptying himself in order to allow his language to receive an other than himself,’ (Blaser 2006a,

p.121) and it is worth recalling at this juncture that Blaser traced this tendency of Spicer's to a tradition drawing on 'Poe, Mallarmé, Artaud, and Duchamp in their emphasis upon loss of meaning turning into necessity of meaning' (p.121). By linking self-emptying with protein metabolism ('ketosis'), Manson emphasises that the body is the material within which meaning takes place, while enacting a similar process in the visual and sonic matter of language itself where the switch from 't' to 'n' turns a metabolic process into one of self-emptying.

If kenosis implies the making of an interior space which forces from outside rush in to fill, in reading 'Sourdough Mutation,' apparent 'loss of meaning,' paradoxically predicated on an excess of signifying material, draws the reader into the space of the poem where repeated, tentative acts of meaning can take place. The reader finds herself constantly pulled into the vortex of unmeaning, rushing to decode and decipher references to cellular biochemistry, poisonous pigments, ayahuasca-induced hallucinations, before being brought up short by complicating material built into the poem's own sound structures, reminding her that the semantic aspects of the poem's material is only one layer of the work's flowing boundary, and that meaning will only emerge in the 'proprioception of vision' and the 'in-between of hearing and proprioception' (Massumi 2011, p.147) that is the thought-event of the poem's reading. Each new reading rolls the dice anew, repeating the gesture of thought but not its resulting forms, reminding the reader that each reading, like Mallarmé's roll of the dice, 'Never will abolish chance' (Manson 2016b, p.1) but will rather, in emitting thoughts of its own, keep the game of meaning in play on and in the surface of the poem.

4.4 'one sings for dear life'

Deleuze spoke of 'a world in which individuations are impersonal, and singularities are pre-individual: the splendour of the pronoun 'one'' (DR, p.xvii), and one of the movements in which meaning emerges in this poem is the interplay between the singular pronoun 'I' and the potentially multiple 'one.' Deleuze went on to describe the process of individuation in terms of a reciprocal

enfolding of the 'I' and 'the self' that co-exist in the same space but are not the same substance, recalling the hypostatic union:

The individuating factors or the implicated factors of individuation therefore have neither the form of the I nor the matter of the Self. This is because the I is inseparable from a form of identity, while the Self is indistinguishable from a matter constituted by a continuity of resemblances. The differences included within the I and the Self are, without doubt, borne by individuals: nevertheless, they are not individual or individuating to the extent that they are understood in relation to this identity in the I and this resemblance in the Self. By contrast, every individuating factor is already difference and difference of difference. It is constructed upon a fundamental disparity, and functions on the edges of that disparity as such. That is why these factors endlessly communicate with one another across fields of individuation, becoming enveloped in one another in a demesne which disrupts the matter of the Self as well as the form of the I. Individuation is mobile, strangely supple, fortuitous and endowed with fringes and margins; all because the intensities which contribute to it communicate with each other, envelop other intensities and are in turn enveloped. The individual is far from indivisible, never ceasing to divide and change its nature. (p.337-8)

In this complex relationship, the form of 'I' and the matter of 'self' engage in a process of individuation that is based on a dynamic, unceasing relation and division that creates and constantly remakes itself. This process is revealing in the context of the current reading in that it attends to the reciprocal presupposition of the singular 'I' and the multiple 'one,' while drawing attention to the spatial domain, or 'demesne,' created by and containing the 'mobile, strangely supple' form, matter and event of individuation.

If the last chapter highlighted Manson's conception of a poem as 'patterned interaction,' 'a thing to be sounded out time and again but never completely known' (2017b n.p.), the reading that follows constitutes one possible sounding out of the interwoven sonic, semantic and visual matter of 'Sourdough Mutation,' attending to the sets of tentative meanings that emerge. The early sections of this 86-page poem initiate a play of phonemic cut and shuffle ('alpine' to 'pineal'; 'ice pole' to 'police'; economy to 'o no my key'), with the line 'crow/ trobar clus' (p.10) seeming to sonically suggest taking a crowbar to the trobar clus's closed form. These acts effect, at the level of the word, the act of severing we have already seen presented in the line from 'Cantique de Saint Jean' from which the collection takes its title, and from which this poem fashions the matter of its 'hotbed of doffed heads' (p.93). It is possible to see and hear evidence of Prynne's 'dialectical unsettling' as phonemes are pulled back and forth across line and stanza breaks depending on whether the eye or ear leads the reading:

Everyone died
no one repairman

or -woman born
soluble
 traces
 the hand set
no body
lifts (p.22)

The ear recombines no-one, handset, nobody, and questions the hyphen that makes it a repairwoman of whom one is born, while the brain struggles to reintegrate the traces of repair personnel, phone bugging, and the unreachable dead. Writing about visual and auditory substitution in Gizzi's 'A telescope protects its view,' Brooks-Motl notes that the 'speed each line generates within itself [is] a matter of linked or substituted glyphs and internal, recombinatory rhymes' (2018, p.64) and, if a similar dynamic is at play in Manson's poem, here in the early sections the movement is between rather than within lines.

In two sections of uneven length, we see and hear complex acts of phonemic reshuffling, and a hint of an emergent underlying theme:

soil improver
orpiment moves in oil
●
arsenide
gall

white
asp

iron-on
pirates

extirpate
kin

in
ink (p.34)

These sections, as well as marking the point where the various processes of sonic recombination achieve a level of apparently self-generating complexity, also demonstrate, for this reader, the limitations of pareidolia: without preparation, patterns remain unseen. The poem is replete with pigments, poisons, poisonous pigments and solvents: orpiment, viridian, aniline, alizarin; Prussian

blue; arsenide and ptomaine; perborate and acetone fill the lines with chemicals and colour but, lacking the scientific knowledge to follow the thread, this reader failed to integrate these toxins and pigments into a pattern. Such realisations remind the reader that there is no single reading that will smooth out the poem's tangled meanings: the patterns will only emerge to the reader primed to see or hear them. The meaning that emerges in each reading is dictated by chance conjunctions of reader and multiply legible matter.

The closing lines of these sections do yield the line 'extirpate kin in ink,' suggesting the eradication of family through writing. This sounds out a generative interaction between pain, family, language and writing that is one of the poem's methods and means in such lines as 'a poet/tattooed' (p. 49) and 'if the pain is/ in language// you age with it/ it says plain' (p.50). Betteridge refers to this property of Manson's poetry, whereby the poetic surface's dynamic unresolved matter becomes a site for the staging of disclosure and concealment, as a 'poetics of candour' (p.16). He cautions, however, against the search for hidden 'sites for confessional unburdening,' (p.3) and this is borne out in 'Sourdough,' where the pain is in plain sight, in the material of language itself. Derrida attends to Mallarmé's 'fragments of candor,' formed from the white of the page itself where 'pale Pierrot...writes in the paste of his own make-up, upon the page he is' (1981, p.195). 'Sourdough Mutation' enacts a similar process, with the self, its concerns and sufferings, forming one stream of the work's material, just one of the non-laminar currents of its flowing boundary. While pain may be in plain sight there, it evades any logic of revelation, cautioning against the very idea of 'the other side of the language surface' (Betteridge, p.8) where the author and his meaning can be found. Meaning, like the pain that it at times comes to resemble, is *in* language and can only be traced in its movements. That language itself serves to set up the movements within which it can mean is suggested in the line 'fund/ a mental autocrat// I lick necessity of/ the word god' (p.68) or 'fundamental autocracylic necessity of the word god,' where

words engage in the process of turning themselves into what they mean that is central to Manson's push towards words that 'do not describe the image, but are it' (BCL, p.54).¹⁰⁷

Exactly half-way through 'Sourdough Mutation' comes the only passage to replicate the rhymed pentameter of 'The Baffle Stage', beginning on p.52 with the Whitmanian line 'I sing the gas-fired hybrid body shell,' a half- sonnet ending in 'the wrong kind of silence' (Dillon 2017 n.p.):

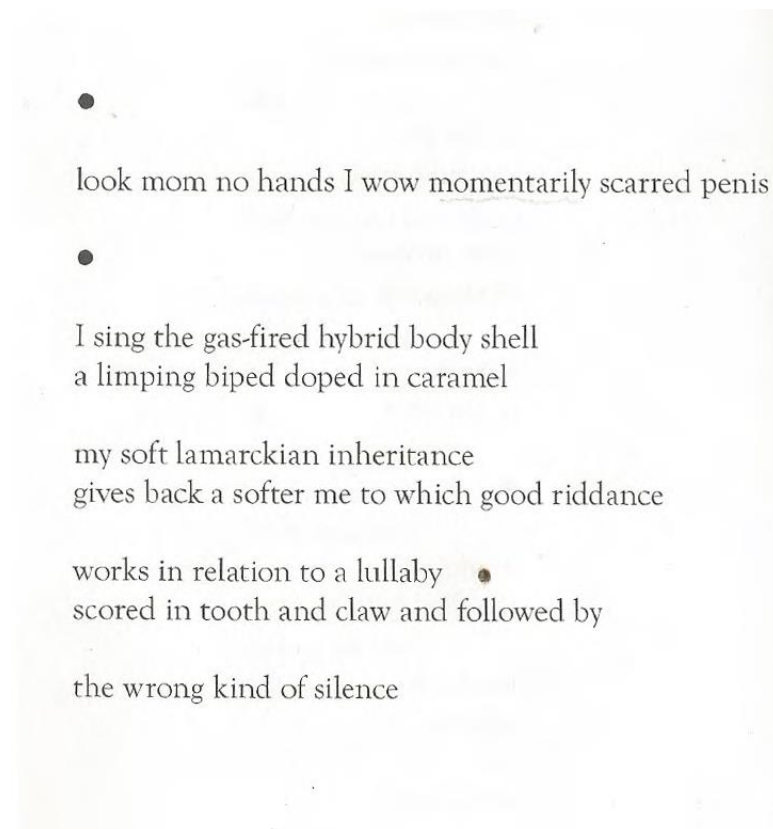


Figure 8 'Sourdough Mutation' p.52

The first section on this page operates through some of the work's more typical dynamics of shape-shifting and grammatical indeterminacy: the mom swings upside-down to become wow, and the placement of the adverb leaves it unclear whether it is the wowing or the scarring that is momentary. The second section is the first in the serial poem to replicate 'The Baffle Stage's' rhymed pentameter, before stuttering to a halt in 'the wrong kind of silence.' This stanza's self-loathing metapoetics serve to site the origin of the song within the 'hybrid body shell' itself. This

¹⁰⁷ Since the term 'cratylic' refers to proper names that are inherently semantically meaningful (Coates 2006, p357), this locution folds the creation of self and semantic meaning into the 'word god's' power.

shell is in motion, its limping recalling the ‘pitching and rolling gait’ of Beckett’s characters that Deleuze associated with ‘the transfer from the form of expression to the form of content’ (ECC, p.111). From the ‘form of expression’ of p.52’s truncated sonnet¹⁰⁸ will emerge a ‘form of content’ drawing on lullaby and scored by nature (‘red in tooth and claw’), underlining both the polyphony of voices from interior and exterior that fill the ‘body shell’ with song and the hybridity of the shell itself, formed as it is of both visible and audible matter and emerging from and returning to ‘the wrong kind of silence.’ It has never been clearer than at this point that the ‘hybrid body shell’ of the poem is not, contra Prynne, a finished surface separating reader from poet, but rather an unfinished and flowing boundary in which both are implicated. If, as has already been proposed, the use of the pronoun ‘one’ in the line ‘one sings for dear life’ (p.83) implies the emergence of an agency in this text that is multiple, this section’s ‘I sing’ (repeated on p.78 and p.81) emphasises the emergence of the voice of that choral ‘one’ from the stuttering of individual singing ‘I’s.

From page 72 the dough rises precipitously, with fragments consolidating into half and full-page poems. This is where the competing patterns supplied by ear, eye and brain are in most danger of cross-contaminating and clashing. There is a foretaste of the sense of disorientation inherent in this mode of reading in page 64:

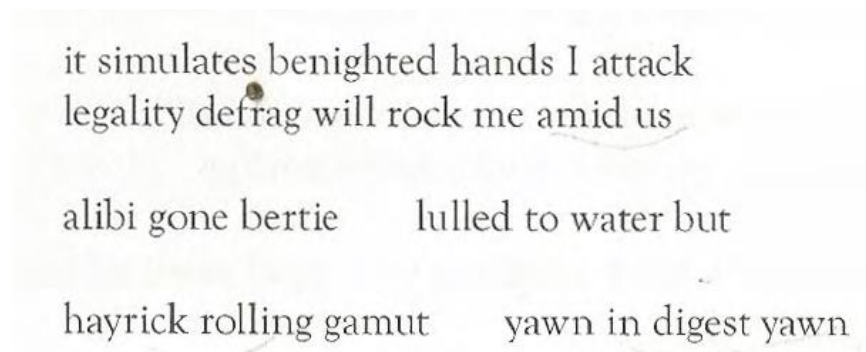
toadies in pain step up
to the brie oche

choir be thought puppets
emetec ketamine enematheque

Quartermain describes ‘a state of perpetual alertness and concentration where we remain open to possibilities of meaning and relationship’ (p.71) in Zukofsky’s reader, and this is equally the case for the reader of ‘Sourdough Mutation.’ The eye wants to read ‘brie oche’ as brioche, the ear inclines towards the hard ‘ch’ of ‘choir,’ and attention to the words’ semantic content suggests that,

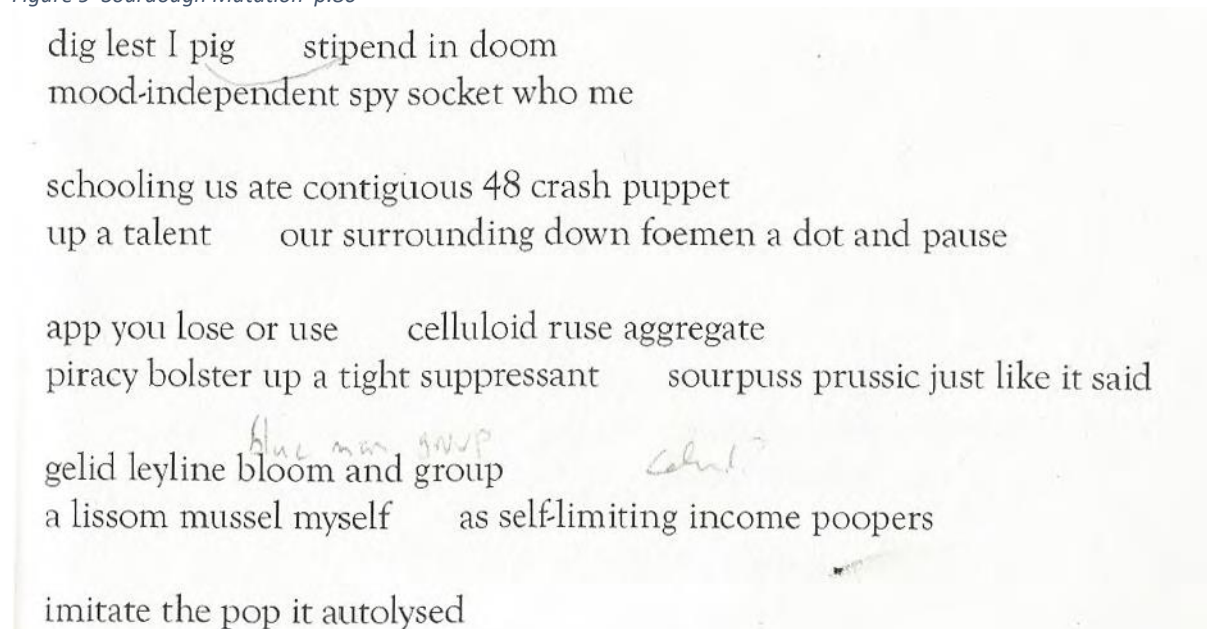
¹⁰⁸ This form structurally recalls Pound’s note on the origin of the sonnet: ‘The sonnet occurred automatically when some chap got stuck in the effort to make a canzone. His ‘genius’ consisted in the recognition of the fact that he’d come to the end of his subject matter.’ (1968, p.168). Getting stuck mid-sonnet, Manson’s poem stutters into ‘the wrong kind of silence,’ one filled with sound.

while it would be unusual to step up to a breakfast pastry, if toadies in pain were playing darts they *could* step up to the oche, albeit one made of cheese. There is a debt here to Allais's 'Rimes riches à l'œil,'¹⁰⁹ sight-rhymes that disappear when read aloud. In the second half of the poem, with phonemes splitting and regrouping at speed, these multisensory choices of meaning rely on the brain's urge to find patterns, sorting familiar names and phrases from the proliferating phonemes, allowing remaining sounds to resolve into words if they will. These familiar names are clocked by the speaker rather than the reader, and there is, at first, a rush of satisfaction at each dropped name picked up:



it simulates benighted hands I attack
 legality defrag will rock me amid us
 alibi gone bertie lulled to water but
 hayrick rolling gamut yawn in digest yawn

Figure 9 'Sourdough Mutation' p.80



dig lest I pig stipend in doom
 mood-independent spy socket who me
 schooling us ate contiguous 48 crash puppet
 up a talent our surrounding down foemen a dot and pause
 app you lose or use celluloid ruse aggregate
 piracy bolster up a tight suppressant sourpuss prussic just like it said
 gelid leyline bloom and group
 a lissom mussel myself as self-limiting income poopers
 imitate the pop it autolysed

Figure 10 'Sourdough Mutation' p.81

¹⁰⁹ The most famous line of which 'rhymes' 'Shakespeare' with 'Isles Baléares.' (Allais 2018b)

But this is the point where pareidolia exhausts its heuristic possibilities: if I'm spotting 'rock me Amadeus' and 'rick rolling,' what am I not hearing? One corollary of the multisensory reading experience is that what has been heard is tricky to unhear. I can *see* syllables in different configurations and *think* them in different ways, as Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit can be one thing then the other. But the patterns picked up by the ear are much harder to put down. Once you've heard 'atomic kitten,' those sounds will not melt back into neutral phonemes. The anxiety unleashed by this realisation serves as a caution against the rush to decipher: if the reader's diligent multisensory reading yields blue man group, atomic kitten, a possible Maybelline-ad pastiche, then this is not pareidolia. These patterns have been woven into the language surface to be found. The poem's own sound structures seem to poke fun at the reader's rush to fill in the gaps. Meaning-making is stymied, and one is forced to re-consider once again what one means by meaning.

This is one of the poem's ways of ensuring that its own limping or stuttering mode is replicated in the act of reading, functioning to upset any set rhythms the reader has fallen into, a condition it self-diagnoses as 'end-stage celebrity turbulence// systolic arrhythmia' (p.92). The poem's own note to 'speakers reading' has primed the reader for a text whose sonic matter will carry equal weight with the visual, with whom it will find itself in a constant tension that is, as already noted, both productive and destructive. This tension refolds Spicer's line (from "Thing Language") 'no-one listens to poetry' twisting it emphatically into the iteration 'No! one *listens* to poetry' (2008, p.373) and leading the unwary speaking reader towards the conclusion that the poem's sonic dimension took precedence over the visual text; that the reading ear eclipsed the eye.

However, hearing Manson read from 'The marrying of Hérodiade' triggered another re-reading, revisiting what now seemed an overly schematic reading of the function of competing sensory modalities in 'Sourdough Mutation.' The translation in question, as has been noted, incorporates all of the revisions and indecisions left open at the time of Mallarmé's death, and hearing it read aloud was a powerfully destabilising experience of language at its most open. In any cluster, no one word held sway but all resonated in mutually interpenetrating echoes. Sound

articulated the language's unfixeness, allowing for a constellation of meanings to coexist in the time and space of the reading. This lead me back to 'Sourdough Mutation's' sonic manifestation as a space in which the poem's acts of meaning take place in the 'in-between of hearing and proprioception,' rather than a modality providing access to a more stable meaning. This recalls a fragment that reads as a possible 'ars poetica' for Manson's work here and elsewhere:

queues sequenced whence
 encircled your domain
 am I in meaning yet
 I is now snow (p.64)

Meaning cannot be sought beyond the blizzard of the words and phonemes themselves. It is a space, but one that is a dynamic element in its own construction. The line 'I is now snow,' echoing Montfort's 'I icing sing' (2006), reduces the 'I' to ephemeral matter ('I is snow') in an act of self-othering even more extreme than Rimbaud's while simultaneously, stutteringly conferring 'I' with an impersonal agency normally only associated with weather conditions ('I I snow snow'). The construction of this space calls upon the proprioceptive capacities of the reader, whose movement within the surfaces of the text generates both these capacities themselves and the meanings they yield in turn, recalling Malcolm Bowie's note on the reading of Mallarmé:

...I have been assuming...that the reader's mind, placing itself within the field of the text, will consent to operate optimistically and creatively with that text, and will enjoy becoming increasingly aware of itself as a multidimensional manifold. (1978, p.145)

Bowie's representation of the act of reading as one that creates a kind of topological space (Weisstein 2018a) recalls Manson's reference, early in *Adjunct* to 'the game of life on the surface of a torus' (2009, p.7), visualising his life's work as taking place on a multidimensional surface with a single hole (Weisstein 2018b). In his work on Deleuze and contemporary British poetry, Jon Clay refers to a poetic figure that is 'torus-like,' operating 'through the virtual connections that might be made through it that are waiting to be actualised' (2010, p.115), and 'Sourdough Mutation' operates a similar play of 'virtual connections,' actualised through 'deformations, twistings and stretchings' (Weisstein 2018a) of the language surface.

Erin Manning describes the dynamic emergence of a hybrid self as a topological and relational process:

When the skin becomes not a container but a multidimensioned topological surface that folds in, through, and across spacetimes of experience, what emerges is not a self but the dynamic form of a worlding that refuses categorization. Beyond the human, beyond the sense of touch or vision, beyond the object, what emerges is relation. (2013, p.12)

Dworkin conceives of *Adjunct*'s dynamic emergence in similarly relational terms, where 'each mode plays one term against the other—the logical against the aleatory, coherent arrangement against disruptive disordering, assemblage against disarticulation, part against whole—by foregrounding one while relying on the other' (2007, p. 192). Massumi describes the actualisation of such virtual connections as 'a seeing-through to the virtual in an event of lived abstraction,' (2011, p.17) and 'Sourdough Mutation' is the site and substance of just such an event, where virtual connections activate and actualise each other in the reader's movements through the text. These movements unite reader and text in the 'multidimensional manifold' of abstraction, where the text's stuttering 'I' and the reader's eye become 'one' in the 'surfacing multiplicity' of the poem's 'hybrid body shell'. This shell, produced and processed as it is through rupture and fragmentation, acquires coherence, in the sense of coming together, in the act of reading, 'an act of incarnation where the abstract is bodily put forth' (Quartermain 1992, p.80) but one in which the incarnation itself is, and remains, a movement of abstraction.

In 'The Baffle Stage,' the word 'cleft' is split across a line break, comically enacting its meaning while helping to provide a rhyme for pinnacle (PFR, p.9). But 'Sourdough' enacts a sort of sonic and visual zeugma where splitting creates the conditions for the other sort of cleaving: a joining together, where the breaks between lines and sections function like the synaptic cleft between neurons, with phonemes crossing to bind to the membrane on the other side like neurotransmitters with receptors. Words are chopped, sundered or dismembered, but they are also propelled by the internal chemistry of a process fuelled by their own action potentials, constructing a coherent sonic surface from their own 'bits and scraps of linguistic matter' (Ngai 2006, p.297).

Both Manson's text and the act of reading it come together in a dynamic surface recalling the 'explosion read backwards' of Mallarmé's poetry ('Like an explosion read backwards, poetry makes for coherence without denying fragmentation, without pretending that the disjunction, sundering and the scattering never happened,' McGuinness 2009, p.822), and only in the abstraction of reading can sundered, scattered, disjunctive fragments move into meaning. This movement of meaning is never linear, constantly reminding the reader that '[t]here are no straight lines, neither in things nor in language. Syntax is the set of necessary detours that are created in each case to reveal the life in things' (Deleuze LL, pp.225-6).

These detours are traced in the act of reading, with the poem itself becoming a guide to the unsure movements of the reader's apprenticeship. In the proprioceptive poem, readers are called on to constantly orient and reorient themselves in language which is both inside and outside them, revealing that 'inside' and 'outside' themselves are relational concepts, what Bernstein describes as 'shifters' which 'have no unitary or definitive sense within poetics' (1992, p.157), differing only in the position of the viewer or other sensor of the space thus defined. The poem thus becomes a threshold of learning, a crossing point between zones of inside and outside, but also the means by which its reader can learn to access the point of intensity that must be reached and surpassed in order for sensory data to become perceptible and meaning to be made possible. Abstraction in its multiple heuristic forms and movements is the dynamic that animates this apprenticeship.

Conclusion: At the edge of ‘meaning’s painterly skitters’

This thesis set itself the task of elaborating a way to read with the flexibility and responsivity called for by, but often absent from, the practice proposed by Altieri in *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry*. That praxis reached its full unfolding, within the parameters of the current study, in the multidimensional manifold that emerges in the reading of Peter Manson’s language surfaces, a poetic and geometric shape created by an act of what Altieri described as ‘poetry’s capacity to reach beyond itself through itself’ (WS, p.8). While Altieri’s own writing frequently situates a static, detached and transcendent self, ‘who we become,’ beyond the threshold of the poem whose meaning it often finds itself irritably reaching after, Manson’s work, emerging in ‘the crises and particularities of one body and as many minds as will fit in it’ (Manson 2017a, n.p.), emphasises that the continuous process of becoming is immanent to the body in whose particularities it emerges, where multiple meanings unfold in the reading and writing of its ‘sensory and semantic overload’ (2017a, n.p.). Altieri’s theory positions itself in opposition to identity politics but its practice centres on the transcendent, universalising identity ‘who we become’ in relation to works of art. Manson’s practice recognises the complex materiality of identity, its implication with cultural and historical material (Owens 2011 n.p.) and its immanence to the specific corporeal and linguistic matter in which it emerges. This practice is shared by Gizzi, whose work emphasises that ‘problems of identity’ (Out, p.2) are always ‘grammatical and syntactical’ (Brossard 2018, p.100), implicated with the language in which they express themselves and dependent on ‘the interaction of the reader’ for their unfolding (p.113). Brossard’s assertion that the lyric self’s risk of losing its identity ‘because of its abstraction and openness’ (p.113) is welcomed rather than feared in Gizzi’s work, holds equally true of Manson’s. In the practice of both poets, an open abstraction based on the acknowledgement of identity’s multiplicity stands in contrast to Altieri’s inflexible identity poetics of ‘who we become.’ This project sought to steer the discourse of abstraction in poetry away from Altieri’s self-perpetuating contradictions and into a mode of reading that could meet the

paradoxical with the practical, finding in the warm and welcoming abstractions of Gizzi and Manson ideal material for this practice of reading.

This conclusion will identify limitations of the current study and propose some potential directions for future work. It will then turn to Peter Manson's 1996 ekphrastic poem "Twenty for Baselitz's "45"" to emphasise the creative as well as corrective dimensions of this project's mode of reading and its affinities with the 'ethics of joy' (1990a, p.262) that Deleuze read in the work of Spinoza.

Given the scope of Altieri's engagement with a range of poetic interlocutors over the course of his career, it was a challenge to narrow the focus of this study. His work has engaged with such contemporary female poets as Julianna Spahr, Jennifer Moxley, Lyn Hejinian, Leslie Scalapino and Dodie Bellamy in articles and, to a much lesser extent, books.¹¹⁰ He has also written, predominantly in uncollected articles, on the Asian-American poets John Yau (1995) and Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge (2002), although Dorothy Wang has, as outlined in the introduction, identified concerns regarding his representation of broader Asian-American poetry in these articles. Given that John Yau, in particular, shares Altieri's interest in intersections of modern poetics and visual art in *The Passionate Spectator* (2006), it could be argued that his work provides as useful a starting-point for a critique of the limitations of Altieri's readings as the work of Peter Gizzi. The work of Barbara Guest, subject of Altieri's 2008 essay 'Barbara Guest and the Boys at the Cedar Bar: Some Painterly Uses of Language', offers similarly rich potential for a re-reading that would recuperate the gender concerns entwined with her 'painterly syntax' (Altieri 2008, p.82) and deliberately elided in Altieri's focus on the material aspects of her language (Altieri 2013b, p.64). In fact, Gizzi's introduction to her *Collected Poems* emphasises her own poems' paradoxical abstraction, describing them as 'not abstract; rather, they locate us always exactly where we already are, at the edge of meaning in an already impacted, developing world' (2008b, p.xviii). This mode

¹¹⁰ Spahr and Moxley (Altieri 2011) and Hejinian and Scalapino (Altieri 2001) are the subjects of uncollected essays, while Dodie Bellamy is considered in *Reckoning with the Imagination* (pp.147-50).

of lived abstraction, taking place at the extreme edge of meaning in much the same way as Deleuze's knowledge comes into being at the extreme edge of his ignorance, recalls similar gestures and movements at the threshold of meaning in Gizzi's work and Manson's. The decision not to ground this thesis's reading praxis in either Yau or Guest's abstractions stemmed from a reluctance to respond to Altieri's version of what Wang describes as a 'negative reaction to the term "identity"' (2014, p.13) with a negative reaction of its own. Setting a female or ethnic minority writer, particularly in cases where Altieri could be seen to 'undervalue their work' (Bernstein in King 2017, p.29) in polar opposition to his stance risked falling into the fixed binaries that this thesis wished to identify in his work and unfix in its own readings. It was felt that deriving a praxis of reading entirely from work perceived to have been undervalued in Altieri's theory would be an unnecessarily oppositional methodology. This was underpinned by a desire to practice a mode of reading based on Deleuze's aesthetics of affirmation rather than negation, operating through 'conceptual experiment' rather than 'tribunal and judgement' (Rajchman 2000, p.119). To these ends, it sought to ground its readings in aspects of Altieri's thinking that could be extended or elaborated, not solely contradicted.

There is scope to apply the mode of reading outlined in this thesis in a range of contemporary contexts. The model of 'resonant, intertextual assemblage' elaborated in chapter three could be applied to the work of other poets whose poetry shares some of its characteristics with Gizzi and Manson. Rachel Blau Duplessis's *Drafts*, with its sustained engagements with named textual sources and interlocutors, would provide fertile ground for such an approach. The concern with permeable, liminal spaces shared by Gizzi and Manson and central to chapter two's methodologies, has been explored in the early work of the Irish poet Catherine Walsh in my forthcoming essay 'Radical Tensions: Robert Lowell, Charles Altieri and Catherine Walsh' (2019) and there is the possibility of developing this line of reading in some of her later work, including *Astonished Birds/ Cara Jane Bob and James*, and of exploring how similar concerns are developed in Billy Mills' recent work, particularly *The City Itself*.

Another potential new application of the mode of reading developed in this thesis is to extend the study of experiments in translation and procedural and theoretical engagements with source texts identified in Manson's work to other contemporary poetry. This would lend itself to considering affinities with such contemporary work as Karla Kelsey's experiments in monolingual homophonic translation in *Iteration Nets*, and the interweaving of poetry, poetics and translation of Nisha Ramayya's *Notes on Sanskrit* and *Correspondences* and her collaboration with Sandeep Parmar and Bhanu Kapil, *Threads*. All of these projects have the potential to extend the praxis of reading developed in this thesis into new territories while remaining mindful, guided by Whitehead and Deleuze, of the need to constantly critically revise its own concepts and abstractions in response to each new context, explaining and adapting its abstractions as it goes.

There is also potential to further elaborate this project's reading praxis within the parameters of a deeper engagement with the work of Peter Manson. Constraints of methodology and theme meant that this thesis confined itself primarily to the collections *Between Cup and Lip* and *Poems of Frank Rupture* as well as a relatively complete overview of his translations and rewritings of Mallarmé. This presents a necessarily incomplete consideration both of Manson's own work and of the multiple interwoven contexts within which it takes place. As well as his roots in French symbolism and the procedural poetics of *Oulipo*, a wider view of Manson's work could consider his relations with the Cambridge school, particularly J.H. Prynne and Keston Sutherland, the role of *Object Permanence*, the magazine of experimental poetry that he and Robin Purves edited from 1994-7, in enabling dialogue between the marginal poetic communities of Britain and North America, and the evolving influence of Bob Cobbing, Clark Coolidge and Maggie O'Sullivan's work on his own. Jon Clay's book *Sensation, Contemporary Poetry and Deleuze* suggests that O'Sullivan's work is transformative of its reader and the world (2008, p.148) and proposes a political dimension to this mutual transformation: where Altieri sought to avoid dealing with the 'gender hierarchies' haunting Guest's work, Clay reads O'Sullivan's poetry through the prism of Deleuze's 'becoming animal' to propose 'a minor poetry that is necessarily pitted against hierarchy'

(p.148). Clay finds in this poetry ‘a certain promise of happiness, broken or not, beyond hierarchical order’ (p.148). Manson’s poetry proposes similar ethical ends, and there is considerable potential to trace the political dimension of such commitments across the span of Manson’s career. Rajchman has extended Deleuze’s adaptation of Whitehead’s critique of abstraction as ‘the abstract does not explain; it must itself be explained by reinsertion into a multiplicity’ (2000, p.53) and an extended exploration of the work of abstraction in Manson’s poetry could proceed by reinserting his work in the multiplicity of relations and chains of influence and affiliation from which it emerged and in which it has, conatively, persevered in its being since the early 1990s.

Deleuze proposed that Spinoza’s ethics is centred on joy, with man striving to increase joyful encounters and connections and minimise those that cause him sorrow (1990a, p.262). Much of Manson’s work arises in and enacts just such encounters, extending to his own readers ‘a certain promise of happiness’ (Clay 2008, p.148). In *Reckoning with the Imagination*, Altieri proposes ‘shapes’ as an alternative term to ‘meanings’ to describe the reader’s experience of a text, in order to avoid ‘getting trapped in abstractions such as “meaning”’ (RI, p.34). Following Deleuze’s affirmative aesthetics allows for the possibility that a shape is no more or less abstract than a meaning, and that the experience of following the shape of meaning’s unfolding need not be a trap but a source of satisfaction and joy. If, as Deleuze’s reading of Spinoza would have it, [n]obody is born free, nobody is born reasonable. And nobody can undergo for us the slow learning of what agrees with our nature, the slow effort of discovering our joys’ (1990a, p.262), a model of this ‘slow learning’ can be found in Manson’s 1996 ekphrastic poem, collected in *Between Cup and Lip*, “Twenty for Baselitz’s “45””:

1. Under/through here’s chiselled crosses’ ground
cage. Soiled tempera batters eyes? No.
2. Brown strokes purple haze’s born chancer.
2 wet lips groyne 3-ply.
3. Art’s eyes down tubes for choice’s
door girl’s chary red rust dreams.

4. Join me Saturday over George's head.
Iron scrapers bruise his sound bucket.
5. Every buck enjoys icon's iconic imagery.
Feet stools support grazing rabbits, cows.
6. Single brown head means hovering space.
Upmost opening cries wolf, noisy aperture!
7. Georg Baselitz spits blood onto wood:
now why he go empty, coinless?
8. Glue, oil, paint, brownness, dross, over
hatching, meaning cut/dried pink areas.
9. No jest: you have forged my
toy. Lung's snout breathes great pictures.
10. Sky picks open coy oddments. Gleam
evanescent, now absent, ultramarine blue palings.
11. T plates shines head's wrong up
-bit. Arms joined outside board view.
12. Utterly new green tit is song sprouts
aerofoils. Joyce sez Yankee smiles so.
13. Arouser's bowl, jug, table, bottle, lamp.
Pure friend's tickler coil's replete life.
14. Hands writhing mouth unamused doll's voice
hoarse Lilith waving elephant's lug, green.
15. Boiled dreamless Anne holds horns' ettling.
I may confuse grins' clown first.
16. Yellow crusts anoint my dropped lithium
clear flute tone A black vowel.
17. Impulse drowns freckles' serial comic capers.
Urchins bore wires through points/ armatures.
18. Chainsaw hack timber. Sculpted bodies loom
frowning skywards, greeting home's eclectic poison.
19. Book's foison makes house; forest's, home.
Sanity equals summary. Why kiss sense?
20. Atonal heads choose black coronets while
joy curls around meaning's painterly skitters.

This poem has one numbered couplet for each of the painted wooden panels of Georg Baselitz's "45," a '20-panelled spectacle' (Rosenthal 2007 n.p.) that combines painting and sculpture in a modern-day altarpiece commemorating the end of the second world war in Germany (Rosenthal 2007 n.p.). However, Manson's poem is not ekphrastic in any traditional sense: like the short poems whose composition is described in 'Love Poetry,' these lines do not describe images but capture the sensation of experiencing them. John Yau has written of Robert Creeley's collaboration with Baselitz that in '[e]choing in language Baselitz's visual reversals...language, which forms the very ground of our thinking and communicating becomes shaky, almost groundless' (2006, p.73), and despite the earthy tones that permeate Manson's poem, his lines share this disoriented quality.

In these couplets, Manson pushes past the 'strangling manifold' (BCL, p.53) of perception to find language that does not describe but recreates visual images in words and these lines are the 'perceptually felt...vision-effect' of Massumi's 'lived abstraction' (2011, p.17). This mode of abstraction has its roots in Deleuze's 'fully living core of the abstract' (in Adkins 2016, p.355), the lived experience that is absolutely abstract because it represents nothing. If it seems strange to consider an ekphrastic poem as 'representing nothing,' it is the essential characteristic of Manson's abstraction, linking it back to Joyce's *Work in Progress* which 'is not *about* something; *it is that something itself*' (Beckett 1972, p.14, emphasis original) via his own love poems which 'didn't describe the image but...were it' (BCL, p.54).

Manson's 'Twenty' is replete with colours and references to artistic techniques and paraphernalia, yet these artistic materials never cohere into a single visual image, or even a series of images. In a gesture that will prove central to Manson's later work, particularly 'Sourdough Mutation,' polysemic words are deployed in collocations and constellations that keep their ambiguities open. In the line 'Brown strokes purple haze's born chancer,' 'brown' could be noun or adjective, 'strokes' a plural noun or a verb; haze's apostrophe could denote possession or the elision of the verb 'is,' depending on how the opening noun phrase is read. The only seeming

certainty in this line is the allusion to Hendrix's 'Purple Haze,' threaded through the poem's eyes, skies and kiss.

The poem's colour palette is dominated by brown: stanza six equates a 'single brown head' with 'hovering space' in terms that force the reader to query what 'means' means in this context. It is not clear, and never becomes so, whether the hovering space originates with the brown head or the space gives rise to the single head, or whether they are mutually generative, coming to 'mean' each other. The second line of this stanza demonstrates an anatomical reticence that is somewhat jarring amidst the poem's masses of named body-parts: it is not a mouth that cries wolf, but an 'upmost opening,' a 'noisy aperture.' This performs a double abstraction on the story of the boy who cried wolf, with the boy replaced by the synecdoche of his mouth which is in turn effaced by a pair of circumlocutions. In this brief image it is not the boy who cries but the openings or apertures of his depersonalized body.

Brown and meaning align once more in the eighth couplet, where the abstract noun 'brownness' takes its place among art materials ('Glue, oil, paint, brownness, dross, over/hatching...') in what reads as a relatively clear description of the overlay of paint, glue, dirt and residue on the artist's crosshatching. Meaning follows from or emerges in these materials ('meaning cut/dried pink areas'), with the play on 'cut and dried' hinting that the process is not as simple as that cliché suggests. The linking of meaning with the 'pink areas' suggests a tendency on the part of viewers and readers to centre their search for meaning on the recognisably human elements of an artwork, and Manson's 'Twenty' deflects this urge by employing the kind of techniques of severing and dismemberment explored in 'Sourdough Mutation' and *English in Mallarmé*. There are two pairs of eyes, two sets of heads and two single ones, lips, lungs, hands, arms, feet and freckles, and these parts are cleaved and joined in acts that blur the boundary between creation and destruction ('Urchins bore wires through points/ armatures.' 'Chainsaw hack timber. Sculpted bodies loom/ frowning skywards'). These acts are mimicked in the slicing and splicing of the poem's sonic material audible in 'Lilith waving elephant's lug' or 'Anne holds horns' ettling.' Those

lines, with their named agents performing acts that look impossible to the eye but are resolved by the ear ('elephant slug,' 'horn settling') remind the reader that the poem is a complex material object, built of signs and sounds that mean differently depending on the channel or modality via which they are perceived.

If 'nobody can undergo for us...the slow effort of discovering our joys,' (Deleuze 1990a, p.262), Manson's poem invites the reader to follow the movements of its own 'slow learning.' The inside of the 'lived experience' of its encounter with Baselitz's monumental painting cannot be replicated or re-lived by the reader, but a version of its gestures can be recreated by Manson's reader in their encounter with the materials and movements of his poem. Deleuze reminds us that 'the movements of the swimming instructor which we reproduce on the sand bear no relation to the movements of the wave' (DR, p.23). The movements of Manson's "Twenty for Baselitz's "45"" bear no physical or descriptive relation to the painting that inspired it. As the boy who cried wolf is replaced by a mouth which in turn is abstracted into an 'upmost opening,' so Baselitz's painting gives way to Manson's experience of it which is progressively overlaid by language that 'does not describe but is' the perception of this experience. In the act of recreating the 'absolutely abstract' of Manson's lived experience of Baselitz's painting, meaning emerges and takes shape in the movements of these fragments of visual, verbal and sonic material, as the reader slowly learns that 'joy curls around meaning's painterly skitters.'

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