Modernist Poetry and the Limitations of Materialist Theory

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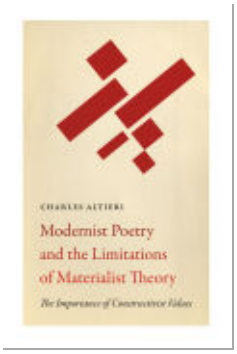

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CHARLES ALTIERI

Modernist Poetry and the Limitations of Materialist Theory

The Importance of Constructivist Values

MODERNIST POETRY AND THE LIMITATIONS OF MATERIALIST THEORY

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CHARLES ALTIERI

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The Importance of Constructivist Values

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I dedicate this book to survivors of all sorts, or, better, to the will to survive under less than ideal circumstances.

MODERNIST POETRY AND THE LIMITATIONS OF MATERIALIST THEORY

INTRODUCTION

Why Modernist Innovations in the Arts Still Matter

This book began with what I hope is a dialectical realization. I discovered how effective the "New Materialisms" of figures like Jane Bennet and Sarah Ahmed are in teaching a variety of materials from impressionist painting and imagist poetry to contemporary writing engaged in ecological issues. These thinkers teach us to see mind and sensation as intricately fused dynamic sources of energy and responsiveness to particular imagined environments. But this very success may reveal the limitations of materialisms in general because the affinity with impressionist values highlights how this ontological stance is vulnerable to modernist critiques of impressionism. The modernists insisted that impressionism was fundamentally "retinal" and, more important, not sufficiently concerned with how art can exercise the formative powers of mind in order to explore new aspects of sensuousness. So in this book, I read a variety of texts that I call "Constructivist" Modernist works for how they imagine exemplary uses for these form-giving powers as means of relating to the actual world. At stake is the possibility that this constructivist work can bring about distinctive ways of valuing our experiences—in poetry and by means of poetry.[1]

I will concentrate here on appreciating what I see as the stakes involved in particular projects by artists and writers who pursue constructivist values that depend on the artists' elaborating and modifying how the senses provide information about the world. Thirty years ago I wrote about how this constructivist orientation treated syntax as an essential component providing much of the semantic force sought by distinctively modernist imaginative work.[2] Now I want to go more deeply into the rationales these writers and artists provide, explicitly and implicitly, for idealizing the modes of self-consciousness emphasized by this art. This project demands honoring the particular resonances established by specific works or aspects of a writer's career. But as we try to find appreciative languages

capable of establishing for criticism the significance of these works, we will have to pursue three modes of generalization.

First, I think it is time to resist the rhetorics of materialism that pervade academic literary criticism today. We can accomplish this by emphasizing features of mental activity that do not fit into even the most sophisticated philosophical work in cognitive theory. Accounting for the differences between impressionist and modernist orientations requires developing theories that at least address the intricacies of self-conscious states of empowerment basic to engaging modernist art, and, indeed, great art in all periods. And these critiques of materialism make clear why I am so committed to treating painting and poetry as aspects of the same project.

Second, I think Hegel deserves a good deal of credit for constructing an aesthetic theory that provides modes of attention by which we can focus on these dimensions of mental activity. My Hegel, or the Hegel most relevant for the study of modernist art and poetry, is not the idealist Hegel concerned with absolutes, but the philosopher responsible for defining how sensuous art objects can embody what the mind can produce.

I will rely heavily on Hegel's idea of "inner sensuousness" because that provides a sharp distinction between the sense experiences stressed by materialist thinking and the kinds of sensuousness that depend on what self-consciousness can produce in its responsiveness to art objects. In order to adapt this concept of inner sensuousness to modern poems and paintings, I will secularize Hegel's claims about spirit by appropriating as many of them as I can for the distinctive work of self-consciousness that Hegel posits as his ideal goals for expressive activity.

We can make this substitution because Hegel allows us to imagine self-consciousness as that activity attempting to make aspects of feeling and thinking interpenetrate as they fuse subjectivity with "substance," Hegel's term for what Wallace Stevens would call "the pressure of reality." Self-consciousness need not be dependent on an imperial ego seeking mastery of its situations. It suffices to see self-consciousness as finding the subject in a distinctive situation and trying to gain some objectivity about that being placed in a public world with potentially dense historical dimensions. It is the feeling for the position that seeks the stability by objectifying the forces that it releases as it expresses its own needs and desires. I will elaborate this further when I turn to Hegel's formula for self-consciousness as the dynamic effort to make 'I' = 'I.' The subject as self-aware feeling seeks, by expressing its felt urgencies, to identify with the objective forces that shape how the subject comes to stand. For now it should suffice to see self-consciousness as

seeking to bring coherence to situations by providing a metalevel for reflecting on how the agent makes articulate and stable a positioning of the self that initially appears fragmented and riven by conflict.

Substituting self-consciousness for spirit is for me part of a larger project of what I call (after our mercifully ex-president) "making self-consciousness great again." From the romantics on, self-consciousness has been seen largely as a curse. It consists in endless self-questioning that generates paralysis, like that of Eliot's Prufrock or Pound's Mauberley. But self-consciousness can also be the instrument by which sensitivity to the ego's states of activity makes possible articulating, accepting, and willing what becomes manifest by virtue of its efforts at self-analysis. This positive view of self-consciousness makes imagination central to its activities. And this fusion emphasizes the roles of subjective awareness in controlling how persons organize their care for multiple aspects of experience. I want to emphasize our having the power to structure objective conditions in ways that see them satisfying basic human needs and the capacities to meet these needs—preeminently in how works of art provide opportunities to affirm or will what imaginative activity can realize. Then reflection on the self shifts from the hopeless project of representing that self to modes of active engagement in what expressive activity can make of the world experienced.

This project of idealizing the powers of self-consciousness (while admitting its dangers) also puts me in a position where I can modify Hegel's historical account of the death of art as a cultural force. For Hegel, art's force as a world-historical shaper of values now could be replaced by a philosophy able to subsume the sensuous into the categorical without denying its roles in experience. By concentrating on what Constructivist Modernism could accomplish in altering how we might value the work of imagination, I hope to show that it was Hegel's beloved philosophy that was on life support in literate culture early in the twentieth century because his models of thinking had been supplanted by a painfully reductive spirit of empiricism. So it seemed to many writers and artists that only art could afford the power to display what the life of spirit might become for the secular world.[3]

I am more insecure about my third domain of generalization. I am familiar with recent debates about the nature of consciousness, but I am by no means capable of proposing specific arguments that might count for philosophical discourse. I can try, though, to display how the kinds of experiences for self-consciousness produced by Modernist Constructivist art and poetry invite participation in mental states that embody quite complicated modes of mental activity, yet are not considered at all by current philosophical discussions. I will try not to belabor the point,

but I consider my readings throughout this book phenomenological challenges to what current states of scientific materialism consider as significant features of consciousness and, especially, of self-consciousness. Then in the epilogue I try to make explicit that phenomenological case by showing how literary critics go astray when they try to adapt current models of consciousness to the intricacies of literary experience. Here I will adapt the arguments of David Chalmers, in *The Character of Consciousness*, that "the really hard problem of consciousness is the problem of *experience*": "there is *something it is like* to be a conscious organism" at work in the world.[4] The easy problems involve explaining a cognitive function because "we need only a specific mechanism that can perform the function" (p. 6). The hard problem occurs because "it is not a problem about the performance of functions" (p. 6). Rather, that problem consists in having to account for "why is the performance of these functions accompanied by experience?" (p. 8). Then of course the crucial question becomes how broad and resonant the experiences are that one takes up for consideration. Even Chalmers turns out not to address many of the states of self-consciousness we encounter in literary experience (although his chapter 14 may provide a model for accounting for such states of mind).[5]

I

Since art theorizes by calling attention to qualities of particular experiences, my focus will be on versions of modernism stressing the constructive process of producing concrete sensuous forms that make present complicated and intense mental states.[6] This practice will not refute empiricist materialism, but it may convince some people that cognitive theorists will have to develop more subtle analyses of mind if they are to deal successfully with how skilled audiences get involved with works of art. I propose to accomplish this by calling constantly on major differences between critical approaches that stress ontology, especially materialist ontology, and those trying to establish loosely phenomenological strategies for attending to how the particular experiences of the work emerge for audiences that have demonstrated their competence in dealing with the relevant arts.[7] Critics now increasingly turn toward models of reading that they think enable them to explain the work—either by setting it in historical contexts or by exploring the material dynamics enabling us to convert perceptions into categories by which action and feelings are governed. But much is lost by not facing the gap between what is offered as explanatory substitutes for the particular work and what can be experienced as responsiveness to the complicated intentional activity that a given

work solicits. Art asks to be experienced, in part because those experiences are among the richest ways that we come to realize what our capacities and powers are as individual imaginative agents.[8]

Given these ambitions, the book faces several challenges. It has to argue continuously on two levels—that the works addressed were oriented toward resisting both the practical and the theoretical orientations promoted by empiricist thinking, and that in this resistance such works can provoke insightful, intense, and engaging presentations that establish affectively charged situations not explicable even by the most sophisticated contemporary versions of materialism. Producing such situations for the reader will require my dramatizing the multiple ways these artists translate the negatives of resistance into positive invitations to engage in the kinds of intricacies that elicit imaginative participation. My commitment to a loose version of phenomenology follows from this desire because I think the art wants to establish ways to care for and build on the intricacies of lived experience.

This book also has to tell a story responsive to the aesthetic impact of such works of art in a way capable of competing with the critical practices now most admired in the academy. There is a great deal of work that goes under the rubric of the New Modernisms, and there is an increasing turn to explicitly materialist versions of cognitive theory that focus on how works of art align with what the sciences are teaching us about how cognition engages the world. The New Modernisms are immensely diverse, but virtually all the proponents condemn mere aesthetic orientations in order to track cultural affiliations of the arts with other material practices. As Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz argue in their magisterial essay "The New Modernist Studies," critical attention to modernist writing has undergone two major changes.[9] There is now an intense commitment to distributing modernism more widely in time and in space. Modernism is no longer fundamentally a European and Anglo-American movement epitomized by a narrow set of examples from the 1910s and 1920s. Modernism has become a global phenomenon, present everywhere that artists and writers contend with the forces of production responsible for the pains caused by modernity. Second, scholars increasingly stress context over text by doing elaborate studies of how these confrontations with modernity take place by relating art to important practices in the material world. There is a great deal of attention to how modernity both challenges and enables the arts by fostering new technologies for gathering and organizing information. Artists and writers then have to expose various oppressive systems of distribution while taking advantage of these new technologies. And critics have become fascinated by possible analogies between social change,

say in systems of transportation, and how the arts configure parallels to those systems—for example, in developments of Sartre's observation that the world just looks different from a moving train or an airplane. Even the problem of diaspora becomes largely a matter of finding the perspectives by which one can take in all sides of how events take place.

It would be foolish to complain of this new burst of attention to ways of confronting modernity. But I think it is useful to point out some of the dangers that accompany this resurgence of scholarly attention. This is how Mao and Walkowitz justify the change in critical attention:

> Predictably, such work has drawn the fire of critics (within and without the academy) who see it as abetting a general devaluation of the specifically literary qualities of literature or as an assault on aesthetic value. But it might be rejoined that this work's truer import lies in showing in new ways how the imaginative exhilaration we draw from literary texts can be rooted in the nonimaginary world. (p. 744)

But being predictable may not entail being wrong or blind to the situation. It would be unreasonable to complain about all we are learning as criticism develops its commitments to treating modernism as a global movement or set of movements. It would be equally unreasonable, however, not to see what we are missing when the category of modernism is extended to virtually every text dealing with the social conditions of modernity. Most modern texts that engage modernity do so by virtue of the story they tell or the emotions they characterize. Such texts are modern in subject matter but conventional in their staging of authorial activity as producing sharp and compelling representations of noteworthy situations.

This is not the case for a relatively small group of artists and poets traditionally gathered under the rubric of High Modernism. They stage work calling attention primarily to what the artist is doing in the process of composition. We have to read the work's relation to the world as an extension of what the making accomplishes in developing sensuous objects embodying a sense of the possible significance for this making. In painting there is a sharp contrast between work intended to represent various situations in the actual world and work devoted to testing how an emphasis on the elements of the painter's craft might appeal directly to states of consciousness specific to formal structure. The case is more complicated for poetry. There have been many modern poets concerned with how matters of syntax and structure actually constitute significant states of consciousness—from Dada to the writing studied by Craig Dworkin's marvelous *Dictionary Poetics*.[10] But I am interested in poets who learn from modernist painters while trying to

balance concerns for engaging what we might call real-world situations. Such poets, whom I shall call Constructivist Modernists, emphasize how various structural, aural, grammatical, and formal features of expression provide new ways of inviting self-conscious participation in the manner of engaging these situations. Like modernist painters, these poets challenge us to find alternatives to traditional representational ideas for how art links to the world. But they have to locate these alternatives primarily within the constraints (and the permissions) afforded by the capacities of language to articulate specific imagined details that echo our practical world while establishing new ways of inhabiting such a world. Negatively, these poets treat an emphasis on traditional modes of representation as affording insufficient techniques for making work that calls directly on participation in powers of mind capable of negating and surpassing what representation can offer as adventures for the psyche. Indeed, this suspicion of representation is a primary feature that distinguishes these modernist poets from their predecessors who also emphasized the work formal concerns might perform. Positively, Modernist Constructivism emphasizes a tight correlation between expressing the powers of mind and the capacity to develop concrete sensuous forms embodying specific structures for those powers.

II

I realize that a much fuller case has to be formulated—both for describing such art and for understanding why an aesthetic approach to art objects is fundamental if we are to deal historically with what the artists understood themselves to be doing. For the purposes of this introduction, I offer the example of how Georges Braque's *Houses at Estaque* (1908, Lille Métropole Museum of Modern, Contemporary and Outsider Art) deploys powers involving compositional activity in order to offer fresh interpretations of what is represented. Emphasis on formal devices allows Braque to risk offering a representation devoid of human agency and without the striking sensuous features typical of impressionist art. We see at first only unforgiving surfaces of uninhabited houses all in various tones of ocher. But then we realize that formal matters have the power to transform how we look at this landscape. There may be no persons around. But the protocubist proliferation of perspectives makes present an awareness of the power of perspective that is capable of informing much more about the village than the details of this specific scene. Here artifice evokes the power for dwelling in this village as an intentional agent capable of animating this setting in an immense variety of ways.

That formal activity elaborates three means by which the painting rejects the kind of sensuousness cultivated by impressionism. First, the flatness of this painting does not correspond to any practical visual field. Instead, it calls attention to other ways of deploying the senses—cultivating what Braque called "pictorial fact rather than anecdotal fact."[11] Here the tree on the left presses into the painting in a manner that suggests an intimacy of vision bordering on touch. Second, the sense of intimacy provided by the compressed scene establishes a strange correlation of nature with culture. Consider how the tree seems almost to change dimensions as it forms a circular force in relation to the central house. The result is a partial transformation of the scene into something approximating a flower that affords a unique spatial configuration. The houses are not transformed into other shapes, but their arrangement opens into an active sense of capacities for constructing significance as the painting unfolds.

Finally, the painting proposes an intriguing imaginative alternative to the work accomplished by traditional modes of perspective. And it does so in a remarkably impersonal and so potentially transpersonal matter. There is no source of desire or feeling that we have to infer as responsible for how the scene is portrayed. Eventually we realize that everything the painting asks us to feel is evident in how the objective details relate to one another. The painting celebrates not the agent of feeling but the agent who can participate in what audiences are invited to share as they reflect on how the painting is composed. In this work the crucial fact about this scene is that there are no people presented as inhabiting this village. So there is no self-congratulatory projection of any controlling perspective. Yet there is a kind of population of the village, because the protocubist style invites us to experience self-reflexively the force of the range of perspectives that we have to take on in order to experience how each house manifests itself to the eye moving into and around the painting. This work suggests that there may be better access to the social relations constituting village life if we can be made to feel human habitation simply in the tensions among these perspectives as constitutive features of the scene. *We experience proprioceptively an abstract condition made sensuous for self-consciousness by these shifting perspectives.* And in so doing, Braque invites us to recognize how there are aspects of psychological experience that are not grounded in fundamentally subjective dispositions. These aspects are determined by an impersonal synthetic act of imaginative judgment based on awareness of how formal features give dynamic force to the work.

In the literary register, we can turn to how an audience is invited to explore

taking up similar stances by William Carlos Williams's "The Rose Is Obsolete," because it resists any attempt at picturing the rose in a naturalistic image that would not be able to escape sentimental associations.[12] Williams wants us to see how art may still recapture by formal intelligence both the physical and the symbolic force of the rose while also sustaining a sharp critique of what had become its conventional symbolic features:

> The rose is obsolete
> but each petal ends in
> an edge, the double facet
> cementing the grooved
> columns of air—The edge
> cuts without cutting
> meets—nothing—renews
> itself in metal or porcelain—
>
> whither? It ends—
>
> But if it ends
> the start is begun
> so that to engage roses
> becomes a geometry—
>
> Sharper, neater, more cutting
> figured in majolica—
> the broken plate
> glazed with a rose
>
> Somewhere the sense
> makes copper roses
> steel roses—
>
> The rose carried weight of love
> . . .
> It is at the edge of the
> petal that love waits

Crisp, worked to defeat
laboredness—fragile
plucked, moist, half-raised
cold, precise, touching . . .

The fragility of the flower
unbruised
penetrates space[13]

Because the traditional image of the rose has lost its power to convey anything but sentimental ideas, artists have the choice of abandoning the entire range of experience the rose has come to convey or restoring that range by making it depend on something other than those conventional picturings. In this poem, the force of the rose depends on identifying with the activities basic to constructing its image. Rather than picturing the rose and commenting on it, Williams performs an act of "presentation" and "realization" that appeals directly to qualities of self-consciousness as they engage the work as itself a process of production. Then the art as structuring of energies can provide sources of authority able to replace inherited wisdom: reconstituting the force of love simply involves the audience identifying with the shaping acts that give point and force to how edges take on force in art and in life. This new art could literally offer a concrete pathway to the continuing significance of the rose by establishing for consciousness a medium of intense resonance between what enjambment does for the poem and what edges constitute as desire.

For Williams the relevant powers reside in the kinds of care that this reconstruction makes visible. The edge is what one makes dynamic as a register of intense presence, but it is also where one is most vulnerable to and eager for contact with other beings. In the visible labor by which the edge gets established, there still can reside the fragility and the fluency that makes love such a distinctive state of sensibility. And the idea of love may even reflect back upon the art by stressing what the work enacts as its own structuring of an erotic excitement capable in itself of defeating laboredness. Once one stresses art as enactment of mind seeking to find what might suffice, there seem to be infinite possibilities for remaking what has gone stale in a culture. Taking advantage of those powers demands our stressing how the embodied activities of the maker provide exemplary presences inviting audiences to value states of consciousness evoked by participating imaginatively in the text. It will not do to approach these modernist works as merely efforts to

represent feelings for or judgments of situations. Nor can it suffice to see the art as bids to project the ironic disruption of the potential fullness of sensual experience.

I want to emphasize the idea of exemplification here because it will be my central means of connecting what art and writing display with what audiences take into the world from the work. All criticism has to connect works of art to the world that they address, even if a fully aesthetic criticism might stress the work's capacity to reject that world. For me the central feature of that connection is preserving what one sees as the distinctiveness of the particular work of art and not subordinating that particularity to some concept governed by practical understanding. I could invoke Kant on the difference between understanding and reason—the one devoted to relating particulars to universals so that actions become possible, the other devoted to working directly with the relations among concepts. But here I do not want the philosophical baggage, so I will define practical understanding simply as the judgment that "this" is a "that" because it fits a concept that I have, so I am guided in performing certain actions upon it. Then I can claim that most works of art disrupt this smooth flow from particular to concept to action, primarily by focusing attention on how particular features might exemplify aspects of concrete actions, which we submit to practical understanding only at a substantial cost. Exemplification is not understanding and does not directly guide actions. Rather, it is the elaboration of concrete qualities of actions that matter to the extent that we can imagine their guiding attitudes and investments because of features that they exhibit rather than how they fit our conceptual schemes.

We can make such distinctions because "example" can be used in two different ways. The work can provide examples *of* some general situation of which it is an instance. Or the work can provide what I call "examples *as*," wherein we keep the particular as our focus for elaborating what imagination can do as it adapts the work to the world.[14] Consider how we cite poems from memory when events call them up, so that the poem can serve as a means of fleshing out the actual experience. I often think of the opening of Yeats's "Leda and the Swan" when I am moved by other texts, and then reflect on why the comparison might be appropriate.

I think all effective art is exemplary in the sense that it constitutes a "seeing as" that audiences can adapt to the world in all its particularity. But there are at least two different general ways for the work's particulars to become exemplary. Representational art tends to make scenes and characters exemplary in the sense that audiences can adapt their sense of what the work realizes or displays to their own practical situations. One learns by seeing how far imaginative identifications can take one. Constructivist art, in contrast, focuses on the exemplary powers of

the making as rendered concretely in the work's ways of distributing attention and care. Later in this book I will treat these exemplary capacities as modes of inner sensuousness because they depend not on what we see but how we come to think about how we see. Braque's *Trees at Estaque*, for example, offers several levels of exemplarity, from asking for attention to houses and trees as linked architectural forms, to inviting audiences to see this particular act of synthesis and care as capable of inspiring alternatives to personalized perspectival seeing. There are times when it is more illuminating to see oneself seeing as from an impersonal perspective. In the same vein, Williams's "The Rose Is Obsolete" exemplifies possibilities of erasing standard connotations and replacing what had traditionally carried sentiments about roses into identification with something like the eroticism of the edge for touch and feelings of exquisitely delicate attention.

III

I have to admit that constructivist art demanded too much change in audience modes of awareness to compete in popularity with conventional commitments to representation. And relatively few makers could sustain life on imaginative high wires without the safety net of representational strategies. But what that art lacks in popular access it makes up for in inventiveness and intricacy. I will elaborate several strategies by which those I call "constructivists" make the creative processes themselves the story. These artists want their art to provide the direct sensuous realization of how their imaginations cast or recast feelings for their own compositional intelligence. And audiences then are invited to participate in the dynamics of such objects by reflecting self-consciously on the difference the manner of making can have on their feelings for their own powers of engaging the real world. Given this focus, I also have to oppose the New Modernism's emphasis on social and political contexts. Once criticism turns to social contexts, claims to genius become focused on how texts negotiate these contexts rather than how they work out ways to make us celebrate their own constructions of what they can do imaginatively with more general aspects of what they encounter as material constraints. Modernist Constructivism may often have little direct political passion, with the exception of art participating in the Russian Revolution.[15] But it does exhibit intense passions for changes in how we reflect on our own powers as individuals to find ways of altering our commitments. So my aim in this book is to develop some ways in which this art helps us appreciate who we can be as individuals, while recognizing that this is probably all art can

do in relation to politics if it is to retain commitment to essentially contemplative experience. The basic hope for this art is that we can enact some approximation of what we imagine our powers to be in the world.

However, here I face some problems that probably have to be confronted at the outset. I want to be responsible to contemporary thinking about the arts, but I do not want to make this book primarily about philosophical issues. Or, more precisely, I do not think we can fully understand the issues art poses for materialist thinking unless we have patient and extended accounts of just what constructivist art asks of its audience. Yet appreciating what that art asks requires having constantly in mind the kinds of challenges this art faces in its efforts. So I propose two compromises. The first compromise is that I will reserve for the epilogue an effort to locate general features of art that simply resist all the current popular versions of materialism, in large part by complicating the cases of those thinkers like David Chalmers who give me confidence in my resistance to current forms of materialist thinking. I will have in mind versions of materialism ranging from Marxist practice, to classical empiricist materialism still vital to many analytic philosophers doing aesthetics,[16] to various versions of extended cognition, and to the efforts by self-proclaimed "New Materialists" to weave into materialism Niels Bohr's quantum theory, Bergson's vitalism, and Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on fluid relations between subject and object.[17] But I will not treat any of these in depth, because what fails in their accounts of art are not subtle ramifications of the theories but the core vision of what their thinking allows them to attend to when they turn to aesthetic appreciation.

The second compromise is more complicated because it will affect the structure of my argument in much of this book. I will stress New Materialist ways of thinking in my critique of materialism even though they establish significant differences from enlightenment versions of such thinking. Only New Materialism among discourses claiming roots in the sciences even tries to engage the intricacy basic to aesthetic experience. So by stressing this most modern and self-reflexive version of materialism I can hope to produce clear accounts of the powers and limitations for aesthetics that set off by contrast what a commitment to phenomenology of aesthetic experience can engage—especially in relation to Modernist Constructivism.

Influenced by Bergson's contrast between spatial and temporal thinking and by Karen Barad's idea of differential methods, the New Materialists repudiate ideals of causal explanation for an emphasis on dynamic and shifting fields of entangled interrelationships as their preferred approach to the object world.[18] This sense of dynamic fields aligns them with the blend of foregrounded sensuality and

imaginative intentionality characteristic of many works of art, so their writing easily adapts to how art embodies conditions of perceptive experience—in ways that are much richer than the other materialisms that stress cognition rather than a more general dynamic of apprehension. They are the only materialists who fuse phenomenology with ontology. And, even more important, the New Materialisms stress the complexities of agency as mind comes to participate in atmospheres and atmospheres open to complex conditions of interactive mutual influence. New Materialisms make it possible to see how a painting by Monet does something more than render the play of light within complex atmospheric conditions—natural and psychological. Such painting, along with related modes of what I will call "a poetics of scenic epiphany," makes articulate how the material play of energies and events actually constitute the embodied mind as it elaborates the scenes with which it engages. Mind here is not the domain of mastery but of learning its own powers by trying to cooperate with the vital forces by which the scene exhibits its dynamic affinities with imaginative desires.

We can then imagine a plausible theory coming from New Materialist thinking of what arts mean for social life. But I will argue that such imaginings remain limited, in ways that are quite useful for understanding the ambitions of Constructivist Modernism. New Materialist thinking seems so enthusiastic about providing revolutionary new perspectives that it is not always careful about being persuasive in its philosophical claims. There seems little reason to accept claims for a robust concept of freedom on the level of human behavior because of how molecules display indeterminacy. And their versions of vitalism rely much too heavily on analogies that claim descriptive power. Try as Stacy Alaimo might to draw analogies from affordances in the natural sciences to literary devices, the former are matters of fact, the latter involve speculation about intention and interpretation. Literary devices do produce something like affordances in the sense that they make connections possible, but such connections need not follow any determinate processes allowing science an explanatory hold on phenomena.[19] So, more generally, I will argue that while New Materialist ways of talking about human agency are wonderfully alert to matters of sensibility, or information coming into the mind, their resistance to traditional idealizations of mind make them insufficiently attuned to the kinds of mental activity artists perform and ask their audiences to share.

I hope I can be faithful to both the achievements and limitations of New Materialist thinking in relation to the arts by staging the claims of their materialism in what I hope is an interesting dialectic. As I have stated in my opening remarks,

I emphasize how impressionist art and imagist writing can come alive under the lenses they offer for envisioning how we experience the world. But then I argue that these very affinities with a historically dated mode of art practice makes this New Materialist thinking subject to pretty much the same critiques now that constructivist artists made of their predecessors early in the twentieth century.[20] The New Materialists' very affinities with representational arts focusing on fields of energy makes it very difficult to appreciate or handle the critiques that modernist artists posited as a means of defining the limitations inherent in impressionist strategies. So the overall materialist position best attuned to at least some artworks proves incapable of handling the art on which I want to focus. Constructivist art makes present what in my view is the richest set of demands within aesthetic experience for foregrounding the kinds of acts of mind that do not seem built up by our experience of the senses. Instead, the acts of imagination that this art cultivates invites inferences to direct creative powers devoted to establishing levels of self-conscious responsiveness very different from attention to the play of surface forces.

Two constructivist critiques seem to me to stand out. The first is the sense (somewhat unfair and self-interested) that the materialist emphasis of impressionism's stress on retinal values largely ignores the powers of construction that make it possible to shift from how art pictures the world to how art can encourage different ways of seeing and of thinking. Such seeings and thinkings hold out the possibility of self-consciousness attending to what making can exemplify as powers for living with full self-awareness. The second, more positive line of critique stresses how these new directions in modernist ambitions produce modes of concentration and care well beyond the grasp of materialisms as currently constituted. We have to be able to account for the work done by forces structuring a suprematist painting, or generating the juxtaposition of frameworks basic to so much modernist writing, or sponsoring the choice by poets to foreground grammatical complexities as means of drawing in an audience by asking them to rely on what they have already internalized as the domain of mind.

IV

My primary story about Modernist Constructivism is in many respects a familiar one, although by now High Western Modernism is under so much attack that almost any attempted defense may be an original and timely contribution to literary criticism.[21] I am convinced that the only way to resist the blindness in these attacks is simply to provide a competing and more compelling

case about why this art can matter for our imaginative lives. So I am enlisting a somewhat strange ally in these efforts. G. W. F. Hegel affords a way of thinking that enables us to pay careful attention to how foregrounding the making in constructivist work invites attention to intricate and intense imaginative resources: no things but in reflections on how they are composed. With the help of Hegel's work on the inner life that is focused by how self-consciousness can take sensuous forms, we can see what is at stake in a contrast between what we could call the "picture-thinking" of representational art and the direct attempt to convey inwardness characteristic of "romantic" art.[22] Hegel's treatment of this romantic art then puts us in a good position to appreciate constructivism's stress on the activities of makers seeking to have concerns for elements like line, plane, color, syntax, and structure to take on sensuous power by how they position the participation of a responding self-consciousness. Such modes of self-consciousness can be distinguished from the practical understanding because they are built on concrete structural features of the work that replace reliance on modes of sensuality inviting conceptual generalization or practical action. The constructed details and their interrelationships, in contrast, serve at once as expressions of the maker and as the mode of sensuousness by which that making generates claims for taking embodied objective shape in the actual world.

Let me provide a little taste of Hegel on art, in order to clarify how I will be using him. His central concern in discussing art is to show how that domain displays a distinctive mode of spirit's work of expressing itself in sensuous forms:

> Spirit does not stop at the mere apprehension of the external world by sight and hearing; it makes it into an object for its inner being which then is itself driven, once again in the form of sensuousness, to realize itself in things, and relates to them as *desire*.[23]

Spirit in art is manifest by how making embodies dimensions of inner life and establishes a distinctive product marked by the capacity to give that inwardness a concrete shape:

> These sensuous shapes and sounds appear in art not merely for themselves and their immediate shape, but with the aim, in this shape, of affording satisfaction to higher spiritual interests, since they have the power to call forth from all the depths of consciousness a sound and an echo in the spirit. In this way the sensuous aspect of art is spiritualized, since the spirit appears in art as made sensuous. (*LFA* 1:39)

It is crucial then to distinguish this spiritual self-reflection from other modes of sensuousness that in art remain satisfied by subjective representations that have their own sensuous reality. In order to speak concisely of the internal links distinguishing these "depths of consciousness," I will rely on the phrase "inner sensuousness." The phrase in German is *selbstbewusste Innerlichkeit*, which can be translated into English as "self-conscious inwardness." In this way Hegel can characterize the kind of inwardness produced by romantic art, where spirit surpasses any sensuous object processed by the understanding.[24] Braque and Williams deploy a distinctive version of this mode of sensuousness as their ways of appealing to the self-conscious participation of their audiences and at the same repudiate descriptive terms like "image" and "scene." For the modernists, art does not give an idea a sensuous form. Rather, it provides something like an ideal state of mental activity as taking on sensuous embodiment for self-consciousness —such as appreciating the force of perspective or imagining love in the form of edges. Inner sensuousness becomes the seeing of seeing and the feeling of feeling. It stems from treating the work as involving participation in the activity of the maker rather than as any kind of picture.

I have to admit from the start that I am not an expert on Hegel and make no claim to illuminate his work.[25] I want to be clear that while I borrow a good deal from him, I adapt these borrowings for my own purposes. I hope I am accurate about his general concerns, but my primary goal is to provide access to what my artists and writers produce in accord with constructivist ambitions. This will involve secularizing Hegel's claims about spirit as much as possible, primarily by translating the claims into the dynamics of self-consciousness. This Hegel will help me in two basic ways—by enabling me to insist on how imaginative making requires distinctive forms of judgment, and by showing how limited contemporary treatments of self-consciousness are when they stress the corrosive effects of irony rather than engage processes of participation in expressive activity. Hegel will have performed significant labor for our culture if he can help turn our attention away from critical positions that emphasize the distance consciousness imposes on experience so that we can focus on the satisfactions possible when audiences recognize their own powers objectively at work.[26]

I will elaborate what I need from Hegel in my first chapter. In this introduction I think I only have to identify the three specific concepts from Hegel with which I engage in order to characterize my writers' and artists' resistance to materialism and argue for their continuing value as acts of mind. The first concept is quite elemental, yet offers a rare perspective on why human beings need art. For Hegel,

art is fundamentally the work of imagination that tries to align what he calls "spirit" with the sensuous world. Art then is opposed to philosophy, which seeks to absorb that sensuous world within conceptual structures. And this opposition entails a telling critique of how most critics talk about romantic concerns for personal expression in ways that help us articulate why Modernist Constructivism developed very different accounts of how subjectivity can be staged.

Hegel shares a typical romantic attitude toward expression that stresses the maker's efforts to bring articulate sensuous objectivity to experiences that began as inchoate jumbles of impressions. I imagine most romantic poets and critics would agree that what matters most in art is the pressing out of subjectivity the aspects of experience that can bear the weight of sensuousness.[27] But Hegel's dialectical model draws out significant new possibilities because it stresses how these subjective expressions become objective as sensuous structures.[28] Then one finds in the expression becoming an objective state the opportunity to recognize this shaping as having achieved a new level of subjective awareness. For example, the subjective shaping of imagination in art can cultivate various kinds of impersonality that are not opposed to individual self-consciousness but present ways of seeing what subjects can share and the powers that accrue to that sharing.[29]

My second borrowing elaborates Hegel's concept of expression in order to specify how this interplay of subjective and objective actually takes place in a dialectical mode of self-conscious activity. That dialectic then becomes fundamental practice at the core of constructivist art. Hegel's dialectic of expressive activity involves a simple but powerfully dynamic equation: 'I' = 'I':

> Only after it has externalized this individuality in the sphere of culture, thereby giving it existence, and establishing it through the whole of existence . . . only then does it turn the thought of its inmost depths outward and enunciate essence as 'I' = 'I.' . . . In other words, the 'I' is not merely the Self, but *the identity of the self with itself*; but this identity is complete and immediate oneness with Self, or this *Subject* is just as much *Substance*.[30]

On the left side of the equation is the work of self-conscious attempting to understand aspects of one's pursuit of full identify that require engaging the objective conditions Emerson called the "not me." Imagine Braque's disgust with traditional landscape as constraining what he imagined landscape could be. The right side of the equation involves Emerson's "not me" taking shape as how history and the force of situations define what demands expression by the subjective 'I.' The question becomes for Braque: How can I see who I become if I produce an

objective scene better attuned to possible contemporary ways of seeing, feeling, and thinking? Neither side of the equation involves fixed entities. Rather, both sides are continually adjusting to the other: the situation on the right side of the equation can challenge the subjective side by revealing aspects of the world that actually negate how the agent has in the past established identify for the self.

Probably the clearest general account of this dialectical principle occurs when *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* develops his criticism of empiricist idealizations of the "here" and the "now" because he thinks both terms are empty without the elaboration of contexts.[31] Suppose the "here" before consciousness appears to be a straightforward scene of an apparently idyllic landscape. Then the left side of the equation needs only relatively simple judgment taking direct pleasure in what is before the eye. But the situation can change, for example when the 'I' becomes suspicious of that ease, as if it began to fear that it was ignoring potentially disturbing aspects of the scene. Danger may be lurking in what seems innocent. Or an element of the scene may emerge that reminds one of how the scene implicates a history of injustice. Such suspicions negate the way the subject initially appropriates the scene as a source of innocent pleasures. Once uneasiness arises, the agent will have to call upon capacities for complexity of feeling and intellectual judgment concerning historical forces in order to respond dialectically to this negation. The agent would also have to question any direct identifications with the characters in the scenes insofar as these identifications might factor in that unease.

So the agent would have to become self-reflexively critical of its earlier emotional investments. Those negated investments now become part of the objectivity of the scene, which demand rethinking and refeeling if the subject is to take responsibility for how the objective situation has changed. Now the subject cannot feel adequate to the object before her unless she tries to develop ideas about changing social structures. And those ideas will ultimately have to rise to a level of comprehension by philosophy that can comprise absolute knowledge, where substance and spirit live each other's lives and die one another's deaths. The hypothetical process here enables us to grasp how Hegel can imagine an "Absolute" where subjective intensities and objective conditions merge completely, bringing an end to the inadequacies of merely historical understanding.

I can offer more concrete examples if I return to my examples of constructivist art. Art is where we most clearly see the potential balancings that spirit can achieve with substance when they seem implicated each in the other. Think again of Williams's "The Rose Is Obsolete." The subject wakes to a world in which established comforts are gone. The rose will not provide an adequate objective

figure for what love involves. So the spirit has to go back to the drawing board in order to reconstitute objective conditions with which it can identify. The artificial rose stressing the dynamics of edge provides the desired possibilities because it replaces a sentimental figure by an object that actually does work to reconfigure the dynamics of desire. But this change in object cannot suffice in itself. The subject must find in its potential for change the possibility of replacing sentimental figures for love by self-awareness of how it might participate in the dynamics of the edge. This is the work art can do. The flexible subject may have to take up stances that deploy a sense of participation in modes of self-reflection anchored in an idealized and impersonal collective consciousness—hence the crucial turn in the moderns against the individual expressive subject to concerns for what I will be calling the transpersonal possibilities of subjectivity rendered as objective condition. The effort to offer an objective reconciling of subjectivity and sensibility becomes the means by which the art object explores what might be possible for aspects of self-reflection embedded in the density of sensuous life:

> Art's vocation is to unveil the *truth* in the form of sensuous artistic configuration, to set forth the reconciled opposition just mentioned, and so to have its end and aim in itself, in this very setting forth and unveiling. (*LFA* 1:55; also *LFA* 1:56)

V

My third borrowing from Hegel draws on the historical shape he develops for the arts because of how they stage these fusions of spirit and substance. This history provides the adventures of 'I' = 'I' on a world historical scale. Hegel argues that spirit in art first emerges for civilization by awkward and unsuccessful attempts to align that spirit with some form of objectivity. We encounter in the Egyptian pyramids a "symbolic" art in which the spirit cannot quite inhabit the flesh but instead insists on a creative force that disturbs any complacency with the orders of sensuous life. Then a classical art emerges in which we find perfect correlation between imaginative energy and sensual experience. Imagine seeing for the first time a perfectly formed statue of a Greek god making dynamic the interior of architectural space (*LFA* 1:85). But spirit cannot be content with this marriage, because it wants to know itself as something richer and more intricate and more troubled than can be correlated with typical modes by which we experience the senses. So a romantic art develops in Christian painting, then poetry and drama, that portrays the spirit reaching beyond the material senses and rejecting natural

forms for its embodiments. Now the substance for spirit can only be provided by turning from those senses to an "absolute inwardness [that] cannot freely and truly shape itself outwardly on condition of remaining molded into a bodily existence as the one appropriate for it" (*LFA* 1:79).

Spirit goes in search of objects that can express what inwardness becomes as the fullness of self-consciousness. I think of how Giorgione's *The Holy Family* (1500, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC) holds the family so tightly within an elegant spherical form that the focus turns to how we see through the image to the inner forces that shape and interpret it. Giorgione is not very interested in making Joseph or Mary into visually exciting representations that can satisfy the interests of spirit. He is far less involved in the representational qualities of his scene than in the ways his constructive activity characterizes how we might imagine the idea of what the perfect family might be. Here the family constitutes an intense collective unit, bound by three elements. Notice the spherical shape that encloses the family, intensified by the effects of Mary's and Joseph's cloaks. The child then becomes an intense unifying figure, literally binding his parents' different positions in the depth of the field while at the same time producing forceful lines of connection with the two other faces in the painting. Finally the spherical shape focusing on the family as unit contrasts beautifully with the dominant arch that opens to the outside world that will bring so much suffering to those who must support each other.[32]

I need Hegel's very broad outline then because his characterization of romantic art proves extremely useful for the analysis of modern poetry and modernist painting. These art forms virtually demand a critical language that stresses how the imaginative forces of the making exceed any concern with representing natural beauty and dramatic social situations. Analogously, we need a critical language capable of valuing how the sensuous object can articulate these energies of the making that become vital sources of self-conscious activity. Think again of the examples provided by Braque and by Williams.

Yet useful as Hegel is, I need to modify the historicism that underlies this distinction of three phases of spirit and that allows Hegel to imagine that only philosophy can produce a higher stage of awareness than romantic art offers. Hegel thought that modernity constituted an epoch when art would no longer reign as the apogee of cultural expression. Philosophy could take its place because philosophy had finally evolved to a position where its concepts could universalize all that mattered in the life of the senses.[33] But in actual practice, philosophy's universals proved much more reductive than Hegel imagined them to be, because the

field became dominated by allegiance to scientific models of explanation. Under those conditions, art proved necessary for recasting how inner sensuousness might matter for a culture. Artists could manage to resist Christian interpretations of spirit while insisting that spirit could be located entirely in how art appealed to a repertoire of powers experienced as enabling participation in the making. This is why noniconic abstraction seemed to be a powerful model for how sensuousness could be inseparable from identifying with the self-awareness shaping authorial choices. And this is why Hegel's vision of art is so useful for appreciating how the quest for inner sensuousness sponsors multiple imaginative projects, because each work must find its own objectivity within its processes of self-reflection. The result is our opportunity to explore a wide variety of artistic modes of rendering how self-consciousness can become a distinctive object embodied in passionate states.[34]

VI

I begin the concrete argument of the book by using Picasso's recasting of Cézanne's still lifes as a powerful instance of modernism's war on the authority of empiricist treatments proclaiming what objectivity might involve. In this chapter I prepare to get to Hegel by stressing how Picasso's cubism and the forms of abstraction it engendered challenged the ways in which our practical understanding conceives the place of objects in our lives. In essence these transformations of Cézanne require an audience willing imaginatively to refuse yielding authority to the mind's ways of stabilizing objects within conceptual models that posit them as at a considerable distance from the beholder. In Jacques Rancière's terms, art had to make possible a massive redistribution of the senses.[35] More important, this new art had to exemplify calls for audience positions that sought not so much to understand objects as to remake them in accord with the life they afford to the imagination.

All the major High Modernist artists and writers were to join Picasso in his challenge to practical understanding. They explored shifts in scale by which objects and persons might be able to display the force of their presence, and they established a range of subject positions for which finding the appropriate concepts was less important than imagining how a responding consciousness might cooperate in making those modes of presence emerge. This imagining had to orient itself toward a questioning of who members of the audience might become by virtue of participating in what the making elaborates as possible distributions of subjectivity. At one pole, conditions of feeling get modified because of the breakdown

of the distanced observer posited by common-sense understanding. All sorts of intimacies become possible as we begin to imagine ourselves identifying with multiple decisions about line, shape, color, and context that affect the emergence of object states inviting our care and attunement. At the other pole, once the subject does not stand against an object but participates in its unfolding, she can entertain all sorts of feelings involved in reformulating the boundaries of self in order to accommodate how seeing is staged as shareable and how that sense of the common might be willed as itself something to be valued.

Then my second chapter can frame the modernist struggles with materialist thinking by fleshing out the dialectic to which I have already referred. I argue that the New Materialist thinking that emerged in academic circles around 2008 offers a very powerful means of accounting for the originality of impressionist art and writing influenced by impressionism. New Materialisms make matter vital and stress how mind offers a mode of agency embedded in a range of other natural forces. Close attention to paintings by Monet, Pissarro, and Caillebotte allows me to demonstrate how the New Materialisms afford the possibility of taking completely literally the impressionist ideal of presenting nature in accord with the compositional energies of specific temperaments.

Now the dialectic fully kicks in. I shift from using the present in order to read the past to using the past in order to read the present. I argue that the very success of New Materialism in elaborating what was at stake for impressionist artists and writers makes it vulnerable to the critiques leveled by subsequent artists and critics about the limitations of the retinal emphasis basic to such art. The postimpressionists and ambitious modernists saw the emphasis on the retina as precluding the possibility of reflecting on what powers of mind, like active concentration and the pursuit of formal intensities, might provide as values linking art to cultural needs. Such critiques, and the permissions they generate for constructivist painters like Kazimir Malevich, seem to me to reveal problematic features basic to a range of contemporary materialist models of mind. In my view we cannot have an adequate theory of mind if we only attend to matters of cognition and ignore all that aesthetic judgment brings into play. So I argue that only a loosely phenomenological attitude toward acts of mind can recuperate for our culture the qualities and the values that can be located in how the modernists invoked self-consciousness. We need not embrace idealism. We can be faithful to physicalism by arguing that we do not yet know the full biology of mind, so we need to take seriously the critiques of current thinking made possible by close attention to how we have to process singular complex and moving works of imaginative intensity.

Such painterly projects then afford a useful framework for the following chapters' turn to literary materials. For it matters immensely to me that almost all the great modernist writers turned on imagism as dangerously close to sponsoring literary versions of impressionist sensibility. Once we realize that affinity, we put ourselves in a position to value fully the ways in which the modernists elaborated modes of constructive activity that could alter the valences of sensibility's dependence on scenic expressive detail. And once we appreciate the range and depth of these constructive powers, we might be more sympathetic to efforts throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century to oppose the primacy of lyric poetry's reliance on what I call "epiphanic images" building upon such sensibility. I will argue that the epiphanic image is dangerous precisely because it so directly invokes the kinds of emotional intensities that are inseparable from the practical lives and ideologies we embrace. It mimes experiences of value through art but does not open those experiences to significant new models for feeling and for thinking.

My third chapter focuses on the responses to imagism developed by Ezra Pound and Marianne Moore, as each poet turns increasingly to what the constructive dimension of poetry might involve for self-consciousness. By 1912 Pound was trying to transform imagist principles by developing features of language that he thought could partake in modernist efforts by visual artists and musicians. Poetry can realize vorticist ideals of planes in tension with one another—both in physical space and in the play of will and concentration that makes the illusion of physical space possible. A few years later Moore turned from imagist description to experiments in syllabics and in syntactic structure that virtually demanded that her audience emphasize the work accomplished by how the poem articulated constitutive internal relationships.

Then chapters 4 and 5 take a somewhat different tack. I move from individual poems to the projects late in the careers of T. S. Eliot and Wallace Stevens exploring the possibility of using constructedness as a kind of metaphoric ground for valuing experience. Both poets follow a quasi-Hegelian path from satisfaction in the image as object, to ironic agonies about the mind's displacement from any sense of objecthood, to an emerging satisfaction in the kinds of habitation of the world that constructivist values make it possible to experience. They come to treat compositional principles as leading to various ontological and ethical commitments that allow the subject not just a sense of achievement in particular poems but also a capacity to model a devotion to inner sensuousness capable of helping to develop satisfying attitudes toward experience in general. For Eliot constructivism was built into the logic of Christianity because the order created

by Incarnation trumps any full authority for sensual experience. Stevens in "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" sought an analogous sense of plenitude in the ways that the "unreal" and the "real" seemed inextricable from one another as conditions for valuing how experience takes form. In that poem Stevens tries to formulate a vision that treats the mind's constructive labors as enabling persons to find value directly in how imagination and reality interact to manifest each other's interrelated powers.

My last chapter tries to show how Constructive Modernism still persists, if not thrives, in the contemporary world, although it elicits very different affects than those that characterized modernist writing. This discussion will concentrate first on how John Ashbery embraces a constructivist sense of the present tense of writing as a powerful alternative to demands that writing refer to typical situations that authorize practical judgments. That present tense becomes a matter of maintaining fascination by the audience as the text works out complex plays of voices and enigmatic figuration based largely on indefinite grammatical forms. Ashbery in effect focuses on the powers of the unfolding sentence rather than the powers of any kind of synthetic image. Where modernist poets sought to reinforce the present tense of writing with elaborate self-standing and self-referring structures, Ashbery's writing for the present actually takes on power by its capacity to weave absence into what becomes activated: interpretation becomes problematic because structuring seems inseparable from directing self-consciousness toward a necessary incompleteness for writing, and, indeed, for living. I wanted then to look at several younger writers who extend this relation between the present of writing and the nonpresence of what might be able to extend fascination with the text into interpretable coherence for the text. But I ran out of energy and space and capacity to deal with intricate absences. So I settled for one younger writer, Geoffrey G. O'Brien, who seems to offer the richest development so far of, and beyond, Ashbery's poetics.

Again the antagonist proves to be essentially descriptive poetry seeking an epiphanic sense of minor revelation as the poem opens into a fully lyric conclusion. Like several of his peers,[36] O'Brien admits that some epiphanic poems might be terrific, although all run the risk of being bound to well-known conventions within which claims to revelation have to take place. So such poetry embraces not just a problematic style of writing but a widespread disposition toward kinds of feeling, and thinking about feeling, that simply deny our full powers for reflection and assessment. This pursuit of epiphany by means of the senses risks becoming a demonstration of Hegel's bad infinite because it offers modes of representation

that try to embed transitions to transcendental realms of feeling while refusing the practical paths by which self-consciousness must piece the world together.

O'Brien's most recent two books concentrate on those modes of inner sensuousness that can make lyric substance of that piecing together. The subjective pole of "I" becomes an invitation to the audience to participate in enacting processes of reflection attempting to secure momentary satisfaction in the twisting and turning of mind adapting to the changes its activities produce. And the object pole of inner sensuousness becomes the resting place for such activities, often produced by how his complexly simple short line moves between metrical and free-verse renderings of what the poetry makes of aspects of experience. I am especially interested in two features of those embodiments. I think O'Brien develops a distinctive diction whereby he uses very concrete terms in order to elicit quite general or abstract conditions. The first sonnet of "Sonnets So Far" in his newest book, *Experience in Groups* (*EG*), begins this way:

> The past of having makes the present
> Bleed and then we are asked to
> Forget it, like imagined slights (*EG* 30)

This opening phrase treats "having" as if it had a history, precisely because the unmodified verb-become-noun offers a degree of generality that captures perhaps better than any other term the concrete core of what is shared among capitalist practices.

My second interest is in the work done by enjambment, which is also exemplified in the cited passage. Enjambment allows O'Brien to treat thinking as direct objectification of an inner state because the thinking is continually forced to negotiate the physicality of the verse. There is no way for thinking to proceed on its own. Rather, it is continually bound to how the verse unfolds and makes demands for accommodating the leaps enjambment produces. When we get to the end of the first line, we have to determine what part of speech "present" is, and we have to anticipate what verb can satisfactorily complete what we resolve to be a noun. Then as we fill out the enjambment, the course of our reading makes us feel that openness to redirection as an intensifier of intimacy with the speaker's efforts. The words "we are asked to" furthers the process by posing an incomplete infinitive phrase that highlights possible distances between asking and understanding.

Finally I cannot resist adding an epilogue to the book, in which I try to develop a straightforward abstract argument demonstrating how the force of aesthetic experience seems capable of resisting the interpretations of mind posed by even those

resisting current models of materialism in neuroscience research. First I engage the literary critic Omri Moses trying to align poems by T. S. Eliot and W. C. Williams with Andy Clark's theories of extended cognition. There is extended cognition staged within these poems. But in stressing these moments, Moses cannot attend sufficiently to the synthetic authorial acts that stage the situation. Dealing with this staging requires attending to a central mode of self-conscious activity within the text that makes affective judgments about those cognitions. Then I turn to the discussion of subsumptive states of consciousness in David Chalmers's *The Character of Consciousness* to show how this opponent of materialism still cannot handle the complex affective self-reflective intensities in the last stanza of Ashbery's poem "As We Know." This poem seems to reject any language of psychological inwardness. But then it fleshes out the emotional power of elemental grammatical elements like the phrase "really now" in order to develop an intricate and deeply moving objectification of what two lovers can see themselves sharing.

My efforts at showing why close reading can matter for attributing cultural values allow me to conclude that philosophy and science can learn from the phenomenological states that texts pursue as they elaborate modes of delight in mental activity more fundamental to lyric experience, and perhaps to life, than any cognitive satisfaction. Hegel matters in this story because he tries to give a literal picture of the space for such judgments by his speculations on an inner life and the embodiments that speak directly to it, or in it. Once those adjustments are made in theory and actualized in practice, it becomes strikingly clear that the phenomenology he exemplifies is far more enlightening for the arts than the place he gives art in his overall picture of cultural life. For what the arts need most is the capacity to cultivate those modes of attention capable of eliciting our appreciation of why it matters that we have minds as sources of intense self-reflection as well as of knowledge.

CHAPTER ONE

How Modernist Transformations of the Object Affect Its Presentations of Subjectivity

> It is not the "greatness," the intensity of the emotions, the components, but the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure, so to speak, under which the fusion takes place that counts.
>
> —*T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent"*

This book will concentrate on the range of feelings visible in Constructivist Modernist poetry and painting's ways of staging the energies by which the audience is invited to participate in the sensuous objectivity produced by authorial activity. Its basic goal is to clarify how works of art foster powers for situating the self in the world made available by the artist's labors.[1] Such situating makes it difficult to align appreciation of this art with any contemporary mantras about materialism.

One can argue that the arts enthusiastically took up enlightenment modes of materialism in the great age of secularization from about 1860 almost to World War I. After this, they had to worry that they had succeeded all too well. Perhaps it had become necessary at this point to concern themselves with how a culture could value the powers inherent in the modes of human agency they displayed. Then artists could begin to combat two severe threats to society intensified by the successes of empiricist thinking—the reductiveness of calling for realism in every aspect of the arts, and a corollary insistence on the primacy of perspective as the only plausible way of presenting human agency.

However as I look back at those efforts at resistance, it is hard not to think that they have failed. "Sophisticated criticism" seems now in thrall to new versions of materialism, which I have to admit are much better attuned to many of

the intricacies of experience largely ignored by previous commentators. And the new modes of criticism hold out the political promise that they can do a better job than is possible with constructivist values of undermining the individualism that was central to neoliberal materialist versions of cultural life. Rather than proposing alternative possibilities for how distinctive versions of subjectivity might be realized, these critics propose to undermine any language that might sustain individualist values or support claims about the distinctiveness of the human species. But I remain convinced that any effective democracy, or deep intimacy among human agents, requires faith that these beings can take individual responsibility for acting in ways that serve what can be determined as the best options for any collective enterprise. So there are large stakes in getting straight how the arts cultivate distinctively human modes of agency enabling us to think of ourselves as able to act in accord with what we consider good and/or beautiful.[2]

My pursuit of these stakes requires resisting empiricist versions of the priority of the senses by taking seriously how several modernist artists and poets honor the mind's capacities to establish aesthetic orientations capable of directing the priorities for those senses. So I explore what it might be like to present experience under auspices that compete with empiricist world views, beginning with the massive redefinition of objecthood that I think is cubism's enduring contribution to what we can value in human agency. Such a redefinition involves trusting that modes of self-consciousness play central roles in our lives, despite the fact that much of contemporary philosophy distrusts any language stressing any kind of consciousness.[3] I have to admit that I cannot prove that self-consciousness exists as a significant power by which humans complicate and value what thinking about identity can afford.[4] Nonetheless, I will try to display the kinds of valuing of and connection to other minds that become possible when we focus on various acts of self-awareness that artists invite us to experience. And I will try to show how Hegel's aesthetics provides models for self-consciousness through the arts that are not trapped within the practices of evasive irony and cultivation of self-defense or self-disgust emphasized by contemporary criticism. (In making my case, I find myself using philosophical language for what I see as common-sense concerns. So in the main text I will try to stress a possible public efficacy for my concepts, while I will relegate to the footnotes efforts to refine my concerns in a more philosophical language. Only those who slog through the footnotes are likely to appreciate this decision fully.)

In this study I will use the shorthand term "inner sensuousness" for Hegel's model of how the expressions of spirit take on objectivity, all through the arts.

But I also want to emphasize some ramifications of Hegel's vision of romantic art as achieving highly intense inner states in the modes of sensuousness that the art establishes. Therefore I will treat Modernist Constructivist art as a secular version of the self-consciousness in romantic art that concentrates on the force of the making as that force is given an objective presence by the work. For this study self-consciousness can be summarized as a process whereby persons introspect and project significance for their own experiences as they become present. Such presence makes possible imaginative affiliation with other viewers or readers because the emphasis is on how the work structures intricate affective relations so as to establish a sense of demand on audiences: it simply will not do to effuse about what one likes or dislikes about a particular work, because what matters is the particular processes a mind undergoes.

This chapter will get to Hegel by stressing how Picasso's cubism and the forms of abstraction it engendered challenged the ways in which our instrumental understanding conceives the place of objects in our lives. In essence, Picasso's cubist work requires an audience willing to refuse yielding authority to the practical understanding's ways of stabilizing objects within conceptual models that posit them as at a considerable distance from the beholder. This redistribution of the senses proves inseparable from an audience having to appreciate what mental powers they can foster as they attend to the art. Picasso makes clear the need to experiment with alternatives to those modes of human agency that seek accurate description and clear practical judgment. Art practices had to change in order to test the possible use-value of those reconfigurations of presence when the activity of making seemed to have effective force not just as shaping the object but also as establishing conditions by which the objects might be valued. Making and finding had to emerge as overtly inseparable.

This desire for reconfiguring what can count as objective also demands that the maker reflect on who the audience can become by virtue of participating in what the making elaborates as possible distributions of subjectivity. At one pole, conditions of feeling get modified because of the breakdown of the distanced observer posited by common-sense understanding. The distanced observer adjusts the overall scene in order to facilitate practical action or clear understanding. But the new art seeks the kinds of intimacy that become possible if we imagine ourselves identifying with decisions about line, shape, color, and context that produce the emergence of particular states inviting our care and attunement. At the other pole, once the subject does not stand against an object but participates in its unfolding, the subject can entertain all sorts of positions that reformulate the boundaries

of self. As in Braque's *Houses at Estaque*, seeing can be staged as fundamentally shareable because of the exemplary nature of the work. And the work can articulate how this sense of the common might be willed as itself something to be valued.

I

I think the path to Picasso's cubism establishes a profound modernist critique of Western culture's reliance on practical reason as its model for mapping human relations to the world of objects. Picasso shared this critical attitude with contemporaries like the fauves, the expressionists, the surrealists, and much of noniconic abstraction. But the cubist Picasso never gave up on a sense that the real imposed significant demands on painting, even as the artist had to reconstitute how we might engage that real more imaginatively and more vitally. These contemporaries also shared an opportunistic contempt for impressionism, as we will see in some detail later, because of its reliance on the retina rather than the mind's capacities to impose concentrative energies.[5] But here I will focus on how Picasso offered a specific critique in some of his still lifes of 1908 of similar motifs in Cézanne that seem to stop short of freeing the object from the constraints of empiricist understanding. Cézanne had already made significant alterations that broke from what we might call, after William James, "the radical empiricism of the impressionists," since those painters came to represent a new realism—not dwelling on objects per se but on the interaction between temperament and scene under specific viewing conditions. But Cézanne still painted his objects as if he accepted the ultimate authority of the world given to the senses. His task was to "realize" the work that mind and eye had to do to make the work of the senses intensely visible and present. In *Pines and Rocks (Fontainebleau?)* (1894, Museum of Modern Art, New York, hereafter MoMA) and other landscapes in the 1890s Cézanne challenged the conventions employed since the Renaissance that were devoted to three-dimensional means of capturing the weight of the objects rendered.[6] In his paintings the rocks float and trees anchor the scene by their linear forms rather than by their weight. Similarly, Cézanne's later still lifes successfully broke with single-point perspective. But he did not play significantly with scale and he did not sufficiently explore the possibility that painting could also challenge the conceptual split between observing subject and rendered object, even though he did manage to develop intense intimacy between subject and object on an emotional level.

Picasso wanted to extend these freedoms. But he did not want to deny the

ultimate authority of an objective world. He was never a fauve: except perhaps in taking coloristic freedom for his otherwise realistic images, he never reveled in the freedom to subordinate objects to color patterning. So we have to be careful in specifying what the natural object becomes in his paintings from 1908 to 1913. I think he concentrates on the possibility that what is of most interest in the natural object depends on the hand of the artist. The painted object is faithfully rendered on an emotional basis only if its making becomes inseparable from its ability to claim a kind of objectivity. The object does have to exist in imaginative space because its being seen as mattering (in every sense of "matter") depends on alternative understandings of what constitutes nature. The result is that for affective purposes the artist as creator replaces the divine being, who seems to have limited himself by accepting the conditions of practical understanding.[7]

I want to develop these claims about Picasso's relation to Cézanne by attending to a moment in Picasso's career that has garnered little attention—his work in the genre of still life from the summer of 1908 to the end of autumn in that year. Typically this work redoing Cézanne is seen as a "diversion" from developing the logic of cubism.[8] But I think it clearly formulates problems that highlight how cubism offers new ways of rendering experience. Picasso modifies Cézanne by using more radical visual means of treating objects as depending on the painter for making their identity fully present. And that required also imagining possible variations in the modes of subjectivity painting might exemplify as it tries to engage that fullness. Finally, Picasso had to struggle against the fact that Cézanne's still lifes were simply too beautiful as representations, so they did not make sufficient demands on an audience to register the difficulties faced in painting's struggle to develop a more replete mode of presence.

Picasso's still lifes in this period, like *Still Life with Fruit and Glass* (1908, MoMA), are charged with respect for Cézanne's accomplishment in correlating a sense of radical presence honoring the independence of objects within a natural framework while also making visible the power of the composing mind to impose intricate formal relations that manage to intensify that independence. Yet these paintings explore the possibility of combining a break from treating the fullness of an object in terms of scenic representation with the pursuit of another kind of objectivity beholden entirely to painting. Such objectivity might depend on challenging the priority of perspectival seeing that had governed both science and art since the Renaissance. For painting might establish impersonal modes of seeing whose value could be defined by the very kind of objectivity it alone has the capacity to establish.

Picasso's path toward this new way of seeing probably began in his experiments with African techniques. It was a primary task of these techniques to make audiences feel the presence of a collective way of viewing that is also a means of access to intimate features like recessive contours and elaborate visual patterning imposing its own orders.[9] Picasso found in that work stimuli to explore how painting might break further from the logic imposed by stressing how perspective shapes naturalistic seeing. Consider in this light the uses of Cézanne's motifs in two works—one from the summer of 1908 bound to Cézanne's sense of concrete geometry, and one from the autumn, wherein a full transformative lyricism is released, one that reconfigures the forms of fruit into other modes of formal presence.

Still Life with Bowls and a Jug (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 32¼ x 25⅞) offers to the eye Cézanne's typical panoply of still-life objects—jug, fruit bowl, and other bowls on a table whose edges define one perspective while another perspective seems necessary to see into the bowl and take in the full textures and shades of the table. We might begin then with how the table differs from the typical ones painted by Cézanne. Like everything else in the painting, the table is much more in the foreground than in Cézanne's still lifes. This table insists on rendering objects that are themselves insistent on a foreground presence, making it impossible to adapt standard judgments of size. Size seems determined by form, and form seems determined by sheer objectness for the eye. We should also note that Picasso's table refuses a typical Cézannian strategy for establishing that objectness. It is not as visibly tilted as Cézanne's tables are (except perhaps toward the back, thereby opening up a dimension of space not of interest within Cézanne's commitment to presence). Instead of offering a tilt, this table performs its display function primarily by staging an intensely and complexly layered density of shades of rust brown, convening a dramatic interplay of light and shadow. It is as if the tables in Cézanne were realizing now that they could make much greater claims on our attention, ironically by at first seeming to pull back from their job as display tables in order ultimately to revel in their own complex relation to light. The table in Picasso's painting has no legs and no drapery: these would distract from the harmonies its tones establish with the other objects.

These other objects also have minimal utility. They matter solely because of what they are and what they do for the other objects. In fact, the fruits within the bowl have no particularity (except for a vague apical glow echoing Cézanne). The fruits seem to have to be content with serving as masses to set off the contrast, basic to the painting, between the openness of containing forms that invite placement and the mysterious privacy of the closed jug. These objects make visible relationships

that reward and complement the painter's capacity to work with shape and color tones chosen from a limited but very lush palette. The eye here cannot reach beyond the painting to something firmly realized, because it is simply the relational field as painted that establishes what counts as reality for the moment of seeing.

Cézanne introduced this concept of realization, but Picasso alters it substantially. What is realized is a set of formal relationships that does not resolve into geometry but projects a set of marvelously self-adjusting elements. The painting plays circular movements against a strong triangular structure (a structure that almost levitates the small bowl in the foreground) while modifying the triangle with inclinations toward a square. The painter seems to prefer to geometric forms a tangle of possible formal shapes visible as tense possibilities but not as reconciled resting places.[10] In order to accomplish this effect the painter has to deny the role of perspective as conferring presence so that the sense of presence proves inseparable from a constitutive impersonal will to form independent of any practical interests generated by a particular agent.

Now look at what happens in autumn 1908, with much smaller panels. Our example will be *Fruit Bowl with Pears and Apples* (Heinz Berggruen Collection, 10⅝ x 8¼). The reduced scale of this small painting produces a striking level of concentration organizing a complex still-life scene. Picasso continues the treatment of the fruits as primarily shaped masses with almost no surface detail. But while the paintings completed in the summer were a matter of independent sculptural forms, each seeking that independence while maintaining an uneasy spatial relation to its neighboring forms, the paintings completed in autumn introduce intricate planes and overlapping textures that establish at once a circle and a pointed triangle. The tightness of the space in this version of a fruit bowl gives the impression of grandeur to how the fruit occupies a foreground not feasible within the ordinary laws of perception. And at the center of the painting we find a combination of two gathering overall shapes—the circular form of the bowl, distributed also to the multiple bends and bows of the individual pieces of fruit, and the gentle vortex that matches the table in projecting a vertical moment reinforced by the lighting.

These general forms effectively structure all the details because Picasso brilliantly deploys Cézanne's foregrounding of "passage," the technique by which objects encroach upon one another's identity rather than occupying separate planes. Here passage is deployed primarily for sculptural purposes; the time had not yet come when passage in cubism would be transformed from intersecting shapes to intersecting planes. In fact, I cannot think of another painting that deploys passage to give such vitality to the forms of fruit while almost entirely muting any textural

features that are not matters of light and shadow. So light and shadow themselves approach the status of related and relating substances according gentle stability to the whole. There are no cubes and no hinges linking spatial units. But we should notice that there are many similarities to the straightforward protocubist structure of *The Reservoir, Horta de Ebro* (1909, MoMA). Consider how the vortex of the buildings in the later painting relates to the overlapping and rising circular form. And notice how even the reflecting reservoir is echoed in the bowl of the 1908 work, although it does not quite perform the same gendered task as in the later painting.[11]

Such similarities ironically result in making us have to face one huge difference: *Reservoir* rejects passage here for the kinds of harsher interrelations created by intersecting cubes. I think Picasso came to think that paintings like *Fruit Bowl with Pears and Apples* were too lush and directly satisfying to the senses. They did not make sufficient demands for their independence as objects with their own modes of appearing. And, more important, they did not sufficiently explore the relation between the will to make paintings as intricate realities in their own right and the power to make assembly itself a vital access to the forces objects might exercise—block by block and facet by facet. Painting had to be an elaborate act of mind that could demonstrate how mind and matter could cooperate, even though they involved in part quite different modes of feeling.

Yet one cannot be too harsh on *Fruit Bowl with Pears and Apples*, because this painting also establishes a distinctive and powerful emotional field by managing to foreground the activity of making as fundamental to its ways of being objective. The image is quite seductive—with its gorgeous and intricate use of a limited palette in conjunction with its combination of formal shapes—setting a gentle vortex within a gracious container. But to what are we directing our emotional response? Certainly not to any pears and apples that have actually existed. The objects only exist in paint and for contemplation. Picasso has learned well Cézanne's distinction between fruits to be eaten and fruits to be contemplated for their visual qualities. More important, our response is directed toward an authorial act that does not depend on establishing a subjective perspective. Changes in how one imagines the nature of objectness are accompanied by major changes in how we imagine the kind of subjectivity giving the painting its vitality and emotional timbre. We are invited to respond to this work by imaginatively participating in bringing the images into being because we identify with the manner of the painter's working. Most painting invites this identification with the painter. But most Western painting bases this identification on the affective life that the image

presents as an imitation of something in the actual perceived world. In contrast, *Fruit Bowl with Pears and Apples* dramatizes how that perceived world exists only by virtue of our concern with the painter's choices and with our attribution of a purposiveness to those choices. The real world for this painting becomes the viewer's sense of why and how a given consciousness produced coherence for a process of decision-making.

Our basic response then is most full and most satisfying if we can envision through the painting the satisfactions possible in the objects taking on the kinds of presence they do. What personality the maker has is willfully exhausted in strategies for fostering a kind of transpersonality, a condition in which to see at all is to operate within manifestly shared positions isolated from the partiality of perspective. The activity of giving form invites identifying with desires to complete these particular shapes and contexts in this specific way. For Picasso this constructive desire proves inseparable from having the image evoke the real world by virtue of the painter's ways of denying the authority of common-sense understanding. Picasso's composing presence both honors the "real world" and transforms how that sense of reality can be invoked. The painted image becomes the means for realizing aspects of sensuous properties not given to ordinary perception.

II

Perhaps I should go on to illustrate how these modes of agency become even more forceful in Picasso's fully cubist still lifes—from the gorgeous layers of folds in *Fan, Salt Box, Melon* (autumn 1909, Cleveland Museum of Art) to the severe faceting of *The Architect's Table* (early 1912, MoMA). But two general points will have to suffice. The first point involves how the objects take on a life of their own—as objects so real that they establish their own conditions for being perceived. The objects do not appear as images of natural facts but as forces, built up both by gathering and by distributing interconnected forms and relations among shapes, echoes of shapes, and traces of surrounding contexts. The melon revels in a world of folds that afford it a full being. And those folds in turn compose a very complex tension between circular energies around a table seeking flatness and a vertical painting given definition by how the fan picks up those folds and interprets them in its own version of self-definition. Objects emerge, giving and taking life from how painting distributes line and color as themselves reveling in a plenitude without any lack or negation. This melon needs no rendering that would make it more evidently what it appears to be. Existential objects and

painterly decision-making form a seamless whole where subject and object almost continually exchange places.

The case is similar with *The Architect's Table*, even though the constructive forces are lush in a quite different register. Now it is the table that comes alive by virtue of replacing its physical identity with an imagining of its overall gathering power.[12] Here there are no clear boundaries between the central object of attention and the subject giving form to the object: the object does not occupy a site in the distance where it takes its place among other objects. Instead, the object is repositioned as dominating the scene, precisely because it liberates its surroundings rather than binding them to how the understanding conceives sight.[13] The table offers itself as an active support, leaping into the foreground and sharing that foreground with the instruments of the architect's profession, wittily including a glass of wine and spectacles. In many respects this image is all table all the time, but treated more for its functions than as an independent object viewed by an independent subject.

In other respects the table hardly exists at all because this object has a different participatory relationship to its context than it would have in traditional art's modes of establishing positions for specific details. As T. J. Clark puts it, Picasso treats the painted sign as having the function of a hinge so that the bounding edge of one object can be transformed into a very different ontology of infinite connectivity, constantly beginning again.[14] Particularly impressive is this painting's use of a series of vertical blocks as background, which evoke the architectural consequences of the work the table makes possible.[15] It is as if the faceting introduces the possibility that this table also is a support for the architect's imagination, from which it also takes on concrete being. The multiple vertical lines beautifully stretch the circular form, perhaps because the tools on the table invite the imagination to treat the table as being not unlike a constructing mind with its resources laid out in plain sight. The blocks are aspects of the background that also project a future.

Finally, this dynamic of unfolding asks us to alter how we imagine the roles of the painter as maker. There is a strong will to break from habit so that the artist can base the expressive force of the work on how the table is transformed into a set of possibilities for dominating the present tense of the painting. But the will in the painting does not take on any overt distinctive psychological presence. We do not recognize any designs on the object or through the object. So I think Clark overstates the ironic aspects of metaphor making in Picasso's cubist work after the summer of 1911.[16] Here, as in Cézanne, the making is inseparable from the seeing. The mind of the maker seems to have no designs apart from how it modifies our seeing into the ramifications of what the image brings into the present tense. That

mind is not staged as an independent and solitary entity. The making is an aspect of the seeing, and the seeing an aspect of the making.

Neither subject nor object are definable in terms that typically govern perception or art that mimes perception. Instead, both are bound together as qualities of forcefulness somewhat free of established parameters for engaging the world. Consequently there is possible an immense consolation for those viewers who recognize that they too can occupy this subject position by testing how identification may be possible if they participate in acts that free us for the moment from culturally inherited modes of looking. There is an impersonality and a universality to whatever allows the object to appear in this fashion, because freedom from the world of objects as usually staged suggests freedom also from the fixed world of subject positions that haunt those stagings. The objects remain, but as permissions for imaginative transformations.

My second general point also involves this capacity of Picasso's to merge mind and matter, because he demonstrates how imagination is inseparable from the stimulation it brings to the objects of its attention. I think the strongest way to make this point is to turn from the beginnings of analytic cubism to its final stage—from these transformations of Cézanne to Picasso's collages of 1912–1913. In *Guitar, Sheet Music, and Wine Glass* (November 1912, McNay Art Museum, San Antonio), for example, there seems a radical shift from treating objects as taking shape because of the interplay between specific forces, to stressing a timeless condition of visibility built upon a manifestly composed collusion of various kinds of actual materials, like pasted newsprint and charcoal drawing. There are no literal lines of force; the material eye sees only textures and patterns. Yet the eye provided by imagination encounters quite different conditions of objectivity. In order for the imagination to produce a satisfying sense of the object here, it has to reproduce the shape of a guitar made vivid by the collocation of the various elements. The image can be completed only by the mind processing the relations between material elements. And I think this mind also has to generate at least traces of an ear in order to complement how the textures insist on an evocative lightness. That lightness in turn echoes in the imagination the unheard music introduced by the page of score and the play between battle and game suggested by the lettering. Here, what Braque called "the lyricism of the means" induces situations where we have to recognize that while "the senses deform, the mind forms. . . . There is no certainty except in what the mind conceives" (*Art in Theory 1900–2000*, hereafter *ATM*, 215). The apogee of materialism in art turns on itself by demanding an imaginative act shared by maker and audience in order to give the made object its full resonance.

III

In my view we have arrived at the major distinguishing feature of the art and poetry I will be studying: the art ultimately refers to the affects that it can make visible as dynamic features produced by authorial self-consciousness in its processes of construction. This said, it is important to note that such stress on the force of subjectivity, and such satisfactions, need not be solipsistic. There are many expressive ways of composing sensuous art objects that imaginatively explore who subjects can become as they align with the material aspects of the works. Analogously, while these made objects need not follow the conditions laid out for objects by practical understanding, there are numerous ways we connect the actions presented to what we take to be the real world. Most critics at least recognize this emphasis on the activity of construction as fundamental to the modernist works we will be engaging. But then critics tend to go back to stressing what affective force they can gather from the image or dramatic situation as the basis for their judgments about what matters in the work of art. I want instead to develop ways of talking about the values and the affective investments that are available when we direct our imaginations toward identifying with various forms of actual constructive activity. But I need considerable help in establishing conceptual contexts that will give resonance and significance to the various modes of subjectivity that such construction involves.

This is why I turn to Hegel's *Lectures on Fine Art*. These lectures take materialism very seriously, in large part because art for Hegel is the effort of bringing sensuousness to acts of mind. But Hegel does not stop with materialism, because he posits more than one general mode of sensuousness: there can be objective sensuous that fleshes out the manners through which matters can appear, as in Greek art, and there is the later development of an inner sensuousness by which the making of art embodies its own sense of spirit. By virtue of this contrast one can say that Hegel affords us a way of thinking against his own idealism. Since, as C. D. Blanton pointed out to me, the opposition is not between mind and matter but between two modes of sense—sense dependent on perception and on empathy and sense dependent on self-consciously feeling the feelings involved in perception and in empathy, which involve the mind's creative activity. Neither the subject nor the object is bound to the practical understanding mired in what Hegel calls "the prosaic mind which poetry must shun" (*LFA* 2:974).[17] Instead, the mind's sensuality takes the stage.

At the risk of repeating materials from my introduction, I will try to summarize how *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* helps us appreciate the investments in

constructive activity basic to representative works of High Modernist art and poetry. Art matters for human life because it embodies the mind's activities to engage particular states of being without losing its concern for the kinds of universals that can become present as metaphoric extensions of that particularity. The miracle of art is its capacity to bring spirit or imagination to sense while modifying how we develop significance for what the sensuous order can sustain:

> The work of art, as a sensuous object, is not merely for *sensuous* apprehension; its standing is of such a kind, that, although sensuous, it is essentially at the same time for *spiritual* apprehension; the spirit is meant to be affected by it and to find some satisfaction in it. (*LFA* 1:35)

This sustenance occurs on two levels. One is how imagination can transform modes of inhabiting familiar sensual objects so as to reconfigure what representational art sponsors as modes of desire (*LFA* 1:36). The other, the mode of spiritual apprehension, affords objectivity for inner being, which makes "an abstraction" out of "something sensuously concrete" in order to produce "something essentially other than what that same object was in its sensuous appearance.[18]

The pursuit of such conditions of self-consciousness is ultimately why art calls for and instantiates a domain of aesthetic judgment where "the thinking spirit" can know itself again "when it has surrendered its proper form to feeling and sense, to comprehend itself in its opposite" (*LFA* 1:13). Thus for Hegel the focus of the philosophy of art shifts from demands for explanation to a willingness to engage the kind of thinking that involves "reflection on the mode of its productivity and practice" (*LFA* 1:27). Art is the way humans bring the self before itself "by *practical* activity," enabling a person to alter "external things whereon he impresses the seal of his own inner being." Such activity enables humans to find again their own characteristics embodied in their passions: "Only by this active placing of himself before himself" does a person make visible the quality of spirit's engagement with the world (*LFA* 1:31). That positioning makes "spiritual inspiration conspicuous" (*LFA* 1:29) by concentrating on how self-consciousness of one's powers as spirit becomes possible through acts of engaging sensuous particulars:

> The chief task of poetry is to bring before our minds that power governing spiritual life, and in short, all that surges to and fro in human passion and feeling or passes quietly through our meditation. . . . [A person] must know what the powers are which drive and direct him, and it is such a knowledge that poetry provides in its original and substantive form. (*LFA* 2:973)

In this context Picasso can be seen as developing the spirit's engagement as it comes to revel in its capacities to provide something close to an alternative nature. And Williams can be seen as making the rose an abstract object in order to explore why subjectivity has invested in this mode of sensuousness as an expression for how love can feel. While philosophy is committed to expanding the mind so that it can understand the spirit's involvements in the concrete substance produced by historical forces,[19] expression in art stresses the individual's capacity to lift "the inner and outer world into his spiritual consciousness as an object in which he recognizes his own self" (*LFA* 1:31).

These claims are most sharply and extensively realized in Hegel's labors to cast "romantic" art as the culmination of the ways spirit inhabits what making accomplishes. There are three fundamental modes of such efforts to grasp "the Idea as content, whereby a difference in the configuration in which the Idea appears is conditioned" (*LFA* 1:75). Each modality of the Idea echoes a corresponding cultural disposition for understanding how divinity becomes present. The Chinese, Indians, and Egyptians have only indeterminate ideas of a divine presence (*LFA* 1:74). The "Greek god is not abstract but individual, closely related to the individual human form" (*LFA* 1:72). But the Christian God is "pure spirituality and is to be known as spirit and in spirit" (*LFA* 1:72). We cannot know this God by any description: "his medium of existence is therefore essentially inner knowledge and not the external natural form through which he can be represented" (*LFA* 1:72).

If we view the history of art from the perspective afforded by Hegel's philosophy, we can see it passing through three general states by which self-consciousness stages its basic structural relationships with sensuous particulars. I have summarized these stages in my introduction, but now the stages should take on additional force because we have seen more fully how they fit Hegel's ideals of expressive activity. And that activity is most complexly and completely realized in the third "romantic" structure for aesthetic experience. Romantic art moves from spirit finding satisfaction in sensuous forms to spirit seeking satisfaction in its own quest for an objectivity distinctive to self-consciousness. The statue of the god has to turn fluid and mobile so that spirit can focus on the conditions of desire and exalted feeling underlying the rendering of sense experience. Attention must be paid to interior forces made visible in how the working of the art brings distinctive self-consciousness qualities to the experiencing of sensation. One might say that for classical art, spirit finds itself within the activities of picture-thinking, while in romantic art, spirit is a matter of aligning with creative process.

Raphael's Madonnas have all the formal elegance and correlation of body and

spirit that we find in classical art. But at the same time the making here celebrates the capacity of that elegance to define a spiritual state in which the Madonna is a symbol of infinite grace. And the composition establishes the painter's efforts to participate in that grace (see *LFA* 2:812–27). Such painting exemplifies the composing of a body that defines how spirit exceeds sense, primarily by developing complex structures among internal relationships made possible by the medium.

Hegel must be cited at length here in order to illustrate the scope and clarity of his imagination:

> Now if in this way what was implicit at the previous stage, the unity of divine and human nature, is raised from an *immediate* to a *known* unity, the *true* element for the realization of this content is no longer the sensuous immediate existence of the spiritual in the bodily form of man, but instead the inwardness of self-consciousness. (*LFA* 1:80)

The romantic spirit beginning in Christian art "retreats from the sensuousness of imagination into spiritual inwardness and makes this, and not the body, the medium and the existence of truth's content" (*LFA* 1:80). In effect, we have to turn to the making reflected in the work as both the expression of this inwardness and the force by which we are given a content for self-consciousness:

> The new content, thus won, is . . . not tied to sensuous presentation, . . . but is freed from this immediate existence which must be set down as negative, overcome, and reflected into the spiritual unity. In this way romantic art is the self-transcendence of art, but within its own sphere and in the form of art itself. (*LFA* 1:80)

That is, art still cannot rival philosophy because the inward spirit is always engaged in the making of particulars. But the particulars maintain the power to embody an inner life that the art object can "seek and achieve only within itself" as living substance (*LFA* 1:81).

IV

Notice how Hegel makes the work itself provide something like a body capable of directly engaging self-conscious participation on the part of its audience. This is why I want to treat Hegel's development of an ideal of inner sensuousness as a plausible account of basic desires within Modernist Constructivist work, represented here by Picasso. But in order to do this I have to differentiate my

account from Hegel's in three basic ways. First, I need Hegel's historicism in order to position my own version of what seems distinctive about modernism's emphasis on the presence of the making in works of art. But I also need for general theoretical reasons to point out how his historical boundaries do not quite work (as his comments on poetry seem to acknowledge, because poetry's inner spirituality seems to hold even for Greek materials).[20] Aeschylus and Sappho probably share with Shakespeare a concern to achieve inner sensuousness. And while Christian art may have had to emphasize a constitutive tension between inner and outer, there are many other dispensations in art that attempt to reconcile these poles.

Second, for my own historical interests I have to distance myself from Hegel's specific account of inner sensuousness. Hegel saw this third stage as fundamentally defined by Christian painting, then by music, and by poetry, all of which offer very different kinds of sensuousness. The Christian analogues are crucial, in part because they match Hegel's sense of how his religion differs from ancient religions and then Greek paganism: Christianity's interest in Christ as exemplary individual provides strong models for artists' dreams of making objective the conditions of possible inner lives while separating those conditions from ordinary sensuousness. The modernity that followed romantic inner sensuousness was for Hegel characterized by the eclipse of art rather than any new art form. But it may make more sense to say that modernity was characterized by the eclipse not of art but of religion, especially the eclipse of a Christianity that could sustain any teleological view that philosophy might replace art.

So I argue that rather than philosophy replacing art, artists tried to accommodate their work to some basic needs of philosophy after the effective death of Christianity, which philosophy at the time seemed incapable of meeting because of how it embraced the secular spirit of enlightenment. Most influential philosophy after Hegel was sorely lacking in plausible secular versions of inner sensuousness. So human reflection needed alternatives to philosophy that could still find secular ways of honoring what was involved in the capacities of self-consciousness to establish objectivity in its own constructive activity. This line of thinking allows us to imagine that there is not a huge leap from Raphael to the secular dynamics by which Picasso has the object call attention to powers of subjectivity making its existence possible. And the secular case is even more striking in how Malevich's suprematist abstractions objectify purely imaginative sensuous forces by means of intricate and complex balances in the configuration of space.[21]

The secularizing case is a little more problematic when we turn to poetry, because almost all of the relevant work depends on representational settings that

much of the painting rejects. But we can begin to appreciate what the new poetry shares with constructivism in the visual arts if we first focus on how the poets rejected the modes of direct sensuousness popularized by imagism, the modern movement that highlighted how writing might be an instrument for sensitive, precise rendering of objective conditions. Those who turned away from imagism stressed an inward turn—but less for the purpose of exploring personal psychology than for an appreciation of insisting upon the significance of structural elements that called upon transpersonal aspects of audience response.[22]

Where painting locates inner sensuousness in attention to relations among color, line, form, and expressive pacing, writing by Modernist Constructivist poets stresses the sensuous features of grammar and structure stressing judgment rather than direct responsiveness to a vitality fostered by the senses. Such writing often wants to address familiar scenes. But it does so by fostering considerable tension between our typical ways of processing such scenes and the writing's insistence on making realization depend on emphasizing an additional level of sensuousness elicited for self-consciousness by the foregrounded manner of presentation. As we saw with "The Rose Is Obsolete," the sensuous dimension of the poem so embodies the activities of the maker that the making itself takes on a concrete objecthood available to all those willing to participate in how the work organizes its energies. If we concentrate on modifications of inner sensuousness, we will be better able to appreciate what the poets sought and why their work retains significant value for our culture.[23]

My final difference from Hegel is that I ground my secularizing of his characterization of romantic inwardness in what I hope is a plausible account of how self-consciousness can operate. For most constructivist art, we simply do not need to bring in anything smacking of religious or philosophical transcendence, like the unity of spirit and substance. Some modernists did stress various spiritual doctrines—from Anglo-Catholicism to theosophism. But the driving force of their conceptions of this spiritual power in the objects was the desire to bring an audience to the enlarged and intensified states of consciousness fully articulated in the works themselves. As Picasso shows, these works do not ally with common sense but seek alternatives to how the practical understanding shapes objecthood.[24]

In this secular recasting of Hegel we have to emphasize the fact that the work itself then must offer concrete exemplars not just of how people see and feel but also of what it might be like to possess powers to reconstitute objectivity on the basis of subjective states. Virtually all Western art makes "thisness" general by preserving concreteness in such a way as to invite audiences to participate in the appreciation of how it might matter to render these details in this manner.

Modernist Constructivism is distinctive primarily by foregrounding these conditions of participation as capable of replacing attention to the kinds of objective awareness suited to practical understanding.

These artists replace appeals to cognitive impulses by an emphasis on what happens when we engage how the making both produces and objectifies sets of relations inviting us to feel our participation in the object as an end in itself. Think of how Picasso's *Fruit Bowl with Pears and Apples* generates its own vortex as its means of making the gathering of fruits enter dynamic relations with a responding sensibility. It is important that such an art object can elicit multiple contexts for appreciation. But to talk about a particular constructivist work with any depth one has to see that it is the arranging of those relations that matters more than settling on any cognitive mode of producing hierarchies attributing purposes to that structuring.

Kant claimed that this internal directedness for determining relations among elements of the work was a kind of "purposiveness without purpose," a dance of many ideas rather than a quasi argument devoted to a single cognitive purpose.[25] Picasso and his peers radicalize that purposiveness by setting it directly against the possibility of either the work providing an explanation or the critic finding in ancillary contexts some compelling interpretation of why the work has its peculiar intensities. Purposiveness requires audiences to trace how internal relations develop and gather into the capacity to create a distinctive experience resistant to the languages of cause and effect. This is why a significant aspect of attuning to constructivist work is appreciating what powers we can claim for experiencing modes of phenomenological reflection that position the mind and its relation to objects very differently from practices of interpretation and explanation—in all aesthetic experience.[26] The experience of art typically involves focused awareness of who we feel we are becoming by virtue of these acts of participation and attunement. That is, we take the evidence of making as a means of supplementing whatever perception can afford by guiding us to see how the work of the medium provides an alternative mode of objectness by which the psyche interprets what it can become for itself.

V

What I say is by no means new. In one sense it merely elaborates a standard formalist approach to modern art. Yet the approach taken here is only instrumentally formalist, saved in fact by Hegel from complete formalism. I want to understand how forms live in the mind and in the solar plexus. I want to

understand what satisfactions become possible when we give formal relations a full ontological presence in which they actively compete with the orders we typically provide for the senses. Therefore, the next chapter will begin with versions of materialism that I think provide an inadequate ontology, in order to stage by contrast what a Hegelian account of modernism might be able to establish. I deeply admire the capacities of New Materialism to establish the imaginative intensities and depth of impressionist art. For New Materialism provides versions of agency and of relational activity that can capture the elemental dynamics of forces like color relations, atmospheric effects, aspects of contiguity, and the working of features of human temperament that respond to experiences as immediate phenomena rather than deliberate constructions. But the more fully we experience impressionist art, the more likely we are to see how its ways of staging agency in fact eventually led artists and writers back to the work of minds taking responsibility for the eloquence objectified in the work. Braque's "the senses deform; the mind forms" is only one of numerous critiques of impressionism that stressed the limitations of art devoted to the retina, so that its audiences seemed to have become unwilling to emphasize powers of concentration that might resist and reform sensual intensities.

CHAPTER TWO

The Logic of Modernist Art's Resistance to Materialisms Old and New

Not everyone is a sensualist just because he wishes to be.
—*Renoir, in* Art in Theory 1815–1900[1]

I think there is a strange dialectical path that provides the best framework for looking at why constructivist values replaced those based on impressionist thinking, in both poetry and in the visual arts. This path begins in the present: our New Materialisms afford a superb account of the ontology responsible for much of the force in impressionist painting, since the painters sought essentially the same fluid interrelationships between mind and matter that had been kept distinct within enlightenment thinking. This conjunction helps us foster new vocabularies for showing how the spirit of impressionism in all the arts developed vital interrelationships complexly blending matter and spirit. Those vocabularies matter historically because they address the impressionists' enthusiasm for a new scientific realism based on how one sees rather than on impersonal measures capable of characterizing the nature of the objects that sight provides. This new realism focused on the capacity of individual temperaments to express dynamic feelings closely attuned to nonhuman features of actual environments. It even became possible for artists to pursue the possibility that the material aspects of the deployment of paint shared in that confluence of dynamic forces. That pursuit in turn developed a version of materialist practice far more subtle and fluid than any empiricist models at the time could sponsor. There emerged an art that could blend a dynamic rendering of the real driven by individual temperament with a compelling sense of increased accuracy to the details that linked painting to the world.

The impressionists all believed that their creative activity was their means for realizing how there were dynamic forces at the core of our experiencing the world.

But such feelings of precise attunement generated another stage of the dialectic because they provoked intense criticism fearful that such sensual intensities displaced the work of mind necessary for the fullest possible experiences of works of art. In retrospect it is not surprising that Gauguin and Cézanne inaugurated various modes of postimpressionism, which were eventually to sponsor symbolist cults of mystery, nor that these cults were to prove influential in eliciting Fauvist emphases on color as a medium for remaking the world to accord with feelings rather than shaping feelings in accord with the facts of the world. Nor should it provoke much surprise that this level of opposition would eventually produce the more severe and complex critical spirit of painters like Braque and Malevich. That spirit would foreground the makers' compositional powers to reframe what had been fidelity to the dynamics of sense experience by calling attention to elaborate and subtle states of self-consciousness directed toward what making could establish rather than what the senses might elaborate.

Once we take the case this far, I will argue that we become capable of returning to our present situation with a sharper sense of the limitations of materialist theory and consequently with a renewed appreciation of the modernist art that tried to grapple critically with these limitations. And that effort to appreciate what modernist art tells us now about the mind provides a powerful model of history capable of recognizing how research into the past can affect what we can say about our present needs and struggles.[2] This is why we should not stop with the common-sense recognition that artists as ambitious as Braque and Malevich would attempt to make room for their own work by criticizing their predecessors. To dismiss their remarks because they reek of self-interest is to sell short both the creativity of the artists and the importance of their thinking for future generations. I will try to show the significance of these critiques as attempts to anatomize the limitations of an essentially sensual art. These critiques attempted to show audiences how and why they might come to value the kinds of concentration emphasizing capacities for construction and composition. Such art could display crucial powers of mind that could not be produced by any inquiries into mental capacities shaped by empiricist discursive practices.

In order to elaborate the significance of Constructivist Modernist innovation, I need to set it in contrast to the fullest possible appreciation of this impressionist painting. Only then can we make the next, and final, turn in my account by showing why it matters now to appreciate the critiques of materialism occurring early in the twentieth century. If we can free these modernist accounts of the idealist aspects that for them were the only way to combat what they saw as outgrowths

of Materialist Empiricism, we can try to show how this concern for the powers of composition can be recast in terms of a naturalism skeptical of reducing the secular world to materialist ontology.

This recasting takes two kinds of activity. We have to learn to identify provisionally with the imaginative affective sites made possible by attention to the foregrounding of what composition makes available to the imagination. And we have to turn to phenomenological treatments of how the self-consciousness produced by such identifications gathers the emotional implications of what is being experienced. Aesthetic judgment is not just an assessment of the work as a formal structure or sensuous event, but a means of attuning to the particulars of how the works connect to the world. This turn to phenomenological attention allows us to share the artists' struggles to resist the authority of empiricist models of thinking while at the same time providing terms for how these artists composed states of mind that exemplify values capable of dramatizing why it matters concretely to pursue these modes of resistance. Such a dream, I hasten to add, entails arguing that both art historians and literary critics need to take more seriously than they tend to now the task of finding nonformalist languages for articulating the values involved in the modes of constructivist self-consciousness that the modernists call on in their work.

I

Our first step has to be getting a picture of how thinkers associated with the New Materialisms recast the protocols of enlightenment materialism.[3] I propose to do this by invoking an example of these protocols at work before clarifying New Materialist alternatives to these claims. My example highlights the forms of reasoning that tempted the young Freud to describe the mind as an extension of sense experience:

> The intention of this project is to furnish us with a psychology which shall be a natural science: its aim, that is, is to represent psychical practices as quantitatively determined states of specifiable material particles and so to make them plain and void of contradictions.[4]

Here we see two interpretive principles at work. The first derives from a Cartesian ontology sharply distinguishing acts of the reasoning mind from Freud's inert domain of "specifiable material particles." A materialist ontology makes it possible to develop methods of analysis pursuing the "quantitatively determined

states" by which the senses can be seen as underlying what the mind attempts to characterize. The senses are the vehicles by which a realm of ideas attaches to the substance that forms them. This ontology then provided a perfect rationale for the methodological demands established early in the seventeenth century. Empirical inquiry in all domains of life had to be pursued by the methods of science because only the sciences can perform the task of accurately testing what can count as substance. Without scientific method there is no way to distinguish fact from fantasy or from ideology.[5]

For the New Materialists the equation of substance with thinglike features is woefully misleading. Materiality consists in structures of physical relations, not in objects. In order to develop the consequences of this way of seeing the world, thinkers would have to pay serious attention to the ontology of Lucretius and Spinoza while weaving into that ontology the vitalism of Bergson and Deleuze, the implications of quantum physics on our ideas of substance, and Merleau-Ponty's treatments of embodied subjectivity. This combination of factors made it possible to embrace once more classical empiricism's reliance on the authority of science. But now the relevant modes of explanation could be differential rather than causal: what mattered were how various modes of agency established interactions that were often not amenable to strict lawlike prediction.

Consider the implications of this elegant statement by Diana Coole and Samantha Frost in their impressive and influential introduction to *New Materialisms*:

> For materiality is always something more than "mere" matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable. In sum, new materialists are rediscovering a materiality that materializes, evincing immanent modes of self-transformation that compel us to think of causation in far more complex terms; to recognize that phenomena are caught in a multitude of interlocking systems and forces and to consider anew the location and nature of capacities for agency.[6]

Everything that Merleau-Ponty attributes to intentionality becomes features of a dynamic ontology. And we can see ourselves dwelling in what Jane Bennett memorably calls "a swarm of vitalities."[7]

This dynamic version of ontology obviously seems to promise substantial differences in the kind of work done across the humanities as well as the sciences. The primary effect is that it provides grounds for a major shift in the assessment of works of art from decades of commitment to "critique" to the elaboration of positive values embodied in this "swarm of vitalities."[8] The spirit of critique demanded

we treat all imaginative work as complicit in processes of social construction that required a suspicious critical eye. When confronted with positive assertions about values, audiences were trained to ask how these assertions might hide self-interest and disguise their place in social formations rife with self-deceit and injustice. Under this dispensation close attention to cultural practices has to take the form of emphasizing attitudes eager to expose the work of ideology and the limitations of any claims asserting access to something like an inner life. So there was precious little attention paid to how texts and works of art might be valued because of the ways they call attention to affective and intellectual capacities to challenge those prevailing cultural practices. It came to seem that the only values cultivated by social constructivism were continual analytic distance and a radical hope for social change belied by that quest for analytic distance.

Such repetitive and often self-righteous modes of analyses eventually came to frustrate many humanists. But the alternatives seemed only to repeat unacceptable humanist pieties.[9] The situation changed around 2010. At that time critics began to recognize how the New Materialisms could provide a model of nonhumanist dynamics by which to characterize in positive terms what thinking and feeling might involve in particular imaginative experiences. Under its auspices critics could replace the intricacies of hermeneutic analysis with the apparent directness of ontological exploration. Then close attention might be connected to wonder rather than to endless questioning. And then critical commentary might foster modes of valuing what we discover to be dynamic forces shaping our experiences. Despite its political ambitions, social constructivism seemed bound to concentrate on the folly of individual agents and cultural movements for their various modes of blindness. In contrast, New Materialism is devoted to making individuals aware of the larger dynamic forces embedded in environments and collectivities. This is why I think that despite its problems, New Materialist principles will eventually afford the most powerful alternative to the kind of criticism oriented toward reflective aesthetic experience that I propose.

This sense of renewed attention to how value might be embedded in our practices for encountering the arts and in our modes of analytic judgment had two substantial effects whose consequences we are still elaborating. On the one hand, critics began to think it might be possible to correlate seemingly incompatible versions of materialism developed in the nineteenth century. There was the reduction of truth to models of inquiry provided by the hard sciences. And in contrast there emerged an insistence on the primacy of material practices involved in the distribution of economic goods and the regulation of labor. If materialism is a

matter of reducing statements to their predictions that can be assessed by standard science, these competing views have little to do with one another.[10] But if the life of the senses is insistently dynamic and creative, and if those dynamisms can be thwarted or misdirected by prevailing social structures, then it may be possible to locate within the life of the senses oppositional values that can be deployed in a materialist version of political analysis.

However this propensity to push analysis toward questions about value produced substantial risks for New Materialist thinking. Its efforts at reconciling empiricist and Marxist versions of materialism could only be developed by worrisome vacillations in the kinds of language that could bid for philosophical authority. The New Materialisms have become increasingly notorious for their blithe use of such dangerously imprecise terms as "force" and "relationality" as well as fundamentally analogical terms adapted literally, like Stacy Alaimo's reliance on "affordances" as a descriptive term for literary experience.[11] So it is possible and almost inviting to subject this work to philosophical critique, even if then we must rely on terms that these thinkers regard as outmoded. And criticize we must. But we ought not ignore the ways in which this difference from ideals of traditional science also has a very promising aspect. The willingness to project a different kind of philosophical reflection brings philosophy very close to building imaginative models like those in the arts, with more attention to suggestiveness than care for demonstrable truth. We may on that basis be able to shake up the disciplinary habits that separate us from concrete engagements in the intricacy of experience: the mind becomes an instrument for extending situations rather than controlling them. Perhaps then we will eventually elaborate an aesthetics adequate for specifying the distinctive powers the arts provide cultural life.

II

My quotation from Coole and Frost seems sufficient to introduce three fundamental shared concerns in New Materialist theory that pertain to our appreciation of impressionist art. We have to see matter anew as embodying active forces. We have to shift our concerns for persons and minds so that we can replace traditional claims about subjective powers and inner lives by concerns for how various aspects of subjectivity are embedded in the interplay of material bodies: humans are complex nodes of agency involved in gathering intricate sets of relations among dynamic forces. And we have to transform the values we expect from art so that concerns for the intensity and dynamic balances characterizing

individual experiences will gain priority over ideals of true representation of objective scenic details. After developing these motifs I will focus on how these concerns illuminate significant features of impressionist art.

One useful way to stage the New Materialisms' treatments of matter as a dynamic force is to recognize how they turn phenomenology into ontology by shifting from a language of intentionality into a language of orientations and affordances. Husserlian intentionality emphasized conditions of human agency by establishing the active place of consciousness in shaping how human experiences unfold. The New Materialisms, in contrast, insist on the importance of how consciousness can focus on its awareness of multiple forces framing its sense of orientation. Their stress on ontology allows them to attend to such complex dynamic forces because it entails a view more capacious than can be provided by focusing on an isolated perspectival agency like Husserlian bracketing.

Ontology allows thinking to escape the ideals of "conceptual and practical domination of nature" carried out by minds that are not affected by what they observe (*NM* 8).[12] And it demands an attitude toward experience that turns from the stabilizing power of substances to the continually destabilizing and regathering capacities of dynamic processes. Rather than fixing boundaries in order to produce independent entities for analysis, this new thinking stresses "porous boundaries" (*NM* 16), both between entities and between the frameworks by which agents make value decisions. Entities are continually being modified by what they touch and what touches them (*NM* 107), as if there were no such thing as time and space outside the processes that afford continual modifications of any given scene (*NM* 109). We can reimagine Darwin's "tangled bank" as a system of something approaching communication.

Perhaps the best way to demonstrate the difference this new way of thinking involves for our reflections on matter is to elaborate for a moment the general term "field." (As Nathan Brown recognizes, Charles Olson was prescient in his use of this term in the 1950s in order to establish how thinking could be seen as attunement to various environments.)[13] Enlightenment thinking casts what lies before us in primarily visual terms—hence the popularity of the ideas of scene and of "views" for works of art. The scene and the view offer a clear foreground and background, with the foreground made up of various stable entities, and the background providing an organized staging for the entities. The concept of "field," on the other hand, presents objects in a continuously shifting environment where each modification of a single entity affects our grasp of the whole. Fields involve processes that merge foreground and background, because no entity can

stand for attention without an awareness of how staging is a matter of focus on various possible relationships that provide an overall shape for what flows in time.[14] And, more important, the metaphor of how fields are constituted by multiple overlapping relational systems provides a framework for thinking about the space of quantum indeterminacies and the development of self-determining systems. Fields are continually being modified by shifts in internal and external relations.

As an example of these differences in approach to foreground and background between fixed scene and mobile field, think of the difference between a typical landscape by Caspar David Friedrich and Monet's *Impression Sunrise*. In Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg) we see in the foreground an isolated thinker from the rear, looking out into an Alpine landscape in fog that is the object of his meditation. The scene is static and timeless, in part because the act of thinking itself is organized only by the possible metaphysical implications of what the observer sees. The observer is the source of all meaning and all value.

But what kind of thinking can we say is exemplified in Monet's *Impression Sunrise* (1872, Musée Marmottan, Paris)? There is no sharp foreground or background. And the only human presences seem purely visual elements of the scene, characterized more by their capacity to cast interesting shadows than their ability to produce profound meditation. More important, it is difficult to attribute a purposiveness to the painting beyond the activity of accurately rendering the moment. There is little emphasis on design or drawing, so the work seems exhausted in its fidelity to the atmospheric conditions of the morning scene. In Friedrich the mountains are less important as particular visual objects than as an assemblage that moves the observer to profound thoughts. But in Monet there is no explicit observer: the mind of the painting in fact is less a thinking than the activity of an intricate sensibility or temperament[15] capable of fully inhabiting this gift of a moment inviting intense attention. What matters are the minute gradations in blues and oranges as they allow us to dwell on how landscape, sea, and atmosphere realize one possible moment for activities of painting that will soon give way to other distributions of visual force. Notice especially how shadows take on intense materiality from the variety of brushstrokes and the lovely interplay with the rays of sun on water, while the trees break down into something approximating brushstrokes in blue. Matter seems to join manner here as the painter explores possible states of being that are difficult to name in accord with how we divide the world into substances and minds.

Mention of mind brings me to my second and most important shift in sensibility

proposed by the New Materialisms—the demand to reconsider inherited versions of human agency. This is the fullest brief statement I have found calling for such reconsideration:

> Bodies enhance their power in or *as a heterogeneous assemblage*. What this suggests for the concept of agency is that the efficacy or effectivity to which that term has traditionally referred becomes distributed across an ontologically heterogeneous field, rather than being a capacity localized in a human body or in a collective produced (only) by human efforts. . . . To the vital materialist, the electrical grid is better understood as a volatile mix of coal, sweat, electromagnetic fields, computer programs, electrons, profit motives, . . . economic theory, wire and wood—to name just some of the actants.[16]

This attitude mobilizes what Rey M. Chow calls the "dethronement—and reconceptualization—of what used to be called consciousness" (*NM* 226). Because we can no longer treat the human subject as a "unified being with a 'rational mind' or consciousness," we must reposition that subject as "the never-quite-complete product of an ongoing structuring process, a process that might be imperceptible yet is as materially evident and undeniable as effect" (*NM* 226).[17]

That dethronement of unified being goes back to Theodore Adorno's vilification of "identity thinking."[18] But the challenge posed by the New Materialisms to any kind of unity of the human psyche is far more concrete and far more persuasive. First there is the need to accommodate change and complex multiplicity: very few human beings have completely predictable dispositions, so a stress on one's identity is likely to have to repress all that runs contrary to the constructed version of personality. And both morally and socially, claims about personal identity are likely to isolate human agents from one another, as well as limiting our access to complex imaginative situations that modify and constrain powers of agency. Persons that bind themselves to moral principles are likely not to adjust well to novelty or to the possibilities that others with whom the person interacts might have concerns that are not compatible with those shaped by fixed identities. Sharing worlds has to be based on something other than articulate decision-making.

Sharing worlds becomes feasible when we stress the kinds of processes within experience that exhibit multiple modes of active agency. We then find at the core of agency dispositions to act in accord with feelings as well as reasons. And we then can recognize affinities between human activities and "natural" processes that open access to different forms of social collectivities, simply because we can be responsive to what seems to afford richer conditions of interaction than introspection can

provide. As Coole and Frost's introduction puts it, an emphasis on corporeality introduces "elements of creative contingency, meaning, difference, efficacy, and a limited freedom for improvisation or resistance into nature before cognition begins[:] . . . bodies communicate with other bodies through their gestures and conduct to arouse visceral responses and prompt forms of judgment that do not necessarily pass through conscious awareness" (*NM* 20). Here communication and decision-making do not depend on anything idealized or finished. In most instances there will be "considerable instability and volatility," with a "continuous redefining and reassembling of key elements" that make it impossible either to predict outcomes in advance or to repeat an event (*NM* 14). In such cases agency is also not predictable, because it is produced by multiple factors within the situation as well as by multiple vectors that open the situation to future configurations.

Such modifications in our sense of agency can go a long way toward resisting the temptations to treat the arts in the terms shaped by historicist suspiciousness. New Materialist emphases on the complexity of agency call attention to how body and mind are responsive to all kinds of signs and modes of behavior for which we have no language or conceptual categories. The world becomes replete with possibilities of intricate responsiveness manifesting themselves in modes of decision-making that are not readily thematized yet are often articulate within works of art. There are also marvelously intricate ways in which we can recognize our bonds to other people and to how the present tense has embedded in it all sorts of directions for orientations toward the future. And we can understand how much of this subtle information is not directed toward self-consciousness but toward bodily adjustments. In fact, we often have to see ourselves impersonally—as something close to objects on which nonhuman agency has shaping impacts—if we are to appreciate how our beings get modified by information (see Melissa A. Orlie in *NM* 133). Then even when we gain some kind of control, we are better positioned to attribute that control to a reconciliation with these sources of information rather than to powers of the individual mind.

These experiences have the capacity to lead human agents to experience their relationships with other people as containing possibilities not exhausted by negotiating or struggling for dominance. What we see in other people depends on the kinds of information a body receives. And the physical signs affording awareness of the dispositions of other people open into quite complex senses of time and of space. Time enters because we see dispensations toward the future that take form as felt desires to engage the other in certain ways. Those engagements need not take the form of subject and object relations: there are strange and powerful

modes of cooperation or resistance sought by bodies in various contexts. And space enters by virtue of simple mechanisms, like following the glance of another person or reacting to how worlds seem to be putting themselves together (as in Wallace Stevens's poem "July Mountain,"), even at times as if offering invitations for us to take certain perspectives that we trust will extend our powers to see and to feel. Human agency becomes bound to fields of interactions, where it receives feelings and directions as much as it establishes them. The reward for diminishing the sense of self-importance is a much wider capacity to appreciate modes of agency of all kinds, from the play of perception to the work of organizing communities.

I can be much briefer on my third basic motif. Rather than insist on a sharp division between value and fact, immersing consciousness thoroughly within dynamic processes opens the possibility that facts and values emerge together. All organisms can be said to be always selecting and valuing and "communicating" the differences situations make in their behaviors. Insofar as we concentrate on human values, we have to bracket the notion that the primary role of subjects is to organize, interpret, and direct experiences. Instead, we have to ask what might be involved in feeling that valuation and value are always emerging and being transformed simply by virtue of our dwelling in the processes that comprise experience. William Connolly on Merleau-Ponty puts eloquently the aspect of valuing that emerges when we withdraw from assuming we have to maintain the role of value creator:

> To have the experience of depth is to feel things looking at you, to feel yourself as object. This self-awareness is usually subliminal, but it becomes more apparent when you shift from the processes of action-oriented perception to dwell in experience itself. . . . To see is to experience yourself as an object of visibility . . . because the very structure of vision incorporates into itself the projection of what it would be like to be seen from a variety of angles. . . . The codification of operational angles of possible action and the background sense of being seen combine to produce depth. (*NM* 186)

Such depth matters, I think, because it provides an image of who we can become as we actively pursue what is involved in seeing ourselves implicated in how experience places us in relations to other beings.

But the most appealing aspect of the New Materialisms on value stems from a more general shift in mental disposition. For humans, to see themselves as also objects of sight is to be able to recognize the self as active participant in larger overall systems of relations which we share with other object-subjects.[19] From that

perspective, speaking about feelings of life is quite different from searching for the facts about life. These feelings do not stem from our uniqueness as subjects but from our awareness of our being targets and vehicles that implicate other agents. So there are both an impersonality and a sociality or openness to the common that can be affirmed or willed. And nowhere is this kind of experience more available for self-reflection than in what artists produce. These works usually invite responsiveness to complex existential situations. But the works also make us aware of several kinds of agency that are fundamental to focusing our attention on what we might miss left to our own devices. Then it is easy to imagine that the entire experience takes place on a plane of forces more capacious than can be captured by only paying attention to the particular substances that the work represents.

III

Now I want to take up how fully impressionist art invites analogues with the work of New Materialist philosophies.[20] These analogues are most powerful in impressionist ways of working out alternatives to the Cartesian distinction between material background and the work of consciousness responsible for giving shapes to that background. The basic strategy for impressionist artists is to separate themselves from their studio-bound predecessors by making visible a subjective creativity that becomes inseparable from intense attention to moments when particular dispensations of the senses seem to produce satisfying visual events.[21]

My concern for overcoming the division between background and foreground goes back to my understanding of the importance of the concept of field for the New Materialists. Indeed, I have already tried to develop this concept by drawing on a contrast between Friedrich and Monet. But now we have to establish a general stage for recognizing crucial ways that the impressionist painting asks us to see in terms of mental orientations different from what their predecessors emphasized. The most striking feature of attending to fields of relation is how they affect our overall ontological sense of interaction between consciousness and the world. Denying the break between foreground and background has the force of equalizing various aspects of the painting, including how it presents the agents' seeing—painter and audience—as involved directly in the field that supplies the energies rendered by the work. We can even say that because this shift diminishes the authority of what might be in the foreground, it also reconfigures how meaning is established. Meaning becomes almost haptic—largely a matter of forces

organized by viewing rather than stemming from rhetorical design. The point of the painting becomes simply making articulate the conditions of visibility that it embodies. Noble intentions and rhetorics of nobility would have little authority in relation to the specific intensities organizing the visual field.

The practical implications of this ontology are enormous. For erasing the distinction between foreground and background in painting constitutes impressionism's way of separating itself from the studio and from most of the rhetorical gestures by which the art of the studio staked its claims on the sensibility of its audiences. And, more positively, the blend of foreground and background blends perfectly with the larger ideal of treating painting as the conjunction of individual temperament with the kind of objectivity provided by shifting atmospheres.

Consider Edmund Duranty's well-known essay (at the time), "The New Painting: Concerning the Group of Artists Exhibiting at the Durand-Rule Galleries," 1876 (*ATN* 576–584). Duranty praises the goal of introducing "the reality of the street" by having painters renounce their studio (*ATN* 582). Then "as we are solidly embracing nature, we will no longer separate the figure from the background" (*ATN* 583). By rejecting this foreground space, there may be many fewer temptations to the inflations of rhetoric or tendencies to repeat ideologically charged moral judgments; perhaps there is no convincing heroism or general social exemplarity without a pronounced foreground. In the new dispensation the painter has to develop forms of force and emphasis without relying on social distinction and without breaking the harmonious flow that seems to give all details equal claim on an audience. Eliminating the foreground-background distinction even makes it very difficult for the traditional human subject to get an anchor within the painting. That subject needs hierarchy. But the impressionist refusal of traditional roles does not entail that the subject be erased. Quite the contrary. If the subject does not produce order for the painting in terms of rhetorical design, it must provide a different kind of order—not of design from without but of intensity from within. This model of subjectivity relies on substantial shifts in how those in the arts came to think of what could produce significant modes of power for the individual while avoiding what had seemed traps for vocabularies linking the power of subjectivity to heroic deeds at one pole and at the other to various aspects of stoic control.[22]

This is where concerns for temperament and atmosphere come into the picture. "Temperament" was a central word for human agency in the second half of the nineteenth century in all the arts because it equates subjectivity with qualities of the weather rather than with various quests of personal mastery. "Temperament"

orients us toward thinking of the subject as attuning to various atmospheres. This subject does not cultivate the will to power but pursues the will to enjoy the subtle differences its will can make in the degrees of intensity and of attentive acumen by which its participation in various scenes comes to consciousness. That new vocabulary even helped shape what philosophers and artists came to call a "new realism." Where the old realism stressed causal relations between material entities, the new realism stressed how the sensitivity of the subject could be a perspectival factor in animating dynamic scenic structures. That dynamic mode of gathering and connecting intensities becomes the fundamental unit for analytic attention. (In many respects, Alfred North Whitehead's *Process and Reality* was a late, great synthesis of what had been the new realism.)

This sense of embodied subjectivity is so strong in the commentary on impressionist painting that it makes me want to replace Michael Fried's claim that the new painting could be characterized as "ocular realism,"[23] with one stressing how the eye is embedded in a sensitive and productive temperament. The writers attentive to what was going on within impressionist painting were the ones who most articulately insisted on the role of temperament in order to explain their affinities with it. Take this example from Émile Zola stressing how temperament determines the boundaries and the intensities of the painterly field:

> For me . . . a work of art is on the contrary the expression of a personality, of an individual. What I ask of the artist is not that he give me sweet visions or terrible nightmares, but that he give of himself, body and soul, that he clearly express the force and singularity of his mind, the harshness and strength of his character, that he take nature firmly in his grasp and set it down firmly in front of us just as he sees it. (*ATN* 552)[24]

Such passages are as significant for what they reject as for what they propound. In this case there is clear resistance to the pressures to make painting in accord with academic standards of solidity in order that the work could claim a kind of moral universality displaying a painterly version of righteous rhetoric. And there is resistance to treating the copying of nature as a sufficient end. The impressionists would seek instead to realize what Mallarmé defined as the possibility of painting being "steeped again in its cause and its relation to nature" (*ATN* 592). Then, instead of being in thrall to a nature, "which exists superior to any representation of it," the artist might focus on "the delight in recreating nature touch by touch" (*ATN* 592)—a sentiment Picasso extended radically.

The feel of re-creation arises largely from how the paintings dramatize

perspective as a temporal and a spatial feature that resists rhetorical generalization. Foregrounding perspective demands intense attention to local detail and to the forces that bring these details into vital relationships—in terms of both the real act of painting and the imagined act of the embodied observer. One direct way of clarifying the contrast I am trying to make between an emphasis on the shaping of objects and one that calls attention to the act of selecting the relationships organizing the viewer's attention is to return to Duranty:

> What drawing wants in terms of its current goals is just to know nature intensely and to embrace nature with such strength that it can render faultlessly relations between forms, and reflect the inexhaustible diversity of character. Farewell to the human body treated like a vase, with an eye for the decorative curve. Farewell to the uniform monotony of bone structure, to the anatomical model beneath the nude. What we need are the special characteristics of the modern individual—in his clothing, in social situations, at home, or on the street. (*ATN* 582)

For art to pay attention to the real, there is required an individual celebrating efforts to be free of crippling conventions. Then one can revel in the modes of attention that such freedom permits to these new painters:

> [They have tried] to render the walk, movement and hustle and bustle of passers-by, just as they have tried to render the trembling of the leaves, the shimmer of water and the vibration of the sun-drenched air—just as they have managed to capture the hazy atmosphere of a gray day along with the iridescent play of sunshine. (*ATN* 584)

But for the most comprehensive celebration of the senses of power and involvement that such art could produce at its finest, we have to turn to Stéphane Mallarmé's great essay "The Impressionists and Edward Manet" (*ATN* 584–93). Mallarmé begins by insisting that the impressionists do not simply attach themselves to the realism of Courbet or the principles of Zola: "Each work must be a new creation of mind" (*ATN* 587). Now, though, the basic activity of mind is not primarily commitment to the activities that produce compelling and complex structures. Rather, the basic activity is the intensification of concentrated attention to the flux and fluid metamorphosis stressed in the new science. The eye "should abstract itself from memory, seeing only that which it looks upon, and that as if for the first time" (*ATN* 587). And the hand "should become an impersonal abstraction guided only by the will, oblivious of all previous cunning" (*ATN* 587).

Mallarmé then uses this concern for the will to echo Baudelaire's emphasis

on how the personality of the artist can involve itself in ways "neither personal not sentient" but capable of subjecting itself to "the phenomena thus called up by science and shown to our astonished eyes, with its perceptual metamorphosis and its invisible action rendered visible" (*ATN* 588). Manet is his prime example of such metamorphoses, since no other painter so thoroughly rivaled the modes of self-consciousness Mallarmé evoked in his poetry. Yet the description holds, I think, for what becomes of mind's relation to matter in virtually all the work in the first three impressionist exhibits:

> The ever-present light blends with and vivifies all things. As to the details of the picture, nothing should be absolutely fixed in order that we may feel that the bright gleam which lights the picture, or the diaphanous shadow which veils it, are only seen in passing, and just when the spectator beholds the represented subject, which being composed of a harmony of reflected and ever changing lights, cannot be supposed always to look the same, but palpitates with movement, light, and life. (*ATN* 589)

It is worth also noticing how Mallarmé's brilliantly intricate syntax places writing in that same position of seeking a harmony of "reflected and ever changing lights" palpitating with movement.

IV

All this abstract talk makes it imperative that we begin to specify the concrete ways that impressionist painting displays correlates for the three motifs I emphasized in my discussion of the New Materialisms—the sense of matter as active force, the sense of human agency embedded within the flow of material bodies, and the stress on aspects of value, especially value with significant social dimensions, deriving from these modifications in sensibility.

I choose *Railway Bridge at Pontoise* by Pissarro (1873, private collection) because it exemplifies the kind of materiality that Mallarmé envisioned as "a solidity which sometimes serves to render the atmosphere visible as a luminous haze saturated with sunlight" (*ATN* 590). While Manet's self-consciousness ultimately leads away from the painting to the problems of representation that it poses, Pissarro's seems to add a reflective dimension that can define states of will capable of celebrating how solidity can seem inseparable from flux, as though the solidity were the measure of how flux takes on power over the observer.

We have to be aware of three basic structural principles that provide much of

the force for this painting. First there is a constant vitality for the eye as it learns to see rhymes produced by the visual forces and color tones that matter has become. Substance is transformed into various kinds and levels of acting and being acted upon. And then there is the feeling of plenitude established for that eye, because its stress on movement is accompanied by what Mallarmé called "solidity," which I see as based on the fact that the movement also generates a constant sense of arrival. Finding sources of rest becomes inseparable from moving on to engage with other sources of attraction. The ontology that breaks substances down into relational forces nonetheless here promises an escape from any anxieties about lack or loss produced by self-consciousness. There is simply no need to turn away from the complex shifting satisfactions that the painting gathers into a whole.[25]

I think our eyes are initially drawn to trees on each side of the painting that anchor the work within a lesson in the ontology of early morning light. We do not see the complete shape of either set of trees because of Pissarro's cropping. The tree unit on the right seems a looming mass created by offering the viewer only its side in shadow. This creates the effort of confining the tree's most lively appearance to its reflection in the water, where it is almost born again. Conversely, the trees on the left seem utterly open to the effects of air and light. Both modes of appearing suggest that what ultimately matters for vision is how the atmosphere complements and complicates simple substance, creating instead intricately shifting color tones and flows of energy. This mode of awareness is further complicated by the effects of the cropping that defines how perspective arrived on the scene. For we have to work to make sense of what we are given: as we strive to complete the hints of shape, our eyes have to turn back to the other side of the painting in frustration at the incompleteness of the physical scene and the difficulty of clarifying what the one human presence on the road might be doing. This incompleteness leads our eyes to construct something like a bridge between the trees, at once bringing them closer together and allowing the differences between them to expand the space of the scene. (The imagined bridge also places that shadow of the human presence in relation to the shadow of the trees as well as the shadow on the wall created by trees in the light.)

A second basic structural motif sets the two kinds of negative spaces created by the openings in the bridges against the various plenitudes that surround the bridges, especially the fullness of the water and sky and the chiasmic balance just beyond the middle ground comprised of a relationship between sunlit tree and houses on one diagonal and a second diagonal between shadow tree and the foliage on the hill. One property of material force is an ability to generate relations

not only of color tone and degree of fluidity but also of forms inviting the mind to feel its sense of its own powers of responsiveness within this material space.

Here the diagonals are supplemented by a strikingly incomplete parallelogram of the two roads and the bridges, which pulls the eye strongly into depth even as the harmonies in the agencies of sky and water and cloud and reflection force the sense of plenitude momentarily into a two-dimensional space. I love how the plants on the left by the road, among the smallest of material elements, seem to mediate the two movements into depth and into flatness, while horizontally balancing the reflections of the tree. Such relations then open a path into the painting that counters the effect of the road and, to some extent, of the water—hence the feeling of spreading out in spirit as the eye intensifies its activity. These small plants ultimately reinforce the sense of plenitude given by the multiple structural units, because they provide a measure of the inclusiveness constituting and constituted by this expansive view.

We have not yet considered the work done by the most important structural principle in this painting—the contrast between the horizontal effects of the line between the trees and the way the sky-water relation produces a strong vertical alignment, countered in part by the sky's ability to dominate the entire top third of the painting (or almost dominate, because the clouds seem to need their reflections in the water). Here there are many differences that gently insist on their own priorities. But the differences yield to an overall sense of harmony, all participating in the presiding power of the painted atmosphere's ability to acknowledge the details of nature as interrelated bodies. This atmosphere is not exhausted by the presence of the sky or by how it offers modulations of weather or by how the reflections in the water unify and tighten the scene. (Notice that the sky is made to extend beyond the vanishing point on land.) Atmosphere is ultimately a locus of identification allowing the audience entry into the painter's capacity to synthesize these tonalities and offer them as something close to a vision of what nature can afford. Atmosphere becomes itself the most comprehensive material force, because it wields both the aesthetic power to compose affective relationships and the painterly power to bring out in a representation the delicacies of what seems an actual moment when the eye finds the ability to feel itself fully inhabiting the world. Here the mind functions more as gatherer of forces and effects than as independent force available only as self-consciousness.

One has to admit that the sense of plenitude is limited since the scene offers only a moment of seeing. But that recognition affords the painting a grander, and a smarter, *bonheur* because of how it exemplifies a wakening of affective being eager to test itself on other kinds of scenes and other relational forces. Atmosphere

offers a generous sense of how the various elements play their roles in the overall production of harmonies. And plentitude itself need no longer be equated with places to rest. Plenitude here offers itself primarily as a disposition toward the enticements of these metamorphic elements within the painting. Plenitude and solidity both seem mobile.

I have already had to use the concept of agency in order to identify how the relational forces operate in Pissarro's painting. But I want to focus on this concept in another painting, Monet's *The Bridge at Argenteuil* (1874, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC), because it represents the major difference between the New Materialisms and their enlightenment predecessor. For enlightenment versions of science, humans pictured the world and tested how the objects of attention participated in causal forces. But for the New Materialisms, human agency is constantly treated as something other than an independent source of meaning and of value. Human agency consists largely in recognizing and identifying affectively with the force of complex fields of other agential forces, as is most fully articulated in Bruno Latour's actor-network theory.[26]

No one paints that kind of active agency better than Claude Monet. I think the richest approach to *The Bridge at Argenteuil* is to isolate some basic modes in which he deploys active agency and then to speculate on the affects and the effects of the conjunction or assemblage of these modalities. Then our primary distinction has to be between versions of agency that provide structure and those that celebrate momentary release from structure. In the first category we find two basic conditions that seem to be constraining forces. Notice the effect of the imaginary lines through the painting shaped by the bridge and the parallel figure formed by how the masts project onto the substantial houses in the rear of the painting. The people in the rowboat are contained by this structure, and perhaps protected from any dangers that might reside in territories apart from this bourgeois frame. I think the houses themselves then deepen the pressures of constraint because they do such a discreet job of rendering bourgeois solidity. As T. J. Clark points out, Argenteuil was rapidly changing because of industrialization. But these houses in this lovely location seem capable of preserving what had been happier conditions for living, so long as they can maintain a separate and safe order.[27] Opposing these are the marvelous clouds, much more independent in their shapes than Pissarro's, and the even more marvelous single white sail, dwarfing the human sailor, that dares to break the bounding formal structure. This boat seems to have been seduced by the bright sunny morning to set out into a domain that might parallel the apparent freedom of the clouds' movement through space. The painter's fidelity to the real does not preclude such dramatic tensions.

But Monet is not interested just in these tensions. For my account has so far left out the water and the sky, which occupy most of the painting's surface. We have to ask what particular aspects of force these elements exert. Perhaps a contrast with Pissarro will point to an adequate answer. In Pissarro's *Railway Bridge at Pontoise* the water is calm so that it directly reflects the shape of the clouds. Monet's water is too rough and mobile for that. This water still reflects the white of the clouds, but now that white is abstracted; it has no shape not given by the flow of light on the water. So I think the water has a kind of independence in depth that parallels what the single sail manifests in space as it escapes confinement. The force of the water, though, is quite different from the force embodied in the sail. The force of the water is very much an echo of the nature of matter as deep unfathomable ground for all experiences. The water resists all analogies except the analogy of resisting analogy. And in this resistance it seems to echo the strange reflecting power of the underside of the bridge, as if this too were an absolute condition, beyond what can seem the triviality of the pursuit of freedom. As the poet J. E. Rideau pointed out to me, the bridge is marvelously doubled as restricting force and as a kind of liberating force by which the water's reflections are preserved in the form of modifying another surface.

I reveal (and revel in) my profession as literary critic by emphasizing the dramatic aspects of how agency operates in this painting. But my awareness of this possible overemphasis makes me have to insist that I do not want to moralize these terms at all, beyond pointing out Monet's interest in constraint, in freedom, and in resistant materiality as forces that go well beyond human agency. My point is, I hope, his point—that visual relations not only reflect atmosphere but interpret its dynamics—simply for the sake of how the dynamics enliven participation in the visual scene. By helping us to see agency in the material relations enacted by these paintings, the New Materialisms dramatize how things and interchanges establish affective force and elicit the audience's engagement in making the created and creating atmosphere an object of reflection in its own right. The boat seeking freedom from constraint and finding instead a vital relationship with the motion of the clouds invites the language for human interactions with the environment that Baudelaire reserves for the dandy:

> We might liken him [the lover of human life] to a mirror as vast as the crowd itself; or to a kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness, responding to each one of its movements and reproducing the multiplicity of life and the flickering grace of all the elements of life. He is an "I" with an insatiable appetite for the "non-I," at every

instant rendering and explaining it in pictures more living than life itself, which is always unstable and fugitive. (*ATN* 496–97)

My third painting, Gustave Caillebotte's *Paris Street; Rainy Day* (1877, Art Institute of Chicago), will show how these almost obsessive references to life itself are not mere rhetoric. Instead, they can be read as affirmations of the most fundamental value offered by the entire complex of considerations involved in moving the painter into the open air. One's sense of life itself becomes very different when one's basic experience is of vitality and intensity rather than of studying objects or establishing meanings, practical or theoretical. And this stress on multiple forces working in conjunction with one another can have political consequences, at least in the artists' formulating of social ideals. Consider Mallarmé's judgment that this art "in political language means radical and democratic" because "at that critical hour for the human race when nature desires to work for herself, she requires certain lovers of hers . . . to loose the restraint of education, to let hand and eye do what they will, and thus through them, reveal herself" (*ATN* 592).

But it was another poet, Jules Laforgue, who proved even more eloquent and prescient than Mallarmé. He begins his essay, "Impressionism" with a panegyric to "the Impressionist eye," then follows with this sense of the synthesis possible for this kind of commitment: "In the work of Monet and Pissarro . . . everything is obtained by a thousand little dancing strokes in every direction like straws of colour—all in vital competition for the whole impression." This wholeness shifts the force of the details from isolated melodies to a whole "symphony which is living and changing like the 'forest voices' of Wagner, all struggling to become the great voice of the forest." Such vital struggle shifts the focus of response from manifest force to something deeper and more collective, to an "Unconscious" at the core of life which is "the law of world, . . . the great melodic voice resulting from the symphony of the consciousness of races and individuals" (*ATN* 938).

Such force begins with a genius setting "subject and object . . . irretrievably in motion" so that "flashes of identity" circulate between them. And once the subject is freed from the burden of defending a rigid identity, one's sense of the self can retain its particularity while also recognizing both the partiality of that identity and the pleasures of imagining that one can participate in the social version of the symphonies produced by how life emerges:

Each man is, according to his moment in time, his racial milieu and social situation, his moment of individual evolution, a kind of keyboard on which the exterior

world plays in a certain way. My own keyboard is perpetually changing, and there is no other like it. All keyboards are legitimate. (*ATN* 939)

The painter's awareness of these political implications is most striking when we turn from landscape to a scene where the painter represents the particular casual and rhetoric-free sense of social life that is continuous with how the impressionist handles natural details. I have chosen Caillebotte's *Paris Street; Rainy Day* because I suspect he may be experimenting with exactly this concern: How could he bring a sensibility grounded in color tonalities to typical urban scenes, and how might we learn from the painting to register its implications for our sense of urban sociality?

One could stress the isolation of each bourgeois person within what seems an image of the social costs of capitalist individualism. But Caillebotte seems less interested in social criticism than in figuring out visually what constitutes a bond for these people—to each other and to the cityscape that they hold in common. That bond consists in two basic continuities—that almost all the people have umbrellas and so are subject to the same weather conditions, and that they are all dressed in shades of black and gray that connect them to stones and almost all of the shadows. They may be each alone in the apparently inert social theater; they decidedly are not alone in the ontological theater. And that ontological theater is an immensely suggestive arena. In one sense the major feature of the painting is how motion is beautifully woven in to that static moment the painting stages. Most of the human shapes are walking. More important, the painting involves beautiful placements that provide intricate rhythms for the eye as it tracks vertical and diagonal lines of force driving that movement.

Recognizing this movement puts us in a position to observe the subtle touches that bring something like an ethical force to this feeling of active assemblage.[28] The water on the stone pavement seems intent on its own force as it gathers toward the foreground. And by having the figures or couples almost all isolated, Caillebotte can make the rhythm of where they stand a principle by which the surface avoids the trap of utter stasis. Moreover the rain links the textures of the buildings to the flow of the water on stone. Notice how the triangular building in the rear becomes almost a protective sentinel visually pushing the characters into the viewer's attention. Also notice the strange and brilliant choice of having the umbrellas all virtually the same shade of violet. Because of the distance between the various umbrellas and the fact that they constitute the major feature of the walkers, they seem to function with their own agency to compose another rhythm, constituting a relational field that seems to establish vital connections that afford

a shared neediness and moderate security. Politically there is democracy here, in which all kinds of agents perform the functions that will unite the scene and protect it from the despondency isolated individuals might feel. And ontologically there is Caillebotte's own version of plenitude, since the deep forces that bind the characters into a shared life seem much stronger than the self-protections that isolate them.

I have left to last the dark green light pole, visually but not actually at the center of the painting. This is the one shape in the painting without a double, physically linked only to the base of the building in the right foreground. Why give this pole such prominence? And why stage that prominence by stressing its green-gray shadow? The painting suggests several possible answers. Visually the pole seems almost a maypole presiding over this somewhat macabre dance of unaware participants, perhaps unwilling actually to join any collective movement. The pole with shadow also sharply divides the painting vertically in foreground and background and horizontally into one half focused on a particular couple and one on the stones and triangular building. But space freely circulates around the pole, as of the scene could integrate what also segments it. And here space functions dynamically, almost musically, because the umbrellas in shape and in color tone echo the massive building, setting their lightness and the buildings authoritative stability into dialogue. The people become all parts of a collective far more capacious and more elemental than consciousness can represent.

V

Such powerful imaginings would reign for only a very short time. Even painters trained in accord with impressionist principles, like Paul Gauguin and Maurice Denis, would soon be attracted to symbolist ideals because they promised a much greater range of psychological adventure. So I want to spell out two reasons why impressionism seemed eventually to fail as a model for ambitious painting as well as for ambitious thinking about painting. These reasons help us see why most of the modernists rejected the available forms of materialism and why the conditions of experience articulated by those painters afford substantial critiques of how the mind is represented in current versions of those materialisms. More important, by recognizing what the New Materialisms help us to see in the art, we can occupy the dialectical position of having to appreciate the demands on the modernists to develop at least equally sensitive and far-ranging intellectual structures for the work of grounding a very different aesthetic.

The first reason for the change involves how impressionism itself evolved. From the beginning, from Baudelaire, we saw that impressionism combined two enabling stories difficult to reconcile. One was a story about vital matter that painting could "realize" by focusing on the play of color tones in highly specific atmospheres. The other story was about the sense of personal freedom that the new art offered—freedom from academic painting and freedom to express the artists' own creativity by taking up unique perspectives and concentrating on dynamic forces in the scene rather than emphasizing structural architecture captured by the powers of drawing. By 1886, the year of both the final group exhibition of the impressionists and "the first explicit Symbolist manifestos," it had become clear that the dynamic color relations and intricate atmospheres did not have enough cultural heft to shape the future for painting that could consider itself avant-garde.[29] Two options for change presented themselves. Painting could keep its empiricist bent by turning more radically to the science of color relations, as Seurat proposed, or it could align with the symbolist movement in writing by returning to emphases on aspects of subjective creativity that pushed against the limitations of empiricist understanding. Perhaps alliance with the writers might even establish ways painting could reconstruct social relations on the basis of recognizing shared aspects of reality not available directly to the senses.

The hope to ground painting in scientific color theory soon faded, although the liberation of color from the practical understanding of how objects appeared was soon to generate fauvism and, through that, to provide emblems of constructive freedom basic to all of modernist painting. Symbolist theories had a different fate. I want to show briefly how symbolist and then expressionist art theory developed full competing structures of values by which to claim the fealty of younger artists. Because these new theories stressed powers of construction rather than idealizing how representation might be reinvigorated, they made it extremely difficult to share in what would become the New Materialisms' efforts to replace intentionality by ontology.

I think two examples should suffice to suggest how the art world turned critical of the versions of empiricism proposed by impressionist painting. We can begin with Paul Gauguin, because he offers such a lively critique of impressionist verisimilitude.[30] His essay "Notes on Colour" begins with a claim that the great painters all struggled to correlate color with drawing, and so surface and structure. "Then came the Impressionists":

> They studied colour and colour alone, as a decorative effect, but they did so without freedom, remaining bound by the shackles of verisimilitude. . . . They looked,

> and they saw, harmoniously, but without any goal: they did not build their edifice on any sturdy foundation of reasoning as to why feelings are perceived through colour. They focused their efforts around the eye, not in the mysterious center of thought, and from there they slipped into scientific reasons. (*ATN* 993)

Essentially the same claims take on a very different tone in a retrospective essay by the influential Austrian art critic and playwright Hermann Bahr. Writing in 1914 to celebrate expressionism, which he takes to include all the emerging modernist art that "does violence to the sensual world," Bahr argues that all of the new movements are united by one thing—they all turn against impressionism because it tries to "simulate reality, striving for illusion" that will "protect its investments in the bourgeois world."[31] Bahr has a lot of targets and is less an analyst than a polemicist in his making concrete the ideas of Wilhelm Worringer. Yet in those very excesses I think he captures something very important about the social and intellectual rebellion against the entire structure of bourgeois self-satisfaction. For Bahr the impressionists' great sin was the effort "to rule out every inner response to the outer stimulus": "Impressionism is an attempt to leave nothing to man but his retina" and the kinds of pleasures that it makes possible. The impressionist leaves out man's participation in appearance for fear of falsifying it.[32] That is, the impressionist needs to believe that the nature rendered is the reality and not an appearance obscuring other dynamic forces that cannot be represented.

Nature itself for Bahr has a reality beneath appearance because there is no sense in impressionist nature of anything terrifying, anything capable of demanding that humans test their own resources to combat that terror.[33] Perhaps any adequate account of matter has to include the ways in which what seems the natural order is not effective in helping consciousness attune to nature because it presents what has to be resisted rather than embraced. If that is so, any art bound to accepting the dynamics of appearance may not be able to provide the forms of strength that humans need to combat the despair elicited by this kind of awareness:

> Art begins in an attempt of man to break the grip of appearance by making his "innermost" appear also. Within the outer world he has created another world which belongs to him and obeys him. . . . Art frees him by drawing appearance from the depths and by flattening it out on a plane surface. Every fresh outer stimulus alarms the inner perception, which . . . never concedes entrance to nature but out of the flush of experience he tears her bit by bit—banishing her from the depths to the surface—makes her unreal and human until her chaos has been banished by his order.

So Bahr pursues a very different sense of "life" from the sense of center of sympathies cultivated by impressionism. For him the fullness of life must be earned by struggle with appearance: "Life from within must fulfill the function of life as man's most proper deed and action":

> So, brought very near the edge of destruction by "civilization" [the date is 1914], we discover in ourselves powers which cannot be destroyed. With the fear of death upon us, we muster these and use them as spells against "civilization." Expressionism is the symbol of the unknown in us in which we confide, hoping that it will save us.[34]

Bahr's sense of subjectivity in art is simply incompatible with any kind of New Materialist subsuming of human agency into relational fields organized by dynamic natural forces. For, like impressionist painting, the New Materialisms pay very little attention to the kinds of violence that nature imposes on human hopes and desire. Correlatively, both the impressionists and the New Materialists expend very little rhetoric on the senses of threat such powers pose to ideals of personal freedom and social commonality. More important, the New Materialisms share impressionism's sense that the inner life can be best lived, if it can be lived at all, by finding ways of participating fully in the energies gathered within how bodies manifest their energies. Modernist art would instead demand a competing stress on what is involved in participating in the kinds of energies of self that resist the nature of appearance. Only then could art struggle against the painful pressures caused by how both nature and history seem to resist the noblest of human instincts.

VI

Suppose the making of art could be aligned with processes of reasoning rather than with modes of sensibility. This might be a means of admitting the need for resistance to nature's dominion without quite Bahr's expressivist rhetoric desperate for freedom from the bonds of civilized bourgeois behavior. So my second reason why the modernist spirit turns against impressionist materialism is located in Cézanne's responding to impressionism by trying "to substitute reflexion for empiricism without sacrificing the essential role of sensibility."[35] Roger Fry based his support of Cézanne precisely on how he managed to continue capturing dynamic variations of color tone while "his reason spontaneously demanded the logical support of composition, of plan and of architecture." And that emphasis on logical support required in turn a quite different model of how audiences are invited to respond to individual works.

I have to be careful here. It would be a major mistake to say that Monet or Manet or Pissarro ignored structure. But they did not foreground it or insist that the sensuous surface be ultimately subsumed within the mind's capacity to realize architectures whose efforts at stability and timelessness managed to intensify the effects of color modulation. Nor did they see how structuring color modulation might become the artist's central concern, without much care for accuracy to atmospheric forces. Relations among colors freed from representation could be capable of intricate psychological effects by appealing directly to the audience's synthetic and reflective powers.

Notice then the emphasis on breaking from common-sense understanding in Maurice Denis as he tries to summarize the importance of Cézanne's work: artists following Cézanne's example could substitute "for the idea of 'nature viewed through a temperament' the theory of . . . plastic equivalents capable of reproducing these emotions or states of the soul without the need to create a copy of the initial spectacle" (*ATM* 48). When art refuses the entire logic of scenic accuracy, it can allow itself attention to very different dynamic forces at play. There emerge now models of what Roger Fry would call "valuation," which build on anecdotes like this crucial one by Denis on Cézanne:

> Of an apple by some commonplace painter one says I should like to eat it. Of an apple by Cézanne one says: How beautiful! One would not peel it; one would like to copy it. It is in that that the spiritual power of Cézanne consists. . . . I purposely do not say idealism . . . because Cézanne's apple speaks to the spirit by means of the eyes.[36]

What satisfactions and values can such contemplative states sustain that both idealize and resist the authority of the senses? What in art can demand predicates like "beautiful" that depend on the relational structure of the work taken as a synthetic whole, in some respects not subject to the urgencies of temporal existence? And why might it matter that no materialism we are likely to have can fully honor the dynamics of comprehension basic to such satisfactions?

Fry is too much the aestheticist to provide a sufficient account of what aspects of inner life actually do the work of resisting appearance rather than fleshing out its dynamics. So we have to turn instead to Benedetto Croce's *Guide to Art* for a definition of what might be distinctive about all art that would be hampered by an emphasis on appearance:

> Certainly art is symbol, all symbol, that is, all significant. But symbol of what? Signifying what? Intuition is truly artistic, is fully intuition and not a chaotic

> accumulation of images, only when it has a vital principle which animates it and makes for its complete unity. (*ATM* 107)

Croce conceives concentration as the force by which the artist makes visible this unifying activity. And once this force emerges, we cannot read the painting simply as the rendering of a scene. The painting becomes the rendering of the kinds of constructive activity capable of bringing scenes to life, as if that level of content dramatized the power to make meaning, not just arrange meaningful relations among worldly details. Modernist aesthetics radicalizes that will to produce a feeling of meaningfulness by separating it from the details of representation and locating it instead in what Paul Klee calls "the powers that do the forming" rather than "the final forms themselves." Then the forming affords an imaginative leap from the object to the act embedded in the object.[37] Here we are speaking with Fernand Léger of a "realism in conception" (*ATM* 161) based on the embodiment of feeling and thought rather than a realism based on what the work portrays in the world.

But what kind of an act is it that can make for the complete unity of an object yet not be capable of being described apart from the work? Not surprisingly I have to return to Hegel's concept of inner sensuousness in order fully to develop the significance of these critiques of fidelity to objective conditions created by the play of light and atmosphere. In the spirit of Hegel we can say that those artists and writers committed to inviting an audience to participate in constructive activity offer a distinctive model of the expressive process. Normally a person can express in ordinary language what he or she is feeling. But that typically traps the person in categories structured by the understanding. There are some states, sometimes deeply personal ones or states of deep connection with the world or with other people, that signs can only indicate but for which they cannot establish referential correlates. These states have to be embodied in particulars that lead beyond the sentences to the powers that make them different from what the understanding can process. And then the dimension of meaning is not reducible to claims about the sensible world. Instead, meaning relies on how the making of the work produces exemplary qualities by which the audience reads the particular against a background of possible significances. And these modes of significance depend in turn largely on how the work invites self-conscious identification with the force of that making.[38]

This is what is involved in trying to communicate what cannot be reconciled with the forms of practical life. In these cases one has to attach to the force that

keeps the particular exemplary while resisting common sense as capable of interpreting that force. The syntax of the expression and the formal relations that give it particularity have to carry the semantic content. And when one can see into the force of the connecting fabrics, one in effect constructs a sense of wholeness that takes on its own objectivity as the focus of attention. The composition becomes an object only because of the life in which it enables the subject to participate.

VII

I am trying to get at why appreciating composition as embedded affective force requires two attributes very difficult even to state in materialist terms—the sense of a whole requiring the leap of integrating the parts into a synthetic construct, and the sense that this wholeness cannot be described from the outside but requires participating in how the energies become charged with significance. So I know it is high time I talked again about concrete works of art. First, I want to recall the first chapter's discussion of how Picasso engaged Cézanne's commitment to his own kind of realizational naturalism. Then I want to address fully noniconic abstraction by dwelling on the kinds of force the foregrounding of compositional energies have in two suprematist works by Kazimir Malevich. But that task of approaching Malevich unfortunately requires a little more abstraction so that the reader can become familiar with Malevich's understanding of his own project. That understanding will be especially pertinent here because Malevich takes pains to show dialectically how impressionism was both a brilliant demonstration of individual powers of the artist and an ultimate failure of spirit.

Malevich's historical analyses depend on an essentially dualist scheme. He divides the world into an awkward "thereness" of nature (Sartre would say "*existence de trop*") set against what he calls the "non-objective being" of imaginative possibility that can be realized only within the self-conscious imagination. This dualism allows him to honor impressionist painting for freeing the spirit from an empiricist obsession with fact, while simultaneously condemning it for its insistence that this creative spirit must make itself manifest by means of an alliance with material forces forming atmospheres and temperaments. For Malevich, a modern art has to embody creation that relies on forms that "have nothing in common with nature."[39] This radical position seems necessary because the act of forming cannot fully embody the individual imagination if it has to honor imperatives that stem from the observable natural order. For Malevich, imaginative energies are

most vital when they can establish a different kind of objectivity from that which is expected by the understanding. Objectivity must become nonobjective in the domain of sense experience but still make clear objective demands on the kinds of self-consciousness that can identify with the composing force. "Such composing force allows internal relations to be determined by formal considerations that are self-determined":[40]

> The relationship will be the linking movement of two differences, it will be the law of their existence. . . . The element is not yet a form, the form only begins when the link of elements begins. . . . In the final reckoning, the elements do not exist in "the world" as some part of a building whole in form, for such a building also does not exist either, they arise from our own intention. . . . And for this reason nobody can strive or build themselves a Weltanschauung different from another, for "the world" cannot be in different aspects of Weltanschauung.[41]

The viewer's task is to realize the intention and so participate in the life of the forms as they emerge for the imagination. The impressionists changed what was involved in viewing nature, but in the name of a more realistic attunement to flux and fluidity. Nonobjective art wanted to evoke and to guide a seeing that stressed differences from the kinds of recognition we adapt for natural objects, in part because these recognitions also relegate moral and social situations to interpretations that depend on society's conventional readings of human nature.

I doubt that any materialist thinker goes in fear of Malevich's wretched prose (at least in translation). Malevich is far too comfortable in an amalgam of idealist philosophizing and theosophical faith in a real order beyond the natural.[42] But perhaps the materialist should go in fear of what Malevich's paintings can produce, as thinking that also tries to make sense entirely in secular terms. Consider for example how we can come gradually to appreciate the significance of the intricate dance of differences in his *Suprematist Composition (with Eight Red Rectangles)* (1915, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam).

First the painting establishes a highly intricate rhythm of gaps and angles. It offers purely flat colors celebrating the materiality of bright red. But here the spacing becomes as real, and almost as sensuous, as any material object in impressionist work. This spacing has a clear material dimension. But it also gestures toward meaning in a way that requires imaginative processes quite different from association or habits of practical judgment. We have to see the work as exemplary of possible relational structures that manifest how a certain kind of vitality pervades relations among these objects, even though the objects do not produce

representations that count as natural scenes. The rhythmic relations in color, shape, and spatial forms are inescapably real but also inescapably addressed to the life of imagination rather than to the life of the senses. The objective relations among these rectangles have to be processed and tested by how they make subjects feel and how they elicit discourse among these subjects.

Second, we have to attend to the nature of the sheer force wielded by the particular rectangles, especially as they form relations with the neighboring shapes. There is in fact only one plane occupied by these utterly material painted entities. Yet I defy any careful viewer to make these shapes settle into that one plane. Here real objects create illusory planes that we have nonetheless to treat as real despite the fact that they are not objective. The flat existence is inseparable from a remarkable sense that each object is in motion, as the relation among rectangles resists and yields to something like a gravitational force keeping everything in constant activity. I think this motion requires us to introduce speculations about the psyche—for artist and audience—because there seems no other way to explain the satisfactions generated by the complex balancing among the rectangles. We have to imagine that we somehow identify with how they move and with the satisfactions in producing a unified effect as we attend to those movements. This level of balance within movement is not a matter of simple proprioception. There are unrecognizable yet totally physical forces that depend on imagination to be seen.

But talk of imagination also seems not quite appropriate. There seems a realistic dimension to these abstract figures. The painting does not simply build on material shapes. Instead, it seems to take on the capacity to deny the visual authority of those material shapes until we correlate them with the psyche. In part because the smaller rectangles have more white space around them, they seem to resist their masses by taking on force out of all proportion to their sizes. Yet the achieved balance establishes a remarkable sense of peace despite those differences. This balancing even provides the promise of an active force able to negotiate the entire domain of private and social needs stemming from dissatisfactions with the material world. Here the play of differences does not produce any sense of lack or loss. Rather, it enables and exemplifies affective qualities that attentive viewers can project onto the play of attraction and repulsion among the rectangles. In fact, I think Malevich's painting provides a powerful instance of modernist values of participation and identification that objectify states of self-consciousness involved in the play of complex real forces.

Viewers are invited to recognize that we have the power to make these rectangles

over into surrogates that allow us new feelings about our being in the world. The works make objective specific possibilities of subjective involvement in affective states elicited by the real world but not reducible to the facts of that world.

I could conclude here. But I find myself in a strange situation, and I want to take advantage of it. Almost thirty years ago I wrote an extensive analysis on Malevich's *Black Square and Red Square* (1915, MoMA) in my book *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry*.[43] Since there has been no notice of this discussion that I know of, and since this old reading seems to me quite relevant to this new discussion, I want essentially to repeat what I said then in this new context.

While thirty years ago I did appreciate the intricacy of the dynamic balances enacted by the work, I did not fully appreciate what the material surface demands of an audience if it is fully to recognize how self-consciousness is implicated in our responses to the construction. The painting poses nonobjectivity as a challenge to any kind of satisfaction with empiricism. The painting also articulates what I want to call a transpersonal subject, because it invites identification from every kind of viewer: the value of constructivist abstraction becomes manifestly the exemplary concreteness it offers as a condition of experience. And, most intriguing, that condition of experience proves not only affectively engaging but ranges into reflections on the nature of differences, which is to say it ranges into questions about how one can feel one's own subjective being as objectively nonobjective.

These are the two sentences that served as conclusion for my original account:

> Here the purest sense of art's formal purposiveness becomes compatible with the nineteenth century's richest models of the energies that define the constitutive subject. What had been the irreducible force of differentiation, hidden beneath all of efforts at lucidity, here becomes visible in its elemental form. (p. 221)

Now I can elaborate what I said then. So I suggest attending first to the simple facts of *Black Square and Red Square*. What force can a work gain by basing itself on a direct contrast between a black square that repeats the orientation of the frame, and a much smaller red square that tilts away from that orientation? What significance can the tilt have, accompanied by the contrast between red and black and the proportional reduction in size?

Our answers have to lie in how the tilt affects the rest of the painting. If the red square were vertical, the rich off-white of what seems the background would be relatively inert. But the tilt activates the background, as in *Eight Red Rectangles*, because that background now has to provide some kind of active balance between

what have become competing modes of organizing space. This effort at meaning is in fact the first existential resonance of what the tilt might involve. The intense physicality of the red square becomes crucial to denying how the black square wants to order the painting—as spatial orientation and as an imposition of something that refuses any kind of vitality. But we also have to notice that in this tilt's activating the off-white background, the painting shows how opposition can raise to another level the possibility of containing and balancing disruptive elements.

So the tilt also activates questions about how the mind can recognize the possible significance of this creative act. This work is too bare and too spare to be decoration or ornament; it must signify something, and it must signify because of how that sparseness foregrounds the activity of choosing paths of significance. Resistance and negation on one level become on another level the acceptances of interdependence. And painted material marks become enactments of important psychological distributions of energy. Enactment becomes a material event that our languages of materialism cannot even locate as real.

In all these attunements to how the painting might embody what it signifies, we have to take the tilt as necessarily complemented by an entire set of feelings about what tilting can involve. The sensual and the abstract live one another's lives, but only when one feels one's self-consciousness identifying with the forces soliciting it in the painting. In fact, we are likely to find that what we attribute to the action of the painting will echo our gradual understanding of the kind of agency we take on as we ourselves try to break from domination of habit. We recognize that we enter Jacques Derrida's world of differing and deferring as conditions of making sense. But Malevich does something no philosopher can do. He establishes a formal model that both enacts the negation and self-reflexively universalizes it as an account of what people can do when they offer resistance to prevailing orthodoxies, or perhaps when they exercise any kind of preference at all. He manages to be so concrete about individuation that he becomes able to construct a transpersonal figure of self-assertion, as if he were making good on Walt Whitman's basic dream. Viewers come to see the material object as also nonobjective because it gets taken up into the psyche as a condition of full participation in the reality it composes. Here art makes visible the tilt that is fundamental to a nonobjective dimension available to all psyches willing to do the work of trying out intimate identifications. The more we try to adapt to this image the more clearly we see that it celebrates a mode of expression so precise and clean that it remains fully expressive only while maintaining its tilt from all that would appropriate it for practical discourses. What art provides seems more elemental than matter.

CHAPTER THREE

Ezra Pound and Marianne Moore
Why Imagism Could Not Suffice

> Impressionism has reduced us to such a dough-like state of receptivity that we have ceased to like concentration. . . . The whole flaw of impressionist or emotional music as opposed to "pattern music" is that it is "like a drug" because it "works from the outside, in from the nerves and the sensorium upon the self.
>
> *—Ezra Pound, "Vers Libre and Arnold Dolmetsch"*[1]

Critics have yet to ask with sufficient intensity what modes of experience, what values, and what plausible visions of our capacities as human beings we can see emerging in this epigraph's express commitment to the mind's making—for poetry as well as for painting. Yet the question looms with increasing urgency for me because much of the passion and innovative energies within modernism have to be ignored if we emphasize how material life shapes consciousness. So it is time to make good on my promise to relate the constructivist practices of modernist poetry to the work of modernist painters, under the overall rubric of how both sets of artists adapted in roughly phenomenological terms the possibility of fleshing out what Hegel elaborates for the study of arts by his distinction between inner and outer sensuousness.

Here I will concentrate on the quite different but allied constructivist aspects of relatively early poems by Ezra Pound and Marianne Moore, as they try to establish alternatives to what they saw as the materialist dimensions of impressionist art. Both poets invented distinctive means for calling attention to what Paul Klee called "the powers which do the forming," as distinct from the product that the form establishes (*ATM* 367).

I have to be careful here. I cannot claim that Hegel influenced modernist poets, although ideas spawned by his work were part of the European discussion of aesthetics in the first decades of the twentieth century.[2] Instead, I claim that Hegel on inner sensuousness provides one model for appreciating what the

artists and writers were after in their rejections of retinal realism and "emotional music" that risked obscuring the creative act. The concept of inner sensuousness allows us to elaborate two significant features of this model. First, this concept provides a means of fleshing out how self-consciousness becomes a basic affective medium by which we register the force of certain artworks. And, second, putting inner sensuousness at the center of our critical thinking affords a way of identifying with how the modernists' projects sought to achieve lyric states with universal appeal by focusing on impersonality rather than on any dramatic rendering of specific sensibilities for which the work seeks empathy. Modernist creativity typically seeks to distance the empirical subject so that it might align the imagination with the play of complex relational surfaces that themselves guide affective involvement. In this regard impersonality forces self-consciousness to engage with materials that embody shapes for experience more capacious and more penetrating than can be provided by an artist concentrating on personal dramatic feelings. Pound, for example, can stress personal powers by mastering an impersonal medium that displays imaginative states in which audiences are invited to participate.

The Hegelian motifs emerge in the ways modernist poets rejected writing in any manner drawn from impressionist principles. Pound and Moore manifestly repudiated most of the poets represented as avant-garde in Pound's *Des Imagistes* collection, because these writers formed their sense of the role of the concrete image on impressionist understandings of how the mind and sensibility participate in natural phenomena. But I am also after larger and trickier game that underlies my sense of why the argument of this book might matter. I think imagist poetry intensifies and purifies a tendency in poetry since romanticism to rely on what I call the epiphanic image, the sense that a poem reaches its full affective intensity by capturing a dramatized particular speaker's investment in particular sensuous details that come to a climax with a resolving image. This kind of structure is everywhere, from Wordsworth's "Nutting" to the latest issue of *The New Yorker* (at the time of this writing).

Poetry was not always thus. Shakespeare's and Donne's and Milton's sonnets were structured rhetorically. Argument governed the choice of images, so the sensual dimension was always manifestly subordinated to a rhetorical intention to develop the poem's conceptual force within everyday empirical conditions. I think one of the great ironies of modernism is that under the guise of hating rhetoric, they returned to an emphasis on the feelings solicited by the activity of providing structure for the poem's events. The modernists did not see this work as rhetoric because they understood rhetoric to involve the self-righteous pandering

to prevailing cultural attitudes presented by vague abstractions. But it is worth realizing that their emphasis on making structures as fundamental vehicles for feeling adapts traditional attitudes in English poetry that, in my view, are more powerful than this cult of the epiphanic image.

One reason I am concerned with this contrast between a poetics of making structures and a poetics of expressive feeling is that in 2014 and 2015 I was privileged to serve as a judge for two poetry prizes—the Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award for distinguished achievement and the Kate Tufts Award for the best first book of poetry in the United States. This meant reading over 350 volumes of poetry each year. And that meant trying to preserve one's sanity by engaging in a range of speculations about the state of poetry in this country.

From my perspective, poetry in the United States seemed to be thriving in several registers. At least two-thirds of these volumes had compelling poems and impressive craft—largely due, I think, to the emerging effect of MFA students in creative writing who receive excellent training in technique. But there is a downside to this success story. Well over two-thirds of this two-thirds of volumes of poetry were committed to pretty much the same kind of poem, at least when one looks for generalized patterns. This is why I became dismayed by how frequently the poems sought epiphanic enlightenment won by the imagination elaborating a plain style to mine a concrete situation for emotional effect. The basic mark of successful epiphany seems to be the production of bated breath or charged silence as an evocative image enables a narrated situation to break into something approximating timeless compassion and chastened wisdom.

Most epiphanic poetry has been based on dramatically elaborating a scene that culminates in an evocative image. Many of the popular poems of the 1960s and 1970s influenced by the ideals of the "deep image" provide good illustrations, like "Clear Night" by Charles Wright:

> Clear night, thumb-top of a moon, a back-lit sky.
> Moon-fingers lay down their same routine
> On the side deck and the threshold, the white keys and the black keys.
> Bird hush and bird song. A cassia flower falls.
>
> I want to be bruised by God.
> I want to be strung up in a strong light and singled out.
> I want to be stretched, like music wrung from a dropped seed.
> I want to be entered and picked clean.

And the wind says "What?" to me.
And the castor beans, with their little earrings of death, say "What?" to me.
And the stars start out on their cold slide thought the dark.
And the gears notch and the engines wheel.[3]

This poem is not without constructive intelligence. Wright is always lush with sound play, and here the structure is forceful in building a transition from description to the subjective desire it unleashes. There is also a striking picture of how the universe replies to the individual's pathetic cries. But perhaps there is in this poem too much intelligence in the wrong places. There is a great deal of mental energy elaborating the appearance of the moon, thus making it seem as if the mind could at least trust that it had a place in the descriptive process, even when its desires are repudiated by the cosmos. Then there is the probably greater error of risking sheer melodrama because of the gulf between the insistent "I" and the indifferent universe that gets to render the epiphanic conclusion. All this energy to tell audiences about the indifference of the cosmos, however brilliantly figured, seems little more than an expense of spirit to cover up a shameful lack of precise self-consciousness.

In recent years poets have increasingly been wary of relying so heavily on epiphanic imagery from nature. But rather than turn to other modes of structuring poetry, they simply shift the epiphanic focus from illumination by means of nature to treating the subject's emerging powers of self-description as the locus for the emotional climax. Derek Mahon's "At the Window" was published in the latest *New Yorker* to arrive as I write this chapter:

The bird flying up at the windowpane
aspired to the blue sky reflected in it
but learned the hard truth and flew off again.
Was it a finch, a blue tit or a linnet?
I couldn't quite identify the strain.

Checking a pocket guide to get it right—
"The Birds of Ireland," illustrated text—
I note the precise graphic work and definite
descriptions there, and yet I'm still perplexed.
I only glimpsed the bird in busy flight:

bit like a goldfinch, like the captive one
perched on a rail, by Rembrandt's young disciple,
except for the coloring, blue, yellow, and green.
A tit so, one of those from the bird table
which whirr at hanging nuts and grain.

Off he flew. Now there's a mist out there
and a mist in here that would not interest him,
since what he wants is sky and open air.
He's in the leaves; I'm trying one more time
to find an opening in the stratosphere.[4]

Again there is a great deal of intelligence to complement the gorgeous rhyming. But also again we find a focus on description—here as a problematic possibility that the questioning mind might be able to find a secure place in the world observed. This "I" is much subtler, more adult perhaps, than is the "I" in Wright's poem. But the stress is the same in the two poem's dwelling on how to reconcile the subjective feeling for its own presence and the natural world's unconcern with such issues. There is no third possibility, no quest to do something with what seems an inevitable knowledge. All of the poem's skill and intelligence founders on "one more time," as if poetry had to get its sense of epiphany by going round and round in the same old pond.[5]

I want to insist that I admire these poems. But I think it is a mistake to imitate how they engage experience, because they afford such limited powers for the mind and even for the sensibility: everything seems to depend on reaching rapprochement with the world of fact. Only his attunement can allow the subject some compensatory emotional pleasure, given that it can continue to treat the discovery of its own limitations as significant news. So I think criticism has to analyze the weaknesses of this set of assumptions about the lyric. Then perhaps it can help bring about change by spelling out other fresher and more viable ways to construct intelligent, intense, and moving verbal experiences. I hope to offer one challenge here by drawing attention to how many of Pound's imagist poems do not quite conform to the epiphanic model. Instead, they dwell on how language constructs the scenes and directs attention to the force by which the artifice invokes dimensions of self-consciousness that cannot be satisfied by the evocations of sensual fullness. These poems invite different kinds of valuing in which we participate by identifying with the constructive activity foregrounded by the poem.

We will see that the focus on the making in Moore's poems collected in

Observations (1924) is quite different from what we find in Pound's imagist work. Her earlier poetry can be said to have its roots in her love of good prose, so that it is always based on analogues to argument. But like Pound's, Moore's work in this volume typically foregrounds modes of self-consciousness committed to testing the capacity of the mind to work its intentionality into its encounters with sensuous objects and practical necessities. Because she is so intricate and careful in working out the powers exemplified in these precise intentional states, I think she has quite close affinities with painters like Malevich, even though she does not at all emphasize the visual. The core of her early poetry is composing concrete self-reflexive acts of mind capable of modifying our feelings for how we can take up places within the world without submitting to the causal authority most thinkers attribute to that world.

I

First we have to look briefly at an imagist poem that does stress the epiphanic, and with certain adjustments in style it could be in many respectable contemporary collections because of how it deploys a plain style focused on the power of a single unfolding event to occupy and to reward attention. The best example I can think of is the one poem Amy Lowell published in *Des Imagistes*, so I cite all of "In a Garden":

> Gushing from the mouths of stone men
> To spread at ease under the sky
> In granite-lipped basins,
> Where iris dabble their feet
> And rustle to a passing wind,
> The water fills the garden with its rushing,
> In the midst of the quiet of close-clipped lawns.
>
> Damp smell the ferns in tunnels of stone,
> Where trickle and plash the fountains,
> Marble fountains, yellowed with much water.
>
> Splashing down moss-tarnished steps
> It falls, the water;
> And the air is throbbing with it;
> With its gurgling and running;
> With its leaping and deep, cool murmur.

And I wished for night and you.
I wanted to see you in the swimming-pool,
White and shining in the silver-flecked water.

While the moon rode over the garden,
High in the arch of night,
And the scent of the lilacs was heavy with stillness.

Night and the water, and you in your whiteness, bathing![6]

Notice first how the opening stanza pushes for syntactic intricacy that weaves a dense set of sensations together visually (and grammatically, thanks to three present participles, preparing for five participles in the third stanza). Even though there is technical enjambment, each line takes on the weight of defining a particular grouping of sensations and of dynamic processes within the overall scene. In fact, the compounding of words that pervades the poem brings to a lovely excess these efforts at grouping sensations.

Never one not to overdo a fine moment, Lowell links the water to the throbbing air and therefore needs an imaginative expansion of the scene that can begin to align the inner life with the profusion of sensual details. Then she complicates the picture by turning to "you," initially staging human desire as different from natural movement, only to absorb that desire into the details of the swimming pool in the "arch of night." So the emotional epiphany becomes the realization of how fully the person fits into the scene: the other's bathing makes it possible for the "I" to grasp the entire scene as an emotionally charged event.

More generally, we can see in this poem how Amygism contributed to the historical shaping of what imagism seemed to exemplify as possibilities for the lyric. The most important change imagism brought about was its critique of all rhetorical effulgence (or language effects born of relations to other language effects rather than to subject matter): the unadorned word, free verse, and elemental syntax will suffice to stage how illumination might be possible within a manifestly secular world.[7] The corollary of the critique of rhetoric is the possibility that poetry can stage aspects of elemental experience in such a way as to call attention to their place in our lives and thus perform an act of valuing particulars sharply at odds with the instrumental generalization so fundamental in our culture. Finally, poetry, in sharp opposition to prose, has the power to alter the senses of time fundamental to consumerist culture. Hence, the significance of Pound's famous definition of the "Image" as "that which presents an intellectual and emotional

complex in an instant of time" (*LE* 4). The emotional epiphany just is this sense of the power of intense contemplation to isolate the instant and allow it to take on its own identity in contemplative space. This is how "emotion endures" (*LE* 14).

II

But Pound, like virtually all major poets in the twentieth century, refused to settle for the principles that would justify the epiphanic style. So I want to examine just what features of his versions of imagism display significant alternatives to that style, in the hope that we can recover the force of his example and provide different possibilities for poetry. Unfortunately, the best way that I can do that involves another small bit of dialectical thinking that will delay for a few moments my directly addressing Pound. Vincent Sherry's brilliant *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence* presents a very strong case for how the values basic to decadent writing pervade Pound's imagist phase and make it continuous with the *Mauberley* poems. But if we focus carefully on his arguments about Pound, I think they in fact highlight a Pound sharply opposed to decadent writing. So by going through the negative case about Pound, we find new and, I hope, compelling terms by which to characterize what is new and still exciting in his relations to imagism.

Sherry's thesis on Pound is one aspect of his larger argument that critics writing in the spirit of modernism have suppressed the ways modernist writing partakes in and is pervaded by concerns that can reasonably be labeled decadent. So critics have stressed parallels with the poetics of symbolist writing and, in so doing, tried to suppress the decadent features in the "mood" of the writing that proved indispensable to such recastings of the senses (see especially pp. 8–9). But Sherry insists that *Symbolisme* cannot account for the continuing focus in modernist writing on delicate and fragmented sensation, on a musicality that pulls against any determinate speaker, on a congruent absorption in the most private features of sensibility leading to a repudiation of public life, on an overall sense of the "melancholy in urban modernity" (p. 17), and on the strong opposition between the symbol and the many features of modernist writing that are quite close to the ironic stances characterized by Walter Benjamin as allegorical writing. Because symbolism pursued an open future, only the spirit of decadence will provide a sufficient context for recognizing how so many modernists deny any myth of progress, preferring instead to pursue a sense of "perennial afterness" (p. 29) as the time zone in which modernist writing most fully comes into its own.

I think Sherry's generalizations about decadence apply to most imagist poetry,

especially Lowell's. There is in this work an obvious fascination with the immediacies of sensation, at least partially abstracted from any specific objective situation (pp. 160–65). There is corresponding musicality set against the speaking as it pursues the poem's interests in an intensity almost divested of actuality because of its self-absorption (p. 187). Character tends to be subsumed into sensation rather than concerned with action. And, most important, the primary effect of that sense of character involves a radical splitting off of private sensibility from concerns for public welfare, a situation that did not prepare writers well for the shock of World War I, when public events and needs simply overwhelmed concerns for private sensibility, and in which writers had to find means of readapting their entire imaginative dispositions.[8]

Yet for all Sherry's eloquence, he seems to me, in the case of Pound, not to distinguish significantly between references to decadence and fealty to any kind of decadent values. There remains a huge difference between Pound's American engagement with the decadence he finds everywhere in Europe, and his own efforts to make work capable of establishing for its participating readers a sharp repudiation of the core values of decadent pessimism. We can test my claim by looking at three areas where Pound develops alternatives to Sherry's characterizations of his work. First, Sherry wants to equate phanopoeia with decadent interests in the particulars of sensation. But to do this he has to reduce Pound's understanding of sensation to his rendering of isolated phenomena, thereby ignoring how Pound links ideals of sensation to the capacity to register complex relational forces distinctive to composing experiences rather than just registering what is taking place. Self-consciousness in the imagist Pound is usually not focused on fragmented sensations but on the power to make intricate total states of awareness built on how the writing structures these sensations.

Second, there is the matter of lyrical music, where Sherry simply never addresses what Pound makes of his interest in the troubadours and in Italian alternatives to iambic pentameter. If one emphasizes these contexts, one can see Pound's experiments in melopoeia as very different from H. D.'s and Aldington's. Pound's music in his imagist poems is in fact arguably his most radical defining of what might break entirely from the nineteenth-century sensibility, which I admit haunts some of his early efforts to capture troubadour love lyric.[9] Finally, Sherry's separation into private lyrics and public address simply does not work for Pound because he elaborates a third term—the constructivist work of art—which casts the private self as capable of bearing significant public force because of the work that the composing intelligence can make manifest.

By taking up these three motifs, I hope to show that essentially the same traits

that provide alternatives to decadence also provide substantial and still viable alternatives to plain-style epiphanic lyricism. Sherry has to treat the *Mauberley* poems as the culmination of Pound's failure to break from decadence, while my story prepares a stage for that other major Pound text of 1917, a draft of *Three Cantos*.[10]

III

Let us begin our analysis of Pound's distinctive achievements in his imagist poems by elaborating two aspects of phanopoeia that break sharply from any rhetoric of the image that relies on ideas of aligning poetry with the task of description and poetic affect with the cult of sensation. The first is simply the concision by which Pound's imagist poetry managed to reconcile the speaking energies of his canzone poems with an aura of engagement with the concrete world. Consider the intensities developed by "Liu Ch'e," first published in *Des Imagistes* (and we could move forward to "The Jewel Stairs Grievance"):

> The rustling of the silk is discontinued,
> Dust drifts over the courtyard,
> There is no sound of foot-fall, and the leaves
> Scurry into heaps and lie still,
> And she the rejoicer of the heart is beneath them:
>
> A wet leaf that clings to the threshold.[11]

In one sense the poem seems bound to a musicality based on isolating sense experiences in separate lines. But the poem works hard to articulate relations among those facts involving what has changed by the lady's death. These relations then allow the poem to be resolved by a striking image. But the terms of the resolution are less a matter of dramatic speech than of structural capacity to synthesize sensations and thus shift them into another level of apprehension. It matters that we recognize how any more overt lament might be seen as painfully self-indulgent. For the sensibility speaking this poem, there can be only a process of emotionally coming to terms with what has changed, without indulging in abstractions about change.

Pound accomplishes this in large part by modifying how poetry stages phanopoeia. It is crucial that the dead woman makes no appearance in the poem. Phanopoiea is not a process of picturing but of evoking the possible force of visual details: the petals falling in the fountain against the substantial permanence of the heap formed by their decay. Then the isolated "wet leaf" that clings to the

threshold" becomes the presence of a past and an evocation of something like real distance between lyrical pleasure and a world of consequences.[12] Here the woman is not so much another fact in the poem as the emergent cause of all the facts, because she now is seen to establish their affective force. And her absence itself also finally becomes an actual mode of presence in the poem's concrete details.

This figure of the wet leaf is not one of Pound's most successful images, since it is rather mawkish. But the figure does sustain a significant internal contrast whose dynamics are presented in what I think are the most powerful lines in the poem: "There is no sound of foot-fall, and the leaves / Scurry into heaps and lie still." The enjambment strangely (and accurately) has the leaves laboring to become still. Stillness becomes an achievement for the leaves, in contrast to the one leaf that cannot be lumped with the mass and so becomes an emblem for what can emerge of her life in her death. The power of this enjambed line consists in its ability to drive the poem to another level, where attention is focused not on pictures but on relations among pictures that occupy different planes of experience. That this clinging leaf will not blow away defines a mode of pain very different from the way the scurrying of the leaves evokes transience.

The crucial point here is that in Pound's imagist poems he is rarely content with how the image provides a specific picture, as the hyphenated images do in Lowell's "In a Garden." In Pound the danger of using images as pictures is that in a text a picture is haunted by absence: what is there by virtue of reference in the poem is simply not there for the audience trapped in memory and in desire. Avoiding such states is why Pound concentrates on how the ensemble of images under the pressure of speaking establishes a vital present tense by having his field of forces compose an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.

As Pound makes clear in his prose, such complexes cannot rely on vision alone. The complexes are richest when they capture vital qualities created by a sense of the interplay of media:

> There have always been two sorts of poetry which are . . . the most "poetic"; they are firstly, the sort of poetry that seems to be music just forcing itself into articulate speech, and, secondly, that sort of poetry which seems as if sculpture or painting were just forced or forcing itself into words. (*LE* 380)

It should come as no surprise that Pound immediately contrasts such moments of juncture capable of evoking complex affective responses resulting from genius to the work of mere talent that is mired in "description" (*LE* 380).

Let me turn then to some of Pound's most evocative imagist poems in order to show how constructive power insists that phanopoeia does not refer primarily to appearances but to the poem's capacity to sustain complex imaginative states. "The Return" offers a stunning example of lyric intelligence producing a more intricate and abstract sense of temporality than decadence can establish:

> See, they return; ah, see the tentative
> Movements, and the slow feet,
> The trouble in the pace and the uncertain
> Wavering!
>
> See, they return, one, and by one,
> With fear, as half awakened;
> As if the snow should hesitate
> And murmur in the wind,
> And half turn back;
> These were the "Wing'd-with-Awe,"
> Inviolable.
>
> Gods of the wingéd shoe!
> With them the silver hounds,
> sniffing the trace of air!
>
> Haie! Haie!
> These were the swift to harry;
> These the keen-scented;
> These were the souls of blood.
>
> Slow on the leash,
> pallid the leash-men! (*P* 85)

Notice how the imperative "see" is driven in fact by what we hear, by the miming of tentativeness and the way the enjambment leads to an intricate self-gathering cadence. In the first stanza there is emphatically no independent description; there is only what sound can solicit as the possibility of sight. And sight never becomes definitive; instead it hovers between visual detail and imaginative projection about the soldiers' feelings. The power of sight depends ultimately not just on

these details but on the contrast provided by memories of the heroes starting out in triumphal glory.

It is as if the warriors dominated the event not because they are seen directly, but because they occupy a hallucinatory space between present and past. The thought of the warriors elicits imperatives to see, but the imperative is much stronger than any form of presence that actually comes into sight. In effect, sound and simile produce a constant promise of substance, but the poetry is all in how that promise evokes what cannot be present except in memory and in projection—the one a domain where promises are precariously stored, and the other a domain in which they are continually produced. Apologists for war want to erase both these dimensions—of memory and of psychological projection. But in poetry the entire space of appearance can be saturated with it, not unlike what noniconic painting such as Malevich's can establish.

IV

In making a case for the complexity of phanopoeia, I found myself also invoking the work of melopoeia. This interrelation is crucial to our understanding of Pound because the play of sound becomes something other than an accompanying music inviting us to enjoy delicate structures of aural sensation. Sound in Pound's imagist poems establishes something very close to an ontological dimension inviting us to treat aural events as establishing a distinctive set of substantial qualities for the experience being rendered.[13]

Obviously this assertion is much easier to demonstrate than to describe in abstract terms. Consider how the music differs in H. D.'s "Sitalkas," in *Des Imagistes*, from "Doria," Pound's first poem in that collection. H. D.'s poem seems to spiritualize impressionist sensibility because it presents a stunning reluctance to anchor sensations in a visible scene. Because the god "touches us not," the sound has to do almost all the work of producing a concrete location:

> Thou art come at length
> More beautiful
> Than any cool god
> In a chamber under
> Lycia's far coast,
> Than any high god
> Who touches us not

Here in the seeded grass.
Aye, than Argestes
Scattering the broken leaves. (*DI* 20)

There is here a beautiful process of making the god manifest in the insistent "o" sounds. Then, when the poem has to acknowledge the remoteness of the god, it switches to a music dominated by "e" sounds that makes "here" a very different place than the kind of existence shaped by the parallel hypothetical comparatives in lines three and six. Both sets of sounds define possible sites of attention. And, as Sherry notes, the effect of sound here produces a "counter-rhythm to the cadences of speech" (p. 165). For Sherry, this resistance to the speaker's presence represents the quintessential cadence of decadence because it makes central not a dramatic scene but "the finer audition of the reader's inner ear, that subtler music" (p. 165).

Not so Pound's "Doria":

Be in me as the eternal moods
of the bleak wind, and not
As transient things are—
gaiety of Flowers.
Have me in the strong loneliness
of sunless cliffs
And of grey waters.
Let the gods speak softly of us
In days hereafter,
The shadowy flowers of Orcus
Remember thee. (*P* 80)

I think this poem is very difficult to interpret. Much of it reads like a love poem. But the ambitions of the speaking seem to make the poem an effort at projecting possible states for the self, eager to test in imagination what its will may be able to produce. This second hypothesis depends on "thee" being how the gods might speak of him. So it is congruent with how much the poem stresses the equation of sound play with the reinforcing of a speaking voice. Perhaps the poem can be considered as simply the character trying to mold itself to how the speaking can express a fullness of will.

Notice how the initial play of strong "e" sounds supports the sense of absolute imperative here. The opening line is sheer assertion and not request. It seems as

if even the idea of the Dorian mode invites a corresponding attitude, capable of fleshing out the musical contrast between those opening sounds and the weak "a" sounds appropriate to the transient things central in decadent poetry. Fortified by this contrast, the voice in the poem can even appropriate the "a" sounds for a third imperative that reaches beyond the bleakness to a kind of transcendental comfort. Now the "a"s mellow into the strong "o"s that provide a resting place for those who internalize that bleakness. This sequence invites us to read the final two imperatives as implicating something close to postcoital satisfaction for this relation to the gods. Having completed the initial sharp demand, the poem can soften, reaching out to a sense of the gods becoming an audience (as in "Erat Hora") and beautifully returning to the long "e"s at the end as softened and spread out in time by the fullness of vocalic round sounds in "The shadowy flowers of Orcus."

In "Doria" Pound makes fully articulate what he means by claiming that "in Provence . . . the arts of verse and music were most closely knit together, when each thing done by the poet had some definite musical urge or necessity bound up within it" (*LE* 91). This poem does not just exemplify effective musicality, nor the power of cadence, nor anything smacking of decadence. Pound puts all the focus on the compositional act. The force of that act of intelligence dispels any satisfaction in the vagaries of responding sensitivities. The effect is not quite refinement of the senses but the production of an alternative, richer world in which to exercise those senses. Here we enter through sound the possibility of participating in what come to seem abiding conditions of passion, not unlike Yeats's gods whose footsteps on our souls provide our emotional lives.

One might say that "Doria" psychologizes music as inner sensuousness, since it so adamantly reinforces the will to speech. This is why in all of his imagist poems Pound treats music less as accompaniment to speech than as positioning for speech, as if it allowed speaking to correlate with deep and distinctive sources of passion. And this is why Pound's essay on Arnold Dolmetsch may be the closest he comes to making explicit the stakes in the imaginative worlds that music can compose for even simple direct speech. Here I will rely almost entirely on quotation, because Pound puts the case so brilliantly that one need only listen in the context of how the imagist poems manifest their own sense of independent being. The opening passages of the essay speculate on how myth arises as the only alternative to skepticism because it can serve as a resource for preserving the literal terms of "some very vivid and undeniable adventure" (*LE* 431). One turns to myth because at least there, the emotion felt might survive, and even provide the basis

for communal conversation about how the world of the gods comes to intersect human experience. Here we see "bewildering and pervasive music moving from precision to precision within itself" (*LE* 431).

Dolmetsch matters because he brings an older music to life in a way that we can hear again "tones as clear as brown amber" (*LE* 433) carrying something like the force of myth without its discursive content. That force makes irrelevant what are the specific instruments, and it bypasses any decadent interests in old instruments for their symbolic qualities. For Pound, "This old music was not theatrical. You played it yourself as you read a book of precision. . . . It was not an interruption but a concentration." But should decadence occur often in the form of the cult of impressionism, we become "reduced . . . to such a dough-like state of receptivity that we have ceased to like concentration" (*LE* 433).

V

Buoyed by the example of Dolmetsch, Pound can explicitly take on what he sees as the heritage of decadence. Impressionism is decadence turned popular, in the sense that the art of sensations becomes available to the masses. But impressionism has the consequence of cultivating "'emotional' music as opposed to pattern music" (*LE* 434), and so has to ignore what can be constructed to occupy a secular version of the space of myth. For such music "starts with being emotion or impression and then becomes only approximately music" (*LE* 434). Emotion or impression will become only approximately music because, like materialism both old and New, the music is condemned to tracing the appearances of vital feelings rather than taking on the task of cultivating the modes of construction basic to the manifest developing of sheerly musical relations. Music that begins with the "vortex of pattern," on the other hand concentrates on, and concentrates in, being purely music rather than producing an impression. Then the music proves "capable of being, after that, many things" (*LE* 434). And if we recognize the power of such patterns, and the capacity they bring to separate art from the vagaries of its stagings, we can see ultimately how the modern arts might be coming together to unite phanopoeia as an art of emergence with melopoeia as a celebrating of sheer emotional substance.

Through such art we learn what is involved in ceasing to treat the emotions as our particular possessions so that we can attend to how they place our psyches in an enlarged world where shadows become substances and facts become elements in dance compositions:

> As I believe that Lewis and Picasso are capable of revitalizing the instinct of design so I believe that a return, an awakening to the possibilities, not necessarily of "Old" music, but of pattern music played upon ancient instruments is, perhaps, able to make music again a part of life, not merely a part of theatricals. . . . It is dance, danced for the dance's sake, not a display. It is music that exists for the sake of being music, not for the sake of, as they say, producing an impression. (*LE* 435)

Now we can address Sherry's basic evaluative point—that the literature of decadence stressed private lives and sensoria in a way that could not address the sense of public crisis created by World War I, and, indeed, by all large-scale operations of political force. This seems to me true about decadence. But it is not true about what Pound was exploring in these imagist poems. For when phanopoeia and melopoeia reach their maximum intensities, there emerges a third elemental feature—the dynamic concentration made present by works of art. That mode of concentration is devoted to displaying how the private in fact can become a public force, at least in limited contexts that can give individuals a new sense of their own powers to root their imaginative lives in communal contexts.

Minimally these conditions establish what we can only call the presentation of real emotion that has few dependencies on description and on the world in which description locks us. Pound begins to make concrete states of mind that establish their own complex realities, with the complexity being the measure of how emotion can claim its own domain in our imaginative lives. Then one might say that his *Cantos* take on the task of attempting to develop these constructive powers while also interpreting their significance as they conflict with the historical realities brought into play by demands for practical description. The development of powers is not limited to individual self-consciousness but can be offered as exemplary possibility for all.

But Pound's specific theorizing is more important for my purposes than his modes of presentation, because of how he makes articulate a feasible model of fusing private and public. First, art can be seen as the impersonal stabilizing and intensifying of the force of personal intelligence, for example by sound working to ground the power of will in "Doria."[14] Second, one has to recognize the potential value of the ways in which impersonality stages intelligence. Impersonality demands that the artist display powers by embodying them in the work of a medium (see *LE* 324n). One cannot effectively assert intelligence: one must demonstrate it at work so that others can "appreciate" it and thereby "determine its value" (*LE* 282). Such work makes manifest the power to keep matter from growing

"gangrenous and rotten" (*LE* 280). So the dramatic presence of intelligence in art stages a kind of phanopoeia of its own, consistently struggling to make visible its capacity to permeate matter with mental force. "The Return" outlasts any particular war, and it offers a powerful reminder of what we risk when we go to war.

My final point concerns how this work of intelligence produces a public dimension for this display of force. For Pound, this public dimension is largely constituted by a somewhat problematic concept of "certitude." "Certitude" is Pound's version of the ideogram for truth—a person standing beside his word. But certitude is also a kind of inner strength, whose richest analogue is how the form of a work leaves no gaps or absences in its content. Pound is clearest on his concept of certitude in a statement on the sculptor on Jacob Epstein:

> The man who tries to express his age, instead of expressing himself, is doomed to destruction. . . . I should ask my opponents to argue, not with me, but to imagine themselves trying to argue with one of the Flenites, or with the energies of his "Sun-God." . . . The test of a man is not the phrases of his critics; the test lies in the work, in its "certitude." What answer is to be made to the "Flenites"? With what sophistry will you be able to escape their assertion? (*GB* 102; see also *LE* 284)

Certitude is a kind of identity that makes objective its own will to express the particular traits it does. This kind of identity is not something one can describe, because description would suggest something incomplete about the mode of presence. Instead, the dramatizing of the powers of self-consciousness requires also managing to embody states in which will or affirmation becomes inseparable from recognizing what self-aware making can establish as the experience of sheer valuation.[15]

Pound wants the celebration of inner sensuousness as an affirmation of the power to make identity visible and to affirm that visibility. In one sense, certitude is an achievement of the heroic artist bound to Nietzschean projects. But in another sense, certitude can be exemplified so that an audience can try to take on similar powers in establishing individual modes of presenting selves. Art then encourages capacities not to tell the truth so much as try to become truthful by exhibiting states with no needs or lacks. These states live up to the standards implicit in their assertion. The states are not oriented toward the social good. But the good they pursue or make present has important social consequences for honesty and taking responsibility for one's beliefs. A society bound to such pursuits will try to establish social relations that do not depend on ideological

agreement but on recognizing the appeal of assertions of individual powers. Art can provide experiences of formal structures that articulate concretely how self-awareness can gather energies into singular identities and provide distinctive conditions for dialogue. Most poets try to exemplify more directly social virtues. But Pound, and to some extent Stevens and Williams and Loy and perhaps even Moore, seem committed to the idea that democracy can only thrive if art illustrates what individuality can involve.

VI

For Pound, melopoeia is not just a mode of musical support for how the words of lyrics establish intense emotions. Rather, it is an incitement to concentration that helps establish a distinctive imaginative site for lyric—transpersonal because the site tries to provide an objective embodiment of what is emotionally at stake in certain imaginative stances. For Moore, Pound's sense of music had to seem too transcendental, too far from the everyday reality that she thought imagination must transform without displacing. So in much of *Observations*, she returns to classical principles for basing the line on syllable counts rather than on measures based on rhythmic units. In doing this she pursues a path completely at odds with Pound, but also in complete agreement with Pound's critique of what lyricism had become early in the twentieth century. When a poem's lines are based on counting syllables, the form of the text has a different kind of sensuous physicality. The text does not participate in traditions of song; nor does it ally the body to specific natural movements. Syllabics depend only on the capacity for counting, yet they hold out possibilities that the states of self-reflection they demand are capable of developing another kind of involvement in the concrete world. The lines depend utterly on our participation in understanding and reconstituting an abstract structure that nonetheless determines material relations among words.[16] The closest parallel I can imagine is how the red of Malevich's rectangles enters relational forces entirely dependent on an invented structure. The invention provides the imaginative shape for what become intensely physical patterns.

Moore's investment in syllabics constitutes one of three basic features in her poetry by which she develops significant parallels to how constructivist art depends on the self-consciousness deployment of powers called on by the work. The second feature is her calling attention to intricate syntactic formulations as the felt material intensifying lyric reflection. Poets in the epiphanic mode rely for

that intensity on the poem's capacity to stage scenes that describe or characterize the feelings they try to embody. Moore, in contrast, makes the unfolding of the sentence structure a fundamental correlate for how self-consciousness might pursue emotional investments in the speaking itself. Syntax proves especially important in "A Grave" because it is all that consciousness can oppose to the utter bleakness of the sea's sheer materiality. And, finally, Moore's work with quotation affords a striking emblem of sociality, since the world experienced is a world held self-reflexively in common with numerous other commentators. Her citations in her poems ask us to respond in such a way as to register the significance of those other locations for experiencing the situation being negotiated.

I think we can see all three features as means by which the poems evoke "inner sensuousness" because of how the work deflects concerns for the object seen into celebrations of the powers that do the naming of how seeing takes place. The result is her inviting readers to feel their minds stretched so that the poems' abstracting powers prove inseparable from their qualities of realizing with full intensity why sharing some particular imaginative situation might matter for their participants. Moore loves the real world too much to settle for description or evocation. And she hates ambitious imaginary versions of the ego too much to allow such dispositions to serve as steamrollers destroying all the fine differences the imagination can bring out in actual situations. Given these hatreds, she seeks an impersonal objectivity capable of exposing the cost of submitting lyric form to the personal ego.[17]

"To a Steam Roller" (1920) establishes early in her career the basic values Moore would seek in poetry:

> The illustration
> is nothing to you without the application.
> You lack half-wit. You crush all the particles down
> into close conformity, and then walk back and forth on them.
> Sparkling chips of rock
> are crushed down to the level of the parent block.
> Were not "impersonal judgment in aesthetic
> matters, a metaphysical impossibility," you
> might fairly achieve
> it. As for butterflies, I can hardly conceive
> of one's attending upon you, but to question
> the congruence of the compliment is vain, if it exists. (*PEM* 84)

I think the poem is best read as dramatizing two ways of engaging the steamroller as a mode of life. One is to display an even more assertive though quiet power to put all that the steamroller stands for in its place; the other is to embody aspects of being to which the steamroller must be eternally blind. For Moore, the essence of lyric poetry might be to combine this power of argument with how logopoeia stages the forms of deep feeling that follow the ways of the butterfly.

Notice first the way that "To a Steam Roller" manifests features like the syllabic counting in order to establish a contrast between the mode of objectivity that the steamroller wants to achieve and the impersonal qualities of the aesthetic experience that end up supporting the convictions and commitments of the "I" in this poem. The "I" here emerges only by identification with the possibility of identifying with the butterflies, as if this conjunction provided a completely separate sense of personal identity—based not the drive of the ego but on the floating desires of the id. This "I" can judge the modes of action basic to the steamroller's existence. And, finally, the poem insists that this "I" identifying with the butterfly also has another source of strength. This source lies in the capacity to call the steamroller out with a series of contemptuous "you"s that seem both to generate the "I" as a figure of opposition and to display the power that maintains the "I" in its difference. A strong "I" need not base itself on psychological inwardness or intensity of self-consciousness. That, indeed, is the way of the steamroller. The poem finds two other grounds of assertion—the sense that it is capable of defining itself as not "you," and the sense that it can have affinities with the butterfly in this opposition.

The poem's echoing the butterfly's movements is the basic way it can treat resistance to "you" as a means of locating significant capacities for what can be done in writing. Attend to how many lines are enjambed. This makes it seem that each line following the enjambment has to invent a condition of continuity on the spot. Control gets attached to the continuous self-invention of the butterfly's flight. And the enjambment adds this same sense of precarious adventure to the syllabics; each line seems to have to stop for quite practical reasons: the form demands it, and then the writing finds pleasure and purpose in the demand to keep inventing. The last feature of the butterfly's flight is the most enticing and perhaps profound. "If it exists" is a very odd clause. For one thing, the provenance of "it" is difficult to fix. Does the expression refer to "complement" or "congruence" or even possibly "question"? So why end with such indefiniteness? I suggest two reasons. The first is manifestly formal: otherwise the poem would not make the fifteen syllables required if the stanzas are to be equivalent. Assertion does not complete the job, so in effect the spirit of the butterfly must step in to revel in

the hypothetical as well as the ironic. And this invention then proves not only to fulfill the formal requirements but to justify them. The whole poem seems summarized by this so casually invented "if." "If" is the one state most sharply opposed to the steamroller, because the steamroller depends only on the indicative mode, both in its assertions and in its implied self-justifications. The arrival of "if" here demonstrates an always-possible state of "perpendicularity"—reminiscent of Malevich's tilt into inner sensuousness—which another Moore poem, "Egyptian Pulled Glass Bottle," defines as how art can provide stable complements for life.

VII

The work of syllabics to establish the force of "perpendicularity" then has to be my initial topic, in part because syllabics are Moore's way of making formal necessity utterly compatible with invitations to the reader to share the role of butterfly. Consider how the syllabic scheme of 4, 6, 12, 12 units in each of the two stanzas operates in "Egyptian Pulled Glass Bottle":

> Here we have thirst
> and patience from the first,
> and art, as in a wave held up for us to see
> in its essential perpendicularity;
>
> not brittle but
> intense—the spectrum, that
> spectacular and nimble animal the fish,
> whose scales turn aside the sun's sword by their polish. (*PEM* 83)

On the discursive level the poem is quite straightforward, almost too straightforward for those who like the kind of surface drama that sets an image in emotional context. "Here" in viewing this sculpture we do not have any kind of picture. We have only states of "thirst" and "patience" in raw abstract form, proclaimed for their resistance to particular emotional human scenarios. Analogously, Moore's presentation is radically impersonal: the poem is not offered as an event reported on by a speaker, but as direct response to a mode of presence. The poem is simply there in how consciousness defines a "here" that invites being rendered vital by virtue of the resources of language. The experience depends entirely on the maker's intelligence and craft.

"Here" the force of this craft depends on two levels of evocation. One is pictorial and associational: it seems that readers have to link thirst to the bottle and patience to the figure of fish out of its home in the water (and so thirsty in a different way). A second level of evocation depends directly on how the poem elaborates the difference between life and art. In life, the fish might return to water; in art, patience and thirst keep oxymoronic company as life and art long for the completion of each other's condition. The second stanza then asserts the ways the art object produces its own version of life. "Brittle" is a condition of the artifact. "Intense" is a psychological condition, here appropriated for the art object's capacity to come alive as producing a spectrum of colors while evoking the scales by which the sculpted fish resists the sun's violence.

I might be dealing with a puzzle here rather than a poem. Where is the kind of intensity by which the reader might become engaged in the affective situation rather than simply recognize an intelligence capable of intricate subtleties? How do we speak about states like forcefulness and power in such impersonal work? I think our answer must involve how the poem manages to enact what it asserts, and in that process to invite the reader to see how the objective situation can be presented verbally so as to take on considerable resonance. Then resistance to the sun has to take on much more than simple recognition of how polish can preserve states of will.

Perhaps the intensity begins with the intricate folds of reference for the deictic "here." "Here" refers not only to the indicated art object and its audience but to the properties of the poem and to how readers might negotiate those properties. The art object is from the start inseparable from acts of construction on the part of author and readers. That activity of construction, that location of intensity, consists mainly in how the manner of the poem puts the mind in matter and matter in mind—primarily by the work accomplished by three features of material presence—the enjambments, the dynamics of syllabic form, and the sheer exuberance of the verbal range. The play of mind allows the intricate development of what can happen in observing an Egyptian glass bottle.

The enjambments place the readers within the process of moving from line to line, as if they had to search for what might complete the line. Heavy enjambment abstracts language from ordinary utterance and makes it seem that these readers are on a difficult journey. Such pauses tend to make meaning seem more provisional than occurs with other kinds of discourse. So readers become more conscious not just of attending to meaning but in being aspects of its construction. Constant enjambment complements the ambiguity of the deictic and transforms "here" into

a characterization of responsiveness: as Richard Wollheim argued, we have to see into the work rather than just see through it.[18] This same process of addressing the reader's sense of constructing meaningfulness is sharply intensified by having to count syllables as one's means of fleshing out what gives the lines their physicality. Syllabics produce a relational force almost entirely dependent on the mind's agreeing to count elemental particles of meaning, if only in retrospect, almost as a reversal of quantum unpredictability.

Notice the weight syllabics establish for "patience." It is the only multisyllabic word among the first two lines. And that weight does not cancel the force of the rhyme but counters its powers of closure, because there is now a competing system of aural organization. Perhaps this sense of responding to multiple constructed systems is one feature of art's perpendicularity—Moore's version of Malevich's tilt. But that perpendicularity is only fully established by what the mind is asked to do with the pair of closing lines in each stanza. The sharp diversity between line 3, all monosyllabic, and line 4, with one word, "perpendicularity," containing seven syllables, reminds us of just how intelligently poetry can play with its constitutive elements, and, in that process, sharply reinforce its central argument, not as image but as argument with sensuous implications. Then, in the other stanza, the penultimate line brilliantly sets off the monosyllable "fish," by having intensely rhythmic multiple-syllable words as its contextualizing features. There is epiphany, but it is not about the reality of the fish so much as a testimony to how life and art can play with each other. This insistence on artifice does not deny life but alters its status, so that the fish itself has to signify both its figural existence as a physical element and its powers as an art object to have its scales turn back the sun's sword. Then the way is prepared for another basically monosyllabic line, this time asserting an ideal and idea of physicality on every level, just because it has the power to absorb all the mental play in the poem.[19] Even the two two-syllable words in the final line produce an elegant balance for the key operators in the poem—the power of polish to produce a transformation of the sun's sword.

VIII

Having discussed one of the distinctive powers afforded by Moore's early poetry, we probably should go back and try to understand why Moore would take such risks in evading what were the prevailing expectations about poetry, especially about the emergence of imagism on the international scene. How does she see this early work establishing new capacities for the lyric

that require breaking from the emerging popularity of imagist writing? And how does she elaborate fresh models enabling her poetry to call upon aspects of self-consciousness that encourage us to replace a world of objects by attention to actions stressing the qualities of mind made present in careful reading of this work?[20]

We might initially examine Moore's prose in order to see how attuned she is to what Hegel depicts. I was surprised to find many of her most helpful formulations about poetry in her writing concentrated on the prose of figures like Hardy and Bacon. She imagines a prose that resists lyrical effusion, but at the same time has sufficient energy to make the reader's role considerably more than comprehending the level of what the prose describes or summarizes. This kind of prose tilts writing toward emotions connected with judgment rather than sheer expressiveness that indulges imaginary aspects of the ego. For Moore there has to be accurate outer sensuousness before writing can be a matter of the inner life. So she writes to Yvor Winters, an ideal interlocutor on this topic, "For the litterateur, prose is a step beyond poetry I feel, and then there is another poetry beyond that."[21]

Reaching this other poetry requires using a prose perspective so that one can resist the temptation to treat the world as mirror for the expressive self. Far better to cultivate a depressive "honesty" like Eliot's, which at least makes him "a faithful friend of the objects he portrays; altogether unlike the sentimentalist, who stabs them in the back while pretending affection."[22] And H. D.'s poems rely on "an unequivocal faithfulness to fact" that frees the mind to develop a "reserve" that is "a concomitant of intense feeling, not the cause of it" (*MSP* 80). Feeling sponsors an active imagination making present through foregrounded technique "a fastidious prodigality—an apparent starkness which is opulence . . . for the balanced speech of poetry" (*MSP* 113).

A sensibility founded on prose matters because it depends on accurate rendering of the world's details and tends to reduce temptations to indulge in effusive ontology. More important, prose also matters because it prepares the way for that other poetry beyond the world of fact. That poetry approaches inner sensuousness because it is based not on observing details but on feeling relational structures within situations, for which imagination proposes its own mode of reality. There is a special kind of imagination, found in Bacon and in W. C. Williams, able "to see resemblances in things which are dissimilar" (*MSP* 56). For such writers, nature seems to invite a free play that extends its parameters without losing a sense of groundedness. To Moore, this involves the possibility of developing imaginative sites capable of presenting what she refers to as the actual within the real. Hence her eloquent responsiveness to the sculptor Alfeo Faggi:

> The preoccupation today is with the actual. The work therefore of Alfeo Faggi . . . is especially for the thinker, presenting as it does solidly and in a variety a complete contrast to the fifty-fathom deep materialism of the hour. Spiritual imagination . . . [seems] to derive feeling from the subject rather than having to bring feeling to it as in the theme which is palpable and easily comprehensible. (*MSP* 73)

"Such distilled impersonal spiritual force" affords "a reverence for mystery" which "is not a vague, invertebrate thing." This force produces the "only realm in which experience is able to corroborate the fact that the real can also be actual" (*MSP* 74).

Moore seems to think that this distinction between "real" and "actual" provides an alternative to the empirical order. For her, if a work of art is to "acknowledge the spiritual forces which have made it" (*PEM* 48), that acknowledgment must take place in a mode of sheer activity that situates the processes it exhibits and celebrates. Here, activity takes the form of manifestly controlling and deepening the emotional field that orients self-reference. H. D.'s "Sitalkas," for example, offers a sense of the mind as concomitant of intense feeling rather than its cause, and so provides one prime instance of this distinctive site. We find that same sense of cultivating the forces active in the space of writing and reading in Moore's letter praising Joyce's *Dubliners* for being "pretty nearly a manual . . . of the fundamentals of composition," in part because "the closing sentences of every one of the stories . . . haunts you and makes you investigate the mechanism of the writing."[23] (Realism's epiphanies dissolve for Moore into how techne in writing exemplifies modes of self-consciousness.)

All these examples of alternative modes of sensual life based in the activity of writing stem ultimately from Moore's distrust of traditional lyricism. She wants to evoke feelings that are not embedded in scenes that readers interpret and flesh out but rather stem from the poetry beyond prose based on the reader's identifying with the writing that places imagination at the core of how worlds emerge. Producing the feelings attuned to such activity is for her a matter of bringing poetry as close to discursive prose as possible so that her constructions directly offer themselves as affective qualities stemming from the life of mind rather than as efforts to produce dramatic stagings of represented feelings. She does not put images to work so much as solicit modes of response to particular contexts built on readers' attentions to the frames by which writing develops. She wants the kinds of significance that typically lead to spiritualist rhetorics of transcendence, but in her earlier work, at least, she seeks to account for those states by what she can make concretely evident about the powers of mind involved in the making. And because the stress is on the powers rather than any speaker who might display

unique powers, she shows how impersonality links to the transpersonally objective states. Manifestly dismantling our desires for dramatically rendered images calls attention to how the poet can stress a quite different desire satisfied only by self-consciousness about what construction can involve.

IX

Now it is time to elaborate the other two distinctive features of inner sensuousness in Moore's *Observations*—the importance of identifying with the powers of syntax to stage how negation might work, and the modes by which she implicates a social background for her apparently idiosyncratic imaginings. I think there is a somewhat remote but perhaps compelling link between how Moore uses syntax to insist on the labors of self-reflection, and how Picasso makes his use of the building blocks of painting to be his access to an objectivity that is made rather than discovered. So I want the strongest example I can find from Moore of sinuous syntax calling attention to the thinking involved in how aspects of the world take on significance. That poem virtually has to be "A Grave" because of how it moves syntactic forms around to emphasize various effects of negation and what can be gathered and intensified by means of these negations. Some negation is governed simply by disappointed desire. But here the range and amount of negation suggests something else. The negations seem direct activities of mind's dialogue with itself as it feels its way into the recalcitrant materiality of this version of the sea.[24] We are asked to reflect on our ways of attributing predicates to the sea:

> Man looking into the sea,
> taking the view from those who have as much right to it as
> you have to it yourself,
> it is human nature to stand in the middle of a thing,
> but you cannot stand in the middle of this;
> the sea has nothing to give but a well excavated grave.
> The firs stand in a procession, each with an emerald turkey-
> foot at the top,
> reserved as their contours, saying nothing;
> repression, however, is not the most obvious characteristic of
> the sea;
> the sea is a collector, quick to return a rapacious look.

There are others beside you who have worn that look—
whose expression is no longer a protest; the fish no longer
investigate them
for their bones have not lasted:
men lower nets, unconscious of the fact that they are
desecrating a grave,
and row quickly away—the blades of the oars
moving together like the feet of water-spiders as if there were
no such thing as death.
The wrinkles progress among themselves in a phalanx—
beautiful under networks of foam,
and fade breathlessly while the sea rustles in and out of the
seaweed;
the birds swim through the air at top speed, emitting cat-calls
as heretofore—
the tortoise-shell scourges about the feet of the cliffs, in motion
beneath them;
and the ocean, under the pulsations of lighthouses and the noise of
bell-buoys,
advances as usual, looking as if it were not that ocean in which
dropped things are bound to sink—
in which if they turn and twist, it is neither with volition nor
consciousness. (*PEM* 49–50)

There are many features that I do not understand in this poem, although even my lack of understanding contributes to my fascination with it. Primary among these features is the form, especially the repeated semicolons, and the imagined setting. Why are syllabic counts continually being altered, and why are the lines in the last third of the poem all so expansive that they overrun the margin? Perhaps the lineation plays on the mind's needs here to find at least some awkward order for its tendencies to run over any boundaries that nature might set for it. And how does one understand the context for the first sentence? What is the relation between the first two general clauses and the use of the second person? Who speaks and to whom?

What comprehension I can muster depends on treating the poem's four sentences as the units providing structure for this overheated confrontation between the persons who look on the sea and the sea's refusal to give anything to that

glance except a well-excavated grave. I take the first sentence as sheer summary statement of the players—man, the desire to get to a lyric "you" as addressee, and the overall resistance of the sea to any of the distinctions about persons the poem seems eager to make. We may not know the dramatic situation from this sentence, but we do have a pretty good idea of the dilemma "man" faces. And we realize that the negations in each of its two final lines will be an important feature of the confrontation with this sea-grave. (Perhaps only the power to wield these negatives can give consciousness any place at all in this bleak situation.)

It should come as no surprise that the second sentence tries to change the focus from the sea as grave to the firs that line the shore. This speaking wants a lyric encounter and not this confrontation with the sea as grave. But the recalcitrance of the sea continues to fascinate, forcing a series of analogies that move from the trees saying nothing, to treating that saying nothing as a sign of repression, to the sea's refusal of any psychologizing attributed to its function as a collector, "quick to return a rapacious look." That last line of the sentence returns to the fiercely impersonal indicative of the first sentence. So again the third sentence begins by looking away, now in time rather than in space, now dominated by odd negative versions of the imperfect tense. And again the sentence seems violently to yoke two separate domains—one concerned with others beside "you" and the other focusing on how the activity of the rowers reveals an unconsciousness that allows them to become utterly absorbed in the oars moving in the water, as if they could imagine that "there were no such thing as death." Here the negative is associated with the decision to pursue appearances rather than confront the reality of death.

It seems at first that the final sentence begins to revel in this unconsciousness by proposing all run-on expansive lines that treat the appearances of the surface as moments for imaginative reveling in the water and the versions of life that it sustains. But this mode of reveling depends on treating the scene simply as conjoined appearances. Here there seem no negatives, only quite general assertions that reveal how desperate consciousness is to identify with what makes it comfortable rather than with searching for underlying forces. Then the first negative simply sets facts against appearances. This allows the reality of the ocean's utter indifference to human concerns to dominate the scene. Now another kind of negation is called for—one that emphatically sets the work of self-consciousness against the comforts of being unconscious. It is time finally to be explicit about contrasts between the ocean that the speaking enjoys seeing and the ocean that it knows can only be thought in negative terms because of its refusals to heed any lyrical demands, however long the lines become:

And the ocean . . .
advances as usual, looking as if it were not that ocean in which
dropped things are bound to sink—
in which if they turn and twist, it is neither with volition nor
consciousness.

Notice how the negations do quite different kinds of work here. The first negation seems to sustain appearance by denying the truth of the nature of dropped things. Yet this negation cannot long support the illusion, because it yields to the quest of mind all along to recognize what it also fears to see in the ocean's look. So the first negation generates the much more terrifying negations in the last line, as the poem seems obligated to state what it has been resisting all along: the grave is absolute and mocks every hint that the sea can be a means of escaping one's sense of mortality. The final negatives then seem the other side of a consciousness that cannot be content with appearances, even if it then has to confront its distance from the reality of death. There are simply no human predicates that we can apply in order to interpret this turning and this twisting. The only thing the sea offers is a sheer physical presence that makes one doubt that any full present tense can sustain what human beings need as sources of connection. An alien materialism seems to toy with the mind's quest for significance.

Yet "A Grave" may not want to have sheer bleakness dominate at the end. Those final negations also suggest that consciousness and even volition still have a place because they force a gulf between what has to be observed and the qualities of the observing mind, whose turns and twists bring something to the situation different from their material counterparts. Isolating the lack of volition and consciousness (with "consciousness" last) seems also to recognize their presence as forces that challenge all that a pure naturalism has to demand. There can be no doubt that matter wins. But matter does not explain the process of the poem, and hence the organization of inner sensuousness, especially the way consciousness struggles with the negatives that it also makes possible. So I think this utter emptying of any claim to escape death oddly confirms the significance of the passions that negation organizes as the emotional center of the poem. The result is a masterful celebration of how the mind can stress its own substance despite its lack of congruence with sheer matter, largely by insisting that matter itself depends on some mental picture to have any impact on observers. And because Moore provides an impersonal rendering of this emptying of any mode of pleasure in the sea surface, the poem seems to deny that the anxieties negotiated here are unique to any

personal situation. Unlike Arnold's "Dover Beach," the poetry here is not in the sentiments of the observer but in the syntax that objectifies possible powers of interpreting the painful situation, for all who deploy those syntactic intricacies. It takes the fullness of mental powers to grasp, and to acknowledge grasping, the horrors of nature's indifference to human mortality. The long lines at the close of the poem seem an effort to provide for consciousness an expansiveness that can rival the sea's control of time and of space.

X

"An Octopus" takes us on a completely different mental journey from "A Grave"—to a model of plenitude based on identification rather than contrast. Here the mind's dynamics are most visible in its constant inventive elaboration of a space of resemblance linking quite disparate features of the scene, apparently by chance. (Here the best painterly analogue might be Picasso's *The Architect's Table*.) These lines characterizing Mount Rainier celebrate the power to construct resemblances among sensations that it is difficult to see as given in the mode of sensation. Instead, the play among resemblances allows the mind awareness of the feelings involved in being able to draw its own unique satisfactions from its capacities for synthesis. The mountain becomes less an object for the senses than a collocation of various perspectives exploring the consequences of the kinds of attention they make possible. And that play among perspectives ultimately gets extended into quoting earlier commentators on the mountain, as if the relational mind could find ways to foster real social connections as well as imagined hypothetical connections. Where Eliot's quotations in *The Waste Land* seem to view the present in terms of what could be imagined in the past, Moore sees quotation as developing multiple possibilities for valuing features of the present afforded by the mountain.

I have space here only to cite the closing passage, where the poem tries to test its own resources for articulating the multiplicity of effects and modes of spatial relations that establish the mountain's uniqueness:

> Relentless accuracy is the nature of this octopus
> with its capacity for fact.
> "Creeping slowly as with meditated stealth,
> its arms seeming to approach from all directions,"
> it receives one under winds that "tear the snow to bits

and hurl it like a sandblast
shearing off twigs and loose bark from the trees."
Is "tree" the word for these things
"flat on the ground like vines"?
some "bent in a half-circle with branches on one side
suggesting dust-brushes, not trees;
some finding strength in union, forming little stunted groves
their flattened mats of branches shrunk in trying to escape"
from the hard mountain "planed by ice and polished by the
wind"—
the white volcano with no weather side;
the lightning flashing at its base,
rain falling in the valleys, and snow falling on the peak—
the glassy octopus symmetrically pointed,
its claw cut by the avalanche
"with a sound like the crack of a rifle,
In a curtain of powdered snow launched like a waterfall." (*PEM* 6)

Let me try to summarize the relational features that this passage draws together. First, there is the intensifying of quotations that have been spread throughout the poem. Their role, contra Eliot, seems to be the incorporating of statements by others so that they function primarily to bring the mountain into the space of discourse. There is no call to provide contexts evoked by the original statements in order to enrich the experience of the poem. What does enrich the poem considerably is the sense that what has been said becomes a part of the mountain: its physical force is as real in cultural space as it is in the observing. For the object as object can be modified by the thoughts and emotions that become a part of the record of its impact on the observers. The emotion becomes something that a collective body has fully experienced, so that it becomes a demand on the poet to make visible not only the mass of rock and ice but also its power to move others to produce verbal correlates to what they see and think.

Taking up this challenge to render the experience of the mountain as cultural object requires not only description but an effort to capture possible rhythms and orientations of focus that make this experience something that regularly moves other people. The reality of this mountain demands cubist-like strategies that gather what it offers to various perspectives. Quotations afford some of these perspectives. But we cannot stop with the words of others. We have to see what

they are seeing under an authority that helps us feel what generates the quotations in the first place. So Moore weaves into the quotations a dialogue between how the mountain constitutes a magisterial space and how that space channels senses of temporal endurance. These quotations contrast intensely realized particulars, like the trees, with how these particulars are contained within the sense of the mountain as a whole "planed by ice and polished by the wind." Then this final passage has the language of the poet take over by testing what it can add to those quotations, before the scene is once again subsumed in quotation. The movement here calls on resources that derive from dramatizing changes in perspective, from rendering the comprehensiveness of the experience as a whole because it solicits an intricate series of rhythmic devices, and from moving out beyond the space of perception to a self-conscious freedom of simile that may afford the ultimate value of paying close attention.

Think of the point of view in these last seven lines after the quotations as itself a mobile locus for intense self-reflexive feeling. First the rendered point of view takes in the mountain completely as volcano; then it moves from base to valleys to peaks, only to return to the whole in the form of a sharply rendered and impressively accurate visual metaphor, the glassy octopus. We also have to recognize how the poem celebrates through rhythmic intensity the syntactic balance as it stresses its own capacities to honor how the details come together. There are few better integrated and balanced expressions of scope than "rain falling in the valleys and snow falling on the peak," the only line in the sequence that deploys a pronounced caesura. Here the rhythm brings the body to the mind's capacious grasp, while inducing the sense that the wording of the mountain renders the dynamic qualities of how it emerges into culture.

After this, Moore can prepare the stage for another kind of quotation. The poet's words culminate in the contrast between the vision of the whole as "glassy octopus" and a fascination with the metaphoric detail of the claw cut by the avalanche. Then the poet's words create almost a protective dome within which the quoted voice can exercise its pleasure in transposing quite particular impressions of the physical event of the avalanche:

> its claw cut by the avalanche
> "with a sound like the crack of a rifle,
> In a curtain of powdered snow launched like a waterfall."

Most of the quotations have taken up impressive general features of the experience the mountain affords. But this final quotation seems to do the poet's job better

than the poet can in registering the impact of striking moments of attention.

Here we have sensations of sound blending into a visual metaphor that in turn produces a dramatic simile. This poem's meditation on capacious space permits also celebrating unique moments in time by which the mountain calls out to be appreciated. One hears the avalanche, or the condition of avalanche over time, before the mind develops metaphors for the sight, and for generating similes that give the feel for what this sight involves. Here the physical and hypothetical share the same kind of union as the quoted and the seen, because the poem produces an affective field stressing the relationship between the facticity of the mountain and the imaginings that are fundamental to our sense of its value.

Yet even this mode of satisfaction does not suffice. Moore seems to have thought that perhaps she had bound consciousness too closely to what was there to see. So she changes the situation with one brilliant closing alliterative simile. The simile fits the scene and gives a momentary immediacy to an enduring condition. Yet it also accomplishes the more important task of celebrating at the end how the labor of accurate rendering earns, and has always earned, the freedom to produce figurative speech that transforms the nature of description by bringing the full resources of imaginative language to bear as having been latent in this celebration from the start. Moore realizes modes of making that bring to bear the most visible, public, and concrete features of how activities generated by the making can complement the world of fact.

Perhaps what impressionism needed all along was this openness to quotation to accompany its fascination with active seeing. Such reminders of the inner sensuousness involved in such seeing shift the focus from the retinal to the social. And in so doing they remind readers of what is involved in fully satisfying the energies of a consciousness capable of elaborating the significance of what is before it in ways that maintain a lively interchange between what construction allows the object and what the object invites as construction. And quotation, or the spirit of construction underlying quotation, allows a constant reminder that perpendicularity affords its own conditions of dialogue and participation.

XI

I have kept Pound and Moore pretty much independent of each other because I want to emphasize the range of different states that come under the umbrella of "inner sensuousness." But I want to close this chapter on a somewhat different note. The poets interacted in 1918 when someone showed Pound "The Grave" and he wrote Moore suggesting that she switch the last line

so that the poem would end with the word "volition," since, as he put it, volition is "the last thing to go and the most dramatic thing to lose." But Moore refused, insisting that "'Consciousness' is more important than 'volition.' In fact, that's really what this whole poem is about, you could say."[25] I take Moore's response as at least indirectly supporting my argument that the rendering of consciousness in the poem pushes against the manifest negations establishing these final words. But it is far more important to recognize how Pound and Moore both make visible in this exchange what matters most for their poetry. Pound is the great modern American poet of will, since even truth gets subsumed into the idealization of the possibility of certitude that allows persons to stand by their words as perhaps the noblest version of inner sensuousness. For Moore, such idealizations of will align with the masculinity of the steamroller that can be resisted only by the intricacies of a self-consciousness insistent on the flexibility of the butterfly. Her example forces me to think that perhaps the only mode of inner sensuousness capable of competing with will is the infinite mobility of consciousness reveling in its own powers.

CHAPTER FOUR

T. S. Eliot's Christian Poetics and Hegel's Ideal of Inner Sensuousness

What is wanted
Again for the first time is a pronoun
For the we things don't run . . .
—*Geoffrey O'Brien, "Sonnets So Far"*

God asks not only for acute, but also, and chiefly,
for consecrated thinking.
—*F. P. Harton,* The Elements of the Spiritual Life[1]

I used to enjoy my own glibness in saying that one important goal of Eliot's *Four Quartets* was the demonstration that one could speak Christian sentences worthy of attention in an utterly secularized world. Now I see that there was considerable point to my observation. In the context of this book, Eliot's efforts to defend how Christianity poses a contrast to the natural order take on substantially more power because we can see how much his concern for his medium shares with a Modernist Constructivist aesthetics sharply opposed to the idealized immediacy that impressionism shared with imagism. Therefore I want to read some of the major texts of Eliot's Christian work in a somewhat new context, which I think can more fully attune us in the secular world to the intelligence and skill that pervades Eliot's later imaginative activity.[2]

I will show how his version of Christian faith develops significant parallels between constructivism's emphasis on addressing "inner sensuousness" and the invocation of Christ's redemptive power in order to provide new grounds for practical life. While constructivism tends to be either secular or radically mystical,

Eliot shares two crucial concepts and practices with constructivists like Malevich, Mondrian, and Brancusi, as well as with Picasso, Pound, and Moore. First, Eliot too has his poetry challenge the authority of scientific understanding, because the explanatory powers often justly claimed by science reduce subjectivity to something close to curatorial activities in the service of securing epistemic stability. When art accepts such authority, it seems to ignore or to reject the phenomenological roles self-consciousness can play in our recognition of what we are capable of experiencing.

Second, both constructivism and Eliot's Christianity stress qualities and conditions of subjectivity in which we become conscious of powers of agency that are not called upon in the kinds of epistemic practices basic to any kind of empiricist inquiry. For Eliot, art has to distinguish between the sensuous order perception gives and the inner sensuousness that arises from reflection on how ordering of the concrete world takes place.

Eliot's Christianity generates a poetry where the self learns its possible identities from the powers that self-consciousness takes on as it comes to realize what is involved in the kinds of experience that might transform its expectations for encountering the world. In effect, the activities of the maker align themselves with what the artists imagine are the most concrete and deepest principles of order capable of aligning mind and world in figures establishing processes of continual interaction. For an elemental example, think of how Brancusi's birds in flight do not refer to birds explicitly but instead compose what flight feels like in the sensuous imagination. Here the art is impersonal because the experience seems fundamentally the same for all those viewing it: to seek a perspective is to miss the elemental nature of the claim made by the art.

In Eliot's later work these systems addressed to self-consciousness depend on the belief that Christ's death and resurrection make manifest his power to impose on experience a structural logic that resists the primacy of natural law. Christ died in order to show respect to the primary human condition of having to face mortality. But then he was reborn in order to provide alternatives to the world of nature: the objects bread and wine could become consecrated in order to take the form of his body and blood; ideals of selfless martyrdom could replace the primacy of individual will for which life is the fundamental value; and the example of love could outline paths for behavior that enable denying the willful ego so that agents could commit to communal values. A new art had to make these Christian principles visible as concrete states of self-consciousness, despite the domination of secular attitudes toward what constitutes experience. One might even say that Eliot's new

art aspired to the full relation Hegel saw between individual consciousness and an Absolute order informing our possibilities for experience.

Eliot's basic task in his post conversion poetry and plays becomes the need to provide compelling examples of how faith makes possible conditions of experience in which believers can adapt to what a consecrated nature can afford. This imaginative work insists on elaborating its differences from any secular commitments, even those that share an emphasis on exploring states of mind not bound by the laws objects make manifest. Eliot aligns his faith with Constructivist Modernism's efforts to defeat the various versions of perspectivism that were basic to what realism had become late in the nineteenth century, especially in impressionist art. In retrospect, many artists and writers could see that perspectivism offered a terribly reductive account of the real by equating what might have authority in our schemes of knowledge to what could be proven on the pulses of the individual ego. Constructivism, in contrast, could be enlisted to flesh out the existential permissions we can develop out of the relation between impersonality in art and submission to the alternative modes of ordering experience made present by Christ's exemplifying what love might entail. And, more important, constructivism replaced an emphasis on material relations created by light and color. It foregrounded instead the capacities of self-consciousness to establish relational fields responsive to something other than any natural order shaping the contours of experience. Hence the crucial role grammar plays in Eliot's later work.

Ultimately, living in Christian faith can seem very close to participating in how constructivists like Malevich and Mondrian replace objects intelligible in natural contexts by having all of the material details transformed by our awareness of the relational structures holding them together. But there is also a huge difference that Eliot develops. For Christianity both resists the world of the senses and returns us to that exact world transformed by faith. So Eliot has to develop devices intended to foreground inner sensuousness, where, for him, self-consciousness adapts to what faith makes possible. This orientation provides ways of speaking that allow us to inhabit the actual world with full appreciation of what its making affords as transformative possibilities. Human making becomes the realization of the implications of what redemption allows. And modernist principles of rebellion against social orthodoxy generate for Eliot frighteningly strong versions of communal bonds.

My project then is to elaborate constructivist analogues with Eliot's later poetry in order to flesh out what Eliot imagined he could accomplish by devoting himself to making Christian sentences also plausible for non-Christian audiences. Then

these sentences might make it possible not just to accept faith but to celebrate what can be involved in responding to a world consecrated by the powers that compose for every step a potential arrival in a new theater of relationships.

In order to make this positive case, I will briefly look first at how Eliot felt that secular modernism doomed him to an inevitable sundering of subject from object, which alienated inner life from anything that might afford objectivity in the secular world. Then I can turn to "Ash-Wednesday" for Eliot's basic model for linking constructivist and Christian modes of self-consciousness. That poem seeks comfort in the natural world only by first going through a range of self-reflexive doublings that involve having to "strive to strive" and "rejoice having to construct something / Upon which to rejoice" (*PE* 85). Self-consciousness becomes the only way to establish values one can live by in a world itself made double by its responsiveness to the logic of Incarnation. *Murder in the Cathedral*, my next topic, adds to this ontology a social vision that emphasized the capacity of martyrdom to provide a moral illustration of the logic of love and sacrifice also embedded in Christ's exemplary self-martyrdom. Here we find powerful figures for the capacity of faith to challenge the primacy of the ego so that one can choose living in accord with the ideals of a specific community resistant to secular values. Finally, I elaborate Eliot's ambition in his *Four Quartets* to correlate these two basic motifs by showing how self-consciousness aligned with Christ manages not only to resist the demands of the ego but to make of that resistance access to forms of daily life attuned completely to the satisfactions of consecrated order. *Four Quartets* is ultimately Eliot's version of Kierkegaard's case for how the person of faith can live entirely immersed in ordinary secular worlds, but in accord with a totally transformed evaluation of what is involved in accepting ordinariness.[3]

Eliot could link Christianity to a modern poetics because Christianity too demanded the primacy of a radical concreteness based on something other than the logic by which we fix empirical relations among objects: faith in Incarnation is less a theological idea to be debated than an existential invitation to try living self-consciously within the sense of an order to nature that can appeal to the needs of each person for a peace beyond understanding. Inner sensuousness informed by faith could provide the path back to a reinvigorated sense of what concrete objects might afford when stripped of the comforts established by our secular explanatory categories and rationales.[4]

I

First I want to make the case that the synthesis of constructivism and Christianity was probably the only way Eliot could eventually have found psychological peace—so deep was his lifelong resistance to empiricist models of truth and happiness. In Eliot's earlier dramatic poetry, intense experience did not evoke a shareable state of consciousness feeling its continuity with the senses. Rather, it produced an excess of self-awareness that seemed to have no objective correlative within the practical world. The sensuous image provoked endless confusion and suffering by making visible how divorced nature and public opinion were from the most intense of human needs. So this poetry dramatizes acute conflict between alienation produced by outer sensuousness and the desperate desire to find in self-conscious inner sensuousness some satisfying source of order and of value. His articulating crucial aspects of that conflict is, no doubt, a major reason why Eliot's poetry still moves many contemporary readers.

Let us begin our story with how early Eliot seemed unwilling or unable to be satisfied with images based on objective features fundamental to perceptual experience. Eliot did share with Pound the idea that "the 'presentation' of an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time" gives "that sense of sudden liberation . . . which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art."[5] It mattered to him that the new poetry, like the new painting, could oppose "presentation" to "representation" and thus project a writing that did not labor to picture the real but rather to enact it in the process of laboring to restore a sense of value to immediate experience—an immense achievement in a society haunted by gaps between what could count as fact and what mattered for individual sensibilities. But Eliot's obsessive self-consciousness could never be satisfied by these ideals. In his view, imagist poetics did not fully realize the possibilities latent in its presentational aesthetic, because while it satisfied a concern for active perception, it seemed incapable of dramatizing what became present in the process of the work's ways of engaging the senses. No mode of relating to objects in the world could satisfy the intricate ways self-consciousness both overdetermined the world by projecting imaginary demands and found the world a continual source of lack in relation to those demands.

Eventually Eliot would require what Stevens in "The Rock" called "a cure of the ground," capable of transforming our sense of how objectivity might sustain the needs basic to how subjectivity is constituted. But we best appreciate this search for transformation by being as specific as we can about the conditions with which

Eliot struggled. I will provide two examples of how Eliot's early poetry staged the pains involved in seeking any kind of satisfaction in what is given to the senses, and hence had to reject imagist efforts to represent new values based on echoes of Greek paganism. Consider "Opera," written in 1909, when he was a graduate student at Harvard. The first stanza offers theatrics that remain painfully remote from the speaker's needs, so that eventually the poem is forced from the dramatic presence of "we" before an objective scene into the recesses of the first person. In fact, this stanza could offer a parody of Eliot's later commitments to impersonality because of the gulf between the performers' efforts to induce passion and the observer's insistence on treating the performance as sheer description, with only a bemused distance from any possibility of sensuous participation in what he observes. The speaker does not even offer a main verb to hold the details together:

> Tristan and Isolde
> And the fatalistic horns
> The passionate violins
> And ominous clarinet;
> And love torturing itself
> To emotion for all there is in it,
> Writhing in and out
> Contorted in paroxysms,
> Flinging itself at the last
> Limits of self-expression. (*PE* 236)

So the second and final stanza is forced to have the speaker turn from the scene without to the scene within, perhaps the first instance of what becomes a common feature in Eliot's ways of engaging sensuous detail:

> We have the tragic? oh no!
> Life departs with a feeble smile
> Into the indifferent.
> These emotional experiences
> Do not hold good at all,
> And I feel like the ghost of youth
> At the undertaker's ball. (*PE* 236)

This stanza manifestly negates both the trappings of tragedy and the "we" that might be produced if he could share in the force of the actors' efforts at self-expression. But there is no dialectic. There is only a different kind of response to

the presentation of emotions—not for what they affirm but for what can only be expressed in metaphors of absence. Here the rejection of public space and classical forms of expressive intensity leave the emerging "I" identifying only with a second negative separating himself entirely from any kind of vigorous emotion. Yet the psyche perhaps cannot live in sheer negation. The saddest feature of the poem is the speaker's need to generate his own theater of the minimal by staging a mode of ironic self-consciousness that cannot be described or expressed except by embodying it metaphorically. Poetry becomes the sad reminder of the insuperable gulf between imagination and objectivity.

Three years later, in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," these private theatrics take on considerably more depth because they clearly manifest two problems at the core of modern social life—a sense of bodily experience as at odds with what self-reflection can affirm, and a difficulty correlating one's feelings of individuality with all that one learns is dictated by impersonal social processes. One sequence in this well-known poem should suffice to illustrate the painful aspects of these two problems:

> And indeed there will be time
> To wonder, 'Do I dare?' and, 'Do I dare?'
> Time to turn back and descend the stair,
> With a bald spot in the middle of my hair—
> (They will say: 'How his hair is growing thin!')
> My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
> My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin—
> (They will say: 'But how his arms and legs are thin!')
> Do I dare
> Disturb the universe?
> In a minute there is time
> For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse. (*PE* 6)

The opening of the passage offers a strange blend of personal insecurity and a defensive generalized reflection on time, as if the personal and the general continually had to compensate for each other's inadequacies. The effort to define self-consciousness also has to handle thoughts of the concrete presence of other people—thoughts that readily produce a chain of anticipated aggression and responding defensiveness that only opens the person to further aggression. These states are as intensely present as they are incapable of providing any sense of stable meaning. Perhaps subliminally aware of this hopeless condition, the speaker tries to

identify certain body parts, as if he could give them imaginatively satisfying meanings capable of warding off the threats he assumes other people pose. However, it is no accident that "they" get the last word in this exchange, since the speaker realizes that any effort at self-protection and self-assertion can be countered by their focusing on other details about the image he presents. Immanence cannot stand up to the presence of the other. And self-consciousness trying to anchor itself in a projected image of self will always be poisoned by the fact that the self must appear to others in ways that it cannot control. So the only apparent adequate defense is to turn entirely from the concrete social world to abstractions about the universe and possible decisions that offer a better protected site, if also an even more ineffective one, in which the imagination can dwell in eternal indecision.

II

Eliot's theorizing about impersonality offers a concrete imperative for the ways that expressive activity takes place in the construction of the work of art as an object. In fact, this is where he begins to turn to the kinds of powers modernist values allow him to cultivate. We are asked to see personal activity impersonally—as evidence of labor rather than as the seduction of individual charm: "the poet has, not a personality to express, but a particular medium . . . , in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways."[6] But I am more interested here in how that doctrine does and does not address the psychological problems involved in the infinite reflexivity of individual self-consciousness, unable to escape either the gap between consciousness and object or the gap between agents and audiences. By stressing the relations internal to the work, the artist amalgamates thought and feeling in such a way as to give a second-order texture to the work. This texture involves qualities of voicing that establish a feeling for the mind's powers to impose orders reflecting its own deepest needs. So art's distinctive involvement in the senses had to be intimately connected to its aesthetic complexity. This complexity in turn affords a worldliness that can be considered available to all readers because its dimensions are properties of the object and not fantasies of the subject. More important, impersonality promises to give poetry the possibility of including history because the object is likely to consist of voices that persist over time rather than of personalities trapped in self-protective fantasies. The poet is not bound to any one perspective, even the perspective of contemporaneity. Historical forces can circulate in the same way

that romantic poetry lets psychological states resonate against one another. In *The Waste Land*, allusions and scenarios bring the past into the present, in a site where invoked worlds measure each other, and where self-consciousness has the chance to objectify and take responsibility for its dilemmas.

But even then, even with a full picture of how the mind can be expressed in terms of its reflections on its own constructive activity, Eliot could not be satisfied. Impersonality opens the mind to history and allows it complex ranges of emotion, but nothing about the impersonal frees the mind from its prison. Poetry can offer an intricate play of voices, but it cannot produce any plausible hierarchy among them. And impersonality seems to distance the maker further from anything approaching guidance for a meaningful sense of direction for one's life. Sheer constructivism in art was like a shadow game, with the mind seeking satisfactions that in fact only alienated it further from anything that might connect with the actual world and the lives of other people.

Consider Eliot's *The Waste Land*.[7] The poem offers a brilliant solution to the culture's widespread reliance on perspectivist ideals that doom it to subjective substitutes for objective reality.[8] The poem certainly acknowledges how people see and think differently. But it does not stop there. The constructive activity here raises the possibility that by juxtaposing perspectives, poetry might engage more fundamental sources of suffering, and so also be able to stage what it might take to find means of collectively finding relief from that suffering. But learning to share that suffering is woefully different from finding any significant relief or direction for one's own life. Within this critical orientation the climactic moment in the poem becomes the section opening "What the Thunder Said" and building to the echo of Christ at Emmaus, where sympathy with all the voices produces a shadowy present of a third who cannot be realized. Subsequent sections of this closing movement then play out the consequences of what is involved in this awareness of the gulf between figures of knowing and demands on the psyche to find paths toward satisfying action.

There are two basic forces in this opening to the poem's final section that prepare us for the "third who walks always beside you." The first is the role of the indexical "here" in establishing the roles of the pronouns "He" and "We":

> He who was living is now dead
> We who were living are now dying
> With a little patience

Here is no water but only rock
Rock and no water and the sandy road . . .
If there were water we should stop and drink
Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think . . . (*PE* 68)

We have to ask to whom this "We" refers. What kind of substance or social reality can we attribute to it? I suspect that the only plausible answer is that both "He" and "We" have to be defined by the range of possible references that provide roles for the indexical "Here." The major reference I think is the capacity of "here" to invoke a sadly impoverished imagination of materiality that is alienated from any sense of empowered self-consciousness. There are at best only traces of what might produce meaning and value for the present. Inner life here becomes pathetically transparent in its desperate tension with its environment.

Then there is a second, more dynamic feature of the poem's activity that offers another dimension to the deictic. I refer to an extraordinarily intense profusion of repeated propositional qualification in the previous stanza introducing "What the Thunder Said." For syntax here pulls against any binding to a given place, even to this desolate confrontation with all rock and no water. Repetitions of an "After" that intensifies the bare present are followed by a series of carefully placed conditionals that become the only possible site for a resisting mind, trapped by an increasingly desperate realization that conditional clauses will not suffice for the needs the poem makes present.

It seems that now the best alternative this disposition of energies can explore is simply to address the sense of lack that haunts the entire poem. Echoes of Christ at Emmaus and of Shackleton's journey to the Antarctic give the possibility that the shadows of "Opera" might persist and provide an alternative to any quest for an underlying reality. The only hope for possessing what can be real seems to inhere in the unreal:

Who is the third who walks always beside you?
When I count, there are only you and I together
But when I look ahead up the white road
There is always another one walking beside you . . . (*PE* 69)

Eliot manages in this passage to cast the other "one walking beside you" as capable of evoking or exemplifying all the common suffering that the poem has made present. Yet no array of religious sources can bring redemption to this society, because its denizens are simply unwilling to honor any demands that might induce change

with regard to the people's destructive but trusted forms of habitual behavior. There is a mind here taking form that feels it has to bear some kind of relation to and responsibility for this cultural situation, in part by developing dense internal relationships capable at every instant of having a metaphoric register hover within what the voices express. But glimpses of a real provided by that hovering are all that the secular world offers: it takes powerful art to make us fear that we have no hopes of full spiritual life in a totally secularized world.

III

The Waste Land offered a withering account of the limitations of self-consciousness as any kind of useful power in the secular world. But in so doing, Eliot cleared the way for how faith might address those limitations. He could specify how the feel of thinking and of making could invoke a version of Hegel's inner sensuousness whose needs and potential led beyond the powers of the individual mind. Rejoicing in "having to construct something / Upon which to rejoice" (*PE* 87), might locate a principle within self-consciousness that afforded access to at least a glimpse of the full powers of what the Word might confer within experience. Self-consciousness can become a mode of participating in something greater than the self.

For Eliot, these possibilities involved recognizing the immense impact on poetry of Dante's capacity to make every word functional in its exhibiting the capacity for concreteness to transcend itself. As Eliot was to put it in "Little Gidding":

> What we call the beginning is often the end
> And to make an end is to make a beginning.
> The end is where we start from. And every phrase
> And sentence that is right (where every word is at home, . . .
> The common word exact without vulgarity,
> The formal word precise but not pedantic,
> The complete consort dancing together)[9]
> Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning
> Every poem an epitaph. (*PE* 208)

It makes sense then for remainder of this chapter to pursue how this sense of Dante's power to "realize" the concrete world in words reinforced for Eliot the possibility of merging Christianity's sense of a redeemed natural world with constructivism's emphasis on the primacy of making over any kind of naturalist seeing.

I will emphasize three motifs in Eliot's later work. First, this work concentrates on those aspects of the maker's tasks that involve attention to the capacity of grammatical forms to provide a stable interchange between first-person consciousness and third-person shareable resources within the language. "Here" in *The Waste Land* referred primarily to a locus of disaffection where the power of the objective scene or hallucinated scene overwhelmed any effort to locate the energies of the self as capable of taking responsibility for what became evident by means of the poetry. But in his later work Eliot turns to intricate self-reflexive aspects of the deictics "here" and "this" as indicators of how making enters the material world. And then he can use these deictics to address a community with whom he can actively identify as coparticipants in these creative labors. Eliot uses constructivist principles as access to a world in which construction and stability involve the same predicates.

Second, of all his peers, Eliot most fully understood the difference between the perspectivism that readily accompanies the cult of dynamic sensation and the impersonality that makes possible a fully constructivist mode of writing focusing on the power to play perspectives against each other for some form of more comprehensive self-reflection. In one sense Eliot's religious poetry obviously rejects sheer impersonality for a mode of expression anchored in personal sincerity. But this sincerity is focused on a level of the personal that does not depend on popular psychology or narrative versions establishing a private authenticity. Eliot's version of the personal is wedded to a careful transparency of language that claims a power to position the subject in a world available to all other subjects.[10] Impersonality about the person might provide an effective means of correlating an outer sensuousness established by scenic description with an inner sensuousness grounded in consciousness of how the personal energies become intensified as one reflects on what makes the correlation possible. Self-consciousness can be redirected toward aligning with what a consecrated natural order can provide as conditions of ordinary life.

Finally, we can best approach Eliot's return to subjectivity by feeling how it gets subsumed within a larger sense of sociality deriving from the correlation of outer and inner sensuousness. Faith establishes a constructed logic by which the personal, the objective, and the communal live one another's lives and die one another's deaths. In Christian theology God plays the role of maker, with author relegated to the roles of participant reader. It seems, then, as if Christianity provides an extensive theater by which to concentrate on how a certain kind of making can produce concrete social environments. These environments are based on structures of relationship that are not derived from the practical

understanding yet still basic to how one comes to value the practical world. Because Eliot's incarnate God suffers death in order to demonstrate that religious reality occupies a different plane from the practical orientations necessary to survive in the marketplace, the redeemer's death and rebirth makes possible an order of love rather than one reflecting the priority of egoistic demand. Grace rather than greed can govern expectations about social relationships—in art and in life. And by identifying with a metaphysical maker, Eliot could present all the objective details of creation entering into sacramental relations that displace emblems of indifference, greed, and mortality.

IV

Eliot thought that such reversals of human possibility dwarfed anything a secular art could establish, so in *After Strange Gods* he blamed the arts for leading modern culture down subjectivist paths. Yet Eliot also came to see that Modernist Constructivism offered similar reversals of subjectivism because it emphasized the powers of making to embody a life consistently repudiating human attachments oriented toward the senses. Because it can embody states of inner sensuousness like "I no longer strive to strive" or rejoicing because "the fire and the rose are one," poetry can establish a capacity to resist natural states of satisfaction in favor of imaginatively dwelling in powers of consciousness to alter and to adapt what sensation affords.[11] Christ's dying did not so much escape the world as transform how we might live within it.

I now turn to two texts that bear witness to how Eliot's Christianity allowed him to attune mind to a different kind of reality. First I want to exhibit through close attention to "Ash-Wednesday" how Eliot's Christianity transforms his poetics and mounts a direct challenge to the pathos embodied in his *Waste Land*. Instead of impersonality demanding the weaving of voices, Eliot, after his conversion, sees that impersonality can also allow an individual self-consciousness to hear the implications of his own rejoicing to rejoice. Impersonality becomes an instrument for working out personal salvation. Then I want to elaborate how Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* brings out social dimensions of this Christian version of constructivist aesthetics. A final section of this chapter will spell out how *Four Quartets*, especially "Little Gidding," tries to correlate this new sociality with the felt textures of an immediate mode of objectivity made possible by belief in the Incarnation. This poem provides Eliot's richest framework for speaking plausible Christian sentences as the celebration of an overall "consecrated" mode of consciousness immersed in the details of daily existence.

"Ash-Wednesday" presents itself as performing three basic tasks. The first has to be taken quite literally: "Consequently I rejoice, having to construct something / Upon which to rejoice" (*PE* 87). Such a construction partakes in modern art's resistance to empiricism by composing a set of forces that develops the inner sensuousness of self-reference as a means of celebrating new powers to engage a world sacramentalized by Incarnation. Eliot makes self-consciousness the route to a satisfying world beyond the self, in part by having contradictions become resources for freeing oneself from the demands of the empirical order. Even the days of the week take on new meaning in this alternative order provided by faith. And the indexicals "here" and "this" become the primary vehicles for correlating a new sense of the objective world with the inner sensuousness afforded by faith. Second, this kind of self-consciousness involves seeing its potential participation in the Word becoming flesh: "Because I know I shall not know" (*PE* 87), I can hope to attend to the "Word within / The world and for the world" which makes the light shine in the darkness. It is crucial that the resulting relation to the Word be recognized as a power rather than just a haptic series of events. For then the bearing of faith offers access to a concrete world that resists turns to the sheerly practical pursuit of empirical satisfactions. One can live in order to pursue meaningfulness rather than treat meanings as means to practical ends.

Third, the emotional achievement of the poem is to produce a state wherein the distance between cry and prayer in Eliot's earlier poems dissolves because of the same logic through which the Word becomes audible. I think all of Eliot dramatizes the quest for prayer as an alternative to cries of disappointment and desperation. But after his conversion, he could finally imagine an audible Word responsive to the twists and turns of frustrated consciousness. The more intense the awareness of suffering, the greater the hope in the capacity of language to sound the unheard word in the Word. This sounding occurs in the space of inner sensuousness created by that suffering.

As we turn to the concrete details of the poem, we have to establish how Eliot builds on the inadequacies of both empirical consciousness as it records events and self-consciousness as it tries to find identity in the sequence of those events. For later Eliot, secular self-consciousness is an essentially Pyrrhic phenomenon because it has no object in the empirical world and so always asks for something more—something more precise or more intense—so that it can give the mind relief from its own processes of quest and questioning. The opening of the poem beautifully captures the "this and that" feature of the terrifying mobility visible in our ways of making demands on the world:

Because I do not hope to turn again
Because I do not hope
Because I do not hope to turn
Desiring this man's gift and that man's scope
I no longer strive to strive towards such things. (*PE* 87)

One must strive not to strive, because only self-reflection in this negative form can overcome a temptation that challenges not just practical life but the shape of willing at the core of our feeling for that life.

Self-consciousness must find ways of submitting to other, richer modes of consciousness that make manifest discrete spiritual activity rather than states of secular striving. One can, for example, turn to modes of language that provide ways of hearing something not heard when one strives for particular objects—like the rhythms of one's saying or the possible inner disposition created by attending to paradox. What matters here is that the self recognize and turn away from the endless process that confronts it if it wants a level of satisfaction that will put the striving to rest. Eliot became convinced that the kinds of intensities we really need cannot be achieved so long as we dream that there is a concrete object that self-consciousness can pursue without constant disappointment.

"I no longer strive to strive" is the first instance of the poem's asking us to hear language's capacity for self-reflexive functioning, where the object simply is the force of self-consciousness. Other doublings follow immediately, like "I know I shall not know" and "Teach us to care and not to care." Such doublings release the mind into a capacity to "rejoice, having to construct something / Upon which to rejoice" (*PE* 87). This awareness of the power of construction then mobilizes a spiritual journey, first enacted as a concrete vision of the single rose (in section II), then tested by the qualities of reflection that this perspective can sponsor.

This vision, however must be understood as woven into a series of reversals necessary if self-consciousness is to replace striving in order to align with the possibility of ascent. Here "here" becomes a crucial player in the poem's redeployment of reference away from the empirical order into something like the chant of exalted preaching:

Where shall the word be found, where will the word
Resound? Not here, there is not enough silence
Not on the sea or on the islands, not
On the mainland, in the desert of the rain land,

For those who walk in the darkness . . .
The right time and the right place are not here
No place of grace for those who avoid the face
No time to rejoice for those who walk among noise and deny the voice (*PE* 94)

In this passage "here" is beautifully doubled. "Here" cannot be fully experienced because there is not enough silence. But at the same time, the poem projects as "here" a speaking attuned to what this silence might be like. The silence might be found here paradoxically in how the poem uses language, where such sounds can fully resound as carving out their own place. "Here" establishes a projected concrete place only realized within a relation to the Word.

The place of grace becomes fully present when "this" takes over the deictic functioning in the final poem of the sequence. This "this" is one aspect of a complex adventure based on a shift from the opening "Because I do not hope" to a sequence based on "Although I do not hope." The first sequence had defined the state of the conflicted soul as demonstrating why the agent should cease striving to strive. This last sequence tries to envision a condition in which one recognizes the humility that turns acceptance into prayer, and doubling into a mode of gratitude rather than ironic consciousness:

Blessèd sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit of the garden,
Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood
Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still
Even among these rocks,
Our peace in His will
And even among these rocks
Sister, mother
And spirit of the river, spirit of the sea,
Suffer me not to be separated

And let my cry come unto Thee. (*PE* 96–97)

This "cry" takes on the dual functions of the deictics. In one aspect, the cry is the utterance of pain and dependency reminding us that before Christ we are all infants. But a second proleptic sense of "cry" modulates into prayer because of

the connection to "come." This version of "cry" is profoundly sexual, profoundly the product of all the natural force that at best the speaker holds as dangerous distractions. In *this* cry, the statement of need and pain is inseparable from the hope for redemption. Expressing that hope now proves sufficient to activate the entire sentence as both cry and prayer, both the expression of complete humility and the articulation of the ecstasy that can emerge when that humility enables us to merge with God's will. Indeed, the poem's syntactic doublings make us realize that the whole sequence can be read outside of time as the simultaneous logic of death and rebirth. Faith proves inseparable from powers of construction to maintain structures of relation between human needs and powers that challenge empiricist judgment.

V

I think criticism is insufficiently aware of how *Murder in the Cathedral* extends these experiments in lyric: here Eliot's concern is less with the construction of sentences enacting the powers of self-consciousness than with testing how constructivist ideals might make possible a distinctive relationship to social space. Eliot here treats theatrical making as a mode by which inner sensuousness defines its relevance to an outside world, just as the making of architectural models provided a sense of public reality for constructivist logic in Malevich's work.

Perhaps the most striking break from naturalistic logic in Eliot's play is his putting the human climax in the first part of the play. That climax has to precede the unfolding of the story, because appreciating the logic of martyrdom must replace a logic based on outer sense if the audience is to understand how Thomas Becket's definitive action clarifies everything that touches upon his situation. Indeed, Eliot's play deploys the radical gesture of invoking a chorus, because everything depends on how society can understand what Beckett has accomplished. We see in the first act what the represented audience sees—a commitment that Christian faith can be powerful enough to set its structures of relationship against the orders imposed by the physical world. Here it proves no accident that the Christian God was born during the depths of winter and sacrificed in the spring, while nature is beginning to produce a totally satisfying material world. And, more complexly, Christianity could idealize temptation as the necessary logical means for bringing out the aspects of personal coherence

that follow from believing in these imaginative reversals. Temptation makes active how the inner life can take form. Without the constant presence of temptation, sainthood and martyrdom are only abstractions: such unworldly conditions must define themselves in the actual world by the power and scope of their aligning with the will of God in order to refuse the authority of outer sense. In fact, the ultimate worldly effect of this turn to inner states is the capacity of those characters to elaborate possibilities of community overcoming the typical unstable collection of willful "I"s that populate the public sphere.[12] Faith gives a content and force to history, not just to nature.

This possibility of turning against outer sense gets concretely defined in Thomas's long sermon after the temptation scene, clarifying the logic of martyrdom, before we even see the motives of those who are threatening his life:

> A martyrdom is always the design of God, for His love of men, to warn them and to lead them, to bring them back to His ways. It is never the design of man; for the true martyr is he who has become the instrument of God, who has lost his will in the will of God, and who no longer desires anything for himself, not even the glory of being a martyr.[13]

What speaks for the martyr, and as the martyr, is not his empirical self but the self justified in the logic of what he is doing. This is theologized Kantian morality, making possible a purified private will capable of fully entering public life because speech allows for establishing this alternative logic.

More generally, we can say that this insistence on inner sense allows us to see two reasons why concentrating on resisting temptation offers a crucial analogue to constructivist aesthetics: (1) There is a dynamic process of the refusal of everything pertaining to the appeals of outer sense. The making subject finds its fullness inchoate in the activity of refusal: understanding why the work must deny the authority honored in public life allows the artist to produce objects not bound by practical sense but capable of expressing the import of the capacity to negate on a large scale. Then the negative can change to a positive by virtue of how the manner of expression anchors the subject in a fuller version of its own powers, made articulate by the act of refusing social standards in order to imitate Christ's exemplary death. Meaning comes to saturate sense in the same way that the feeling for how expression can be constructed comes to dominate over feelings shaped by perceptive experience—as in Hegel's reading of Goethe. The coherence of Thomas's self-definition replaces the modes of authority mediated

by society and in so doing grounds the life of a community set against that society. (2) There is a direct presence of will involved in this saturating of sense: the saint's actions are sustained by a range of inner processes that get manifested as pure self-determination made possible by refusing the instincts of a natural self. In fact, it is not a major exaggeration to claim that martyrdom best defines for a public the difference Christianity makes in understanding values. The martyr struggles against the natural will to live so that there can be an absolutely public staging of commitment. And, for the writer, there is no better definition of inner sensuousness than the combination of making something and visibly willing what is made. This kind of affirmation may be the only way convincingly to display the powers of an imagination grappling with a sense of historical crisis. Affirmation becomes embedded in the activity itself because the activity is defined solely in terms of the capacity to exhibit how the self manages to resist temptation.[14] This may be late Eliot's version of the "certitude" so crucial to Pound.

Once we see from these two features how someone can overcome intricate temptations, the motives of the other characters stand out in their blind and self-serving precarity, devoid of any sense of true social responsibility.[15] And once we see Becket's act of willing not to honor will in its secular, egoistic forms, we are also in a position to appreciate how the four knights that speak after his choice of martyrdom in fact sound exactly like the four tempters who defined sanctity by their inability to grasp its active principle. How can the political order change when the knights in the name of protecting the state read their own dark and concealed motives into their victim:

> And when he had deliberately exasperated us beyond human endurance, he could still have easily escaped; he could have kept himself from us long enough to allow our righteous anger to cool. That was just what he did not wish to happen; he insisted, while we were still inflamed with wrath, that the doors should be opened. . . . With these facts before you, you will unhesitatingly render a verdict of Suicide while of Unsound Mind. It is the only charitable version you can give. . . . (*Plays* 51)

The knights are not wrong in their observations—materialists are likely to give keen descriptions. But their accuracy in the one dimension blinds them to every nuance of motive or openness to different possible sets of those motives. Eliot has the third priest issue a devastating analysis of their actual behavior:

You still shall tramp and tread one endless round
Of thought, to justify your action to yourselves,
Weaving a fiction which unravels as you weave,
Pacing forever in the hell of make-believe
Which never is belief: this is your fate on earth . . . (*Plays* 52)

Had we not seen what Thomas was capable of, we might not so readily accept the priest's analysis. But now we have a model for reading the secular order because Thomas became sufficiently transparent to self-consciousness in his defining of himself against the imperatives driven by that order.

And that model is effective, at least in the play. Not only can the priests make accurate judgments of the knights, they also manage to appreciate what it means to substitute a "we" grounded in the will of God for the "I" of the compulsive ego. What "we" can mean as agents cohering in faith is established by Becket's decision, and by the play's rendering of that decision's effect on the chorus. The ideal of community is defined as the capacity of saying "we" because it has no separate "I" not already defined by kind of values driving the martyr. Such a "we" is a denial of the law of nature because natural being for humans seems capable of only saying "I." The natural being's will is for distinctive selfhood; the saint's will is defined by the work of grace. So that definition becomes possible because the martyr establishes the psychological possibility that there can be motives and values that have to be taken seriously even though they seem to deny what nature demands.

The act of the martyr establishes the logic by which spirit separates itself from flesh. Obviously there cannot be a secular argument that establishes reasons for converting to religious sensibility. Less obviously, but perhaps more important for secular society, the powers of art to articulate significant modes of meaningfulness are equally nonsensical to empiricist thinking. In art and in religious sensibilities, the imagination can only display its differences from the empirical order so as to inspire audiences to recognize what happens when imagination and inner sensuousness come to define a situation.

Accepting those differences from the empirical models for ordering life becomes an inviting possibility for Eliot because he can present theater as establishing a distinctive mode of reality—constructed primarily by ecstatic yet simple cadences binding the will of the maker to the celebration of the will of the parishioners:

Forgive us, O Lord, we acknowledge ourselves as type of the common man, . . .
We acknowledge our trespass, our weakness, our fault; we acknowledge

That the sin of the world is upon our heads; that the blood of the martyrs and the agony of the saints
Is upon our heads.
Lord, have mercy upon us.
Christ, have mercy upon us.
Lord, have mercy upon us.
Blessed Thomas, pray for us. (*Plays* 54)

To follow constructivist logic may be to define an ideal sense of the relation of self-surrender to what makes community possible.

VI

I think *Four Quartets*, especially "Little Gidding," tries to rebuild the existential orientations of "Ash-Wednesday" and *Murder in the Cathedral* so as to reconsider possible connections between professions of Christian faith and the kinds of self-consciousness called on by the practical exigencies of daily life. Perhaps this change is warranted by the principle of Incarnation becoming more central to Eliot's learning to live as a Christian in the secular world. I think Eliot came to realize (especially in his later plays) that the logic of an Incarnation making redemption possible asks much more of Christians than can be satisfied by professions of belief. Incarnation means that even the most elemental condition offers a second plane of existence, given value and meaning because it too has been redeemed in its ordinariness. That logic has permeated all of life because all conditions of living have a dual nature, as features of ordinary existence that all people share, and as conditions transformed by the prospect that at every moment self-consciousness is invited to see actions as existing also on the plane of grace, where everything speaks of salvation from the empirical order. No objective condition lacks the opportunity for inner sensuousness, so long as one can speak sincerely the sentence "I am here / Or there, or elsewhere. In my beginning" (*PE* 183). And the speaking of poetry goes a long way to providing one aspect of objectivity by virtue of that "here." That speaking takes on the same reality as theater does in *Murder in the Cathedral*.

Eliot's version of what Wallace Stevens called "a cure of the ground"[16] consists first in the possibility of rejoicing as an elementary condition of existence. Then once one has climbed the stairs of "Ash-Wednesday," one must experiment with the possibility of at least occasionally throwing away the ladder. (Comparisons

run deep with the concerns for the mystical elaborated by the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*.) And then, once a person has recognized how all of practical existence changes because of Christ's redemptive actions, he or she can take up the social possibilities inherent in how *Murder in the Cathedral* depends for its sense of community on an exemplary act of martyrdom, an act that imitates Christ's crucifixion. The order of nature for humans seems to demand that the individual seeks to be the source of value. Within the order of faith, however, the imperative for the "I" becomes a matter of participating as fully as possible in a chosen community of believers. There, as Stevens put it, lives find a mode of being "below which it cannot descend, / Beyond which it has no will to rise" (*CPP* 219). An "I" can make articulate its capacity to speak for and speak as "we" because the impersonal and personal seem utterly continuous.[17]

This sequence of realizations establishes conditions that Eliot has to form into a seamless whole in the picture of faith provided by the *Four Quartets*. At one pole, the believer has to assert his differences from nonbelievers and try to explain as fully as possible the beliefs that the Christian faith makes possible. At the other pole, one has to see beyond those differences, because if one's belief remains only in the abstract order faith provides, that form of faith encourages smugness and dulls consciousness to the importance of interacting with the frameworks governing practical life. More important, withdrawal into the security of belief does not provide a complete enough account of how faith coexists with the demands of that practical order. Faith requires an intellectual substrate, if only a coherent skepticism. But as Eliot's long struggle in preparing for conversion indicates, the person of faith has to embrace the same social and ontological conditions that frame secular existence. Indeed, Christian faith (as opposed to belief) is a matter of taking up a range of orientations toward social existence that completely affirm the strictures of daily necessities. One literally walks in the world made by God. Without that element of immediacy, faith is inseparable from abstractions about duty and will not sustain a vital poetry.

Four Quartets is brilliant at adapting to this demand for synthesis. Not surprisingly, "Burnt Norton" is in many respects quite close to "Ash-Wednesday," especially because it focuses on the abstract intricacy of the challenges faith establishes to think through what in the secular world seem impossible paradoxes. But "Burnt Norton" differs from the earlier poem because it subsumes the personal almost entirely within what seems an entirely abstract foundation for its mystical intensities. The personal seems entirely contained in deictics:

Here is a place of disaffection
Time before and time after
In a dim light: neither daylight
Investing form with lucid stillness
Turning shadow into transient beauty
With slow rotation suggesting permanence
Nor darkness to purify the soul
Emptying the sensual with deprivation
Cleansing affection from the temporal.
Neither plenitude nor vacancy. . . .
Not here the darkness, in this twittering world. (*PE* 182)

The "cure of the ground" will demand recasting what might be available when the mind turns to "here," the measure of its most intimate possibilities for remaking a sense of value in the world.

The mind can change the location of "here" by descending "lower . . . into the world of perpetual solitude (*PE* 182). "Here"—in the mode of experience portrayed and in what the poem enacts—it becomes possible to see the "world of sense" as "dessication," and the world of spirit as "inoperancy" (*PE* 182–83). And "here" we find "this" world absorbed only in "time past and time future." In contrast, the remade world of Christianity can take hold of paradoxical aspects of our situation in order to celebrate our capacities as self-conscious beings to see ourselves doing this thinking in the present. So there must be some place in our orientation toward time where there is a kind of stillness, a light that contrasts with this constantly turning world.

That place will not be in the world. True faith is not revealed by statements but by enacting a doubling of the world embedded in how the silence provokes the efforts of speech to break out of time. Indeed this is the task of the poem we are reading. The reader is given a place for reflection that cannot be characterized as only in time. This place is composed not only of the pictures afforded by this twittering world but also by a pervasive music that actively seeks some alternative existence to the sequential nature of speech:

Words move, music moves
Only in time, but that which is only living
Can only die. Words, after speech, reach

Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,
Can words or music reach
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
Moves perpetually in its stillness. (*PE* 183)

Perhaps the poem has to arrive at the indexical "here" because it seeks a self-consciousness capable of exploring how speech can also take on the qualities of music as we listen in the present:

Quick now, here, now, always—
Ridiculous the waste sad time
Stretching before and after. (*PE* 184)

The introduction to "East Coker," the second section of *Four Quartets* constitutes a quiet but momentous change in the poem. The opening of "Burnt Norton" is impersonal and meditative, as fitting its project of clearing intellectual space for how faith might alter habits of mind:

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future, . . . (*PE* 179)

In "East Coker," however, there is no "perhaps." There is no hesitation because the utterance now is personal and totally committed to initiating a different kind of meditation:

In my beginning is my end. (*PE* 185)

The basic quest here is to elaborate the casual but crucial pun on "end." In one sense everyone's physical end is in their beginning, since living is also dying. That is the law of nature. But there is also a law of a different kind of nature produced by Christ's redemption that warrants a very different sense of "end," or actually two different senses of "end." Christ gives an "end" for one's life in the sense of purpose. And Christ gives the possibility of an "end" to life that is also a promise of a beginning of unity with God in a world of love and spiritual fullness.

But how does one bring this possibility into reality? How does one learn to live in accord with an end that is a clear purpose rather than just the natural end of seeking happiness in order to ward off the horrors of mortality? Part of the answer

was already pursued in "Burnt Norton." One has to be convinced of the logic and the presence that allows one to hear the Word and submit the mind to the faith the Word requires. But one also has to align with the Word as a practical way of life. Indeed, one has to experience in daily practice what is entailed in faith and allowed by faith. When the world is transformed by faith, every moment is charged with the possibility of experiencing the power of the Word to give meaning to the flesh. And every moment has a potential social fullness because active community can be made present: the Word is a gift to all human beings that allows them to think "in the wisdom of humility" (*PE* 185), and so address the good of all those who can share in how belief changes behavior.

"Little Gidding" offers a somewhat different perspective, radically open to concrete daily practices that constitute a Christian life. This poem does not try overt intellectual means of reconciling the dimension of abstract belief with the dimension of felt concrete situations. Instead, it follows a constructivist logic by embodying a continuous doubling made possible on this occasion by both faith and art:

> . . . You are here to kneel
> Where prayer has been valid. And prayer is more
> Than an order of words. . . .
> Here, the intersection the timeless moment
> Is England and nowhere. Never and always. (*PE* 202)

This doubling establishes a strange intimacy—not so much with a particular person as with a specific mode of orientation to experience shaped by the possibility of belief. This is why "now," "here," and "this,"—marvelous doubles of reference to the world and to the possibilities of self-positioning—take on sufficient richness to become the primary figures for the kind of agency permitted to a believer. And this is why noniconic painting like Malevich's is so attentive to placement, as if spirituality were inseparable from intense self-consciousness of how the mind orients itself toward the possibility of formal relations.

This motif of doubling gets very complex because it comes to include matters of time and space and language and, ultimately, of how the musicality of poetry alters the dynamics of reference. In essence doubling is the means by which poetry becomes valid. I have already spoken of the Christian faith as allowing a doubled world because it literarily enables an entirely different perspective from secular disposition: Christ in being reborn earned the right to impose transformations

on the law of nature. Objects have a reality open to spiritual transformation, as "demonstrated" by the Eucharist. Think then of how the opening figure in "Little Gidding" plays on a secular instance of this transformative logic:

> Midwinter spring is its own season . . .
> And glow more intense than blaze of branch, or brazier,
> Stirs the dumb spirit: no wind, but pentecostal fire
> In the dark time of the year. Between melting and freezing
> The soul's sap quivers. There is no earth smell
> Or smell of living thing. This is the spring time
> But not in time's covenant. (*PE* 201)

Midwinter spring is a real event, in the sense that it is present to every one's senses. Yet it is unreal in several dimensions. It is not in time's covenant, because there is not a natural law that this moment of renewal will occur with any regularity. And our reactions to the event do not consist primarily of echoing typical dispositions toward the natural world. There is a sense of strange satisfaction, even of joy and surprise, that such events occur within nature's covenant. In fact, Eliot wants us to see that such anomalies offer telling analogies for poetry because both the event and its implications depend primarily on imaginative receptivity to what at first seems unreal. Midwinter spring provides a model for how the act of imagining becomes part of a shareable concrete world, especially if one hears the very real music that sustains the reflections provoked by the image. This quasi-natural phenomenon provides a poetic figure for much of what poetry tries to accomplish.

Meeting a ghost seems a simple extension of this unreal reality. And that meeting allows this dynamic level of self-knowledge:

> So I assumed a double part, and cried
> And heard another's voice cry: 'What! Are you here?'
> Although we were not. I was still the same,
> Knowing myself yet being someone other— . . .
> I said: 'The wonder that I feel is easy,
> Yet ease is cause of wonder. . . .' (*PE* 204)

The most important effect of this passage is its invitation to reflect on how much is involved as this doubling comes to a take on weird social manifestations. Perhaps only by this unnatural meeting can we fully recognize the kind of wonder basic to

the mode of ordinary sensuous living established by the logic of sacrament. And, more important, only from this angle of reflection can we understand how the poem itself does double duty—first as the precise meditation on a given way of life and then as an actual event of affirming or willing the terms of that meditation through how the poem foregrounds its own musicality and precision as responses to grace. Eliot sees his poetic language as the primary instance of doubling because it so visibly cannot be content with description but must inhabit the affective range made possible by description of a Christian orientation toward the world. It seems as if this language could be responsive to the presence of a grace capable of establishing continual interchange between how Christ establishes meanings and how nature is then empowered to satisfy what the potential for meaning opens up.

I finally arrive at the full implications of my initial observation about Eliot's interest in speaking Christian sentences. I could cite all of the final section of "Little Gidding" in order to establish the implications of what Eliot wants us to see about the sacramental role of language. But I will be selective and focus on the poem's interest not simply in talking about language but in self-consciously wielding the power of language to celebrate how Christian faith drastically alters our appreciation of ordinary experience as if it continually provided midwinter spring:

> . . . And every phrase
> And sentence that is right (where every word is at home,
> Taking its place to support the others,
> The word neither diffident nor ostentatious,
> An easy commerce of the old and the new, . . .
> The complete consort dancing together)
> Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning,
> Every poem an epitaph. . . . (*PE* 208)

Then Eliot doubles his own elegant description by making the language bear intense affirmation that virtually in itself begins to anchor two transcendental motifs within a palpable concreteness. First we have to ask why Eliot sets this line apart from any verse paragraph and capitalizes two key terms in the poem:

> With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling. (*PE* 208)

At this point in the poem Eliot switches his primary indexical from "here" to "this," probably because he wants us to see, and to feel, how this modification

calls on a somewhat different mode of intentionality.[18] "Here" specifies a location in the present and is the means of acknowledging this present. "This" specifies a decision—"this" rather than "that." And "this" is not necessarily reduced to reporting on that decision. Rather, this "this" seems to enact a will to participate in this love and this calling. At this point in the poem "this" has the remarkable power to reduce subjectivity to a single act and to expand subjectivity so that it realizes a capacity to dwell fully in this doubled world.

Notice how fully the poem changes register because of this location of affirmative yet absolutely fundamental subjectivity, even though little has been changed in the material situation. Everything now enters a world where willing and describing seem inextricable from one another:

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time. (*PE* 208)

"This" provides the perfect transition for "we" because it points to something concrete and observable, and so shareable in principle. Here the speaking subject becomes subsumed into a mode of awareness that is not limited to a private sensibility. And the situation's being collective then has consequences for the future because the condition evoked depends on more than description. In fact, "this" modulating into "we" brings with it the mode of self-consciousness the *Four Quartets* has been seeking all along—really knowing the place we started so that the full affective life of self-reflection can be thoroughly grounded in a redeemed material sensuousness.

Now there is left only the need to explore just what that self-consciousness can perform in order to elaborate the permissions embodied in this concrete knowledge. The conclusion to the poem offers an extensive unpunctuated evocation of what is involved in knowing the place for the first time, as if novelty and repetition were completely wrapped up in one another. Where could punctuation intervene? I quote the closing lines in order to point out how Eliot fleshes out this fusion of spaces and times and levels of doubleness:

> The voice of the hidden waterfall
> And the children in the apple-tree
> Not known, because not looked for

But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
Between two waves of the sea.
Quick now, here, now, always—
A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything)
And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well
When the tongues of flame are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one. (*PE* 209)

I see three quite different aspects of "this" sensibility gradually merging into one another. There is first an exquisite propensity for attention to the stillness and what it permits us to hear in the concrete world. Then there is the immediate state of affirmative inner sensuousness born of such attention—in the urgency of "Quick now, here, now, always," in the abstract awareness of the means by which this complete simplicity can become present, and in the merger of this abstract awareness with the historical moment occupied by the fourteenth-century mystic Juliana of Norwich that this situation doubles. Finally, there is the dramatic example of how this inner sensuousness is created by all the doublings that articulate the power of spirit in action. Hegel recognizes that the birth of inner sensuousness creates an enormous problem for spirit—how will it establish its own forms of objectivity providing imaginative bodies that parallel what classical art established in the order of nature. Here, inner sensuousness manages to establish a concreteness that absorbs and melds itself with the kind of symbolic awareness that reveals and rewards an absolute commitment to relations given form by the activities of mind. Recognizing how "here" is established enables an audience to dwell with complete satisfaction in a recognizable world, where divine revelation seems compatible with the realization of human powers modeled in modernist art.

CHAPTER FIVE

What Is "Ordinary" about Wallace Stevens's "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven"?

The world without us would be desolate except
for the world within us.

Modern reality is a reality of decreation,
in which the revelations are not the
Revelations of belief, but the precious portents
of our own powers.

—*Wallace Stevens,* Collected Poetry and Prose[1]

In this chapter I will try to show how this analysis of constructivist values makes visible significant similarities shared by Eliot and by Wallace Stevens in their last long poems. Both poets in very different ways treat these poems as exemplifying what I call modes of habitation, which depend on transforming the idea of the ordinary so that it can serve as a satisfying dwelling place for self-consciousness. In both cases, their later poems look past events to the underlying structures—of fatality and of repetition as well as of chance and variation—that offer challenges demanding the reconciling of the will to a "plain sense of things." For they eventually recognized that Modernist Constructivist values held out the promise that poetry could offer something other than either enlightened commentary on aspects of social reality or dazzling subjective transformations of those aspects of modern life conventionally mired in alienating forms of objectivity. Rejecting these alternatives led both poets to become far less interested in specific states of passion than in models of mental action that could embody modes of

dynamic identification by which people might understand, extend, and affirm the terms of their daily ordinary existence. And, most important, both poets became committed to working out how engaged and intelligent responsiveness to the powers conferred by participation in artworks might prove central to, and perhaps even necessary for, the full appreciation of what emerges in daily life. They tried to understand and to share how people learned to see that ordinariness as a site of value. But they were also committed to producing a poetry that could provide self-reflexive experience, making people aware of ontological conditions rather than simply describing or evoking instances of particular situations.

Inner sensuousness then takes new forms. It is still generated primarily by works of art. But how self-consciousness becomes invested in sensuous experience is substantially modified. For Eliot, construction affords the opportunity of enacting the power of sacramental logic to overcome the modes of empiricism that celebrate the gap between description and evaluation. For Stevens, I will stress how ideals embedded in his views of art as constructive activity change radically by the final poems in *The Auroras of Autumn*, although there remain in many poems traces of the old views. Stevens had for many years stressed the powers of the maker to produce alternatives to what might be given in experience—hence his emphasis in the 1940s on the maker as hero providing supreme fictions not given in practical social life. Here the inner sensuous was located in a power to pursue satisfactions located primarily in the ways art might produce alternative worlds distinct from how the understanding contours itself to the demands issuing from practical life. But by "The Auroras of Autumn" there is a marked shift from the maker's synthetic activities to the making's capacity to "realize" and to "participate in" versions of opposition and variation that reveal rather than construct shareable possibilities for affirming even the bleakest of secular experiences.

So I first set the stage by trying to show the substantial changes in Stevens's thinking that get articulated in "The Auroras of Autumn." Then I will devote the rest of the essay to showing how "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" modifies that thinking, influenced in part by his sense of what a long poem might develop about the intricacies of as tricky a concept as "the real." We have to ask first why Stevens might have become dissatisfied with an idealized version of imagination that produced the notion of a supreme fiction and the projection of constructive activity in life and in art as a kind of heroic labor, freeing the mind from the constraints of the practical understanding into a domain of metaphoric sensuality. In order to see how he moved beyond these aims, I want to put in dialogue the specific constructive practices of Stevens's last two long poems, "The Auroras of

Autumn" and "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven." At stake will be two ways of offering a version of construction that takes habitation as its goal—one oriented to recasting the terrors of the sublime, and the other insisting on recovering an ordinariness that can come to terms with the dissatisfactions produced by the eye's plain version of experience. Both poems invite us to see how the role of art is not to afford a heroic resistance to outer sense, but rather to establish how the maker's imagination and the audience's perceptions or practical judgments can become intimately coextensive. Poetry can emphasize a constructedness fundamental to self-consciousness as it reflects on shared needs to recognize values established by basic rhythms within social experience.

But where "Auroras" focuses on working out how the goals of habitation can be compatible with human suffering and alienated self-consciousness, "An Ordinary Evening" presents a version of inner sensuousness based on something close to a dialectical understanding of the place of feelings of unreality as conditions for accepting the demands of the ordinary. Our awareness of the imagination's bringing unreality into play can stage states of concrete presence not as objects of attention so much as conditions for appreciating reality as a kind of force capable of satisfying the mind. Without the unreal there would not be a ground for appreciating why the real matters for us. With an awareness of the fundamental force of the unreal, it becomes possible for states of inner sensuousness to alter our access to the real by shifting from ideals of adequate description to those that involve satisfying the demands of self-consciousness to feel itself anchored in change. So Stevens develops for writing the kind of nonbeing Malevich attributed to the capacity of imagination. Imagination now is asked to render a level of concreteness only possible through stressing conditions of activity that frame but do not derive from how we experience the capacities of the senses.

Since romanticism, many poets and artists have been explicit that art involves the display of the power of making something in order to have signs attach to the world—not by representing a situation but by exemplifying a manner of seeing or speaking able to inhabit particular situations. These acts of exemplification take two basic forms. Some displays are intended primarily to elicit affect-based judgments of actions; others are intended primarily to elicit participation in why it matters that the work is constructed in a particular way. When participation is at stake, we are not asked to see through the language but to see by means of the language how certain deployments of self-consciousness position the reader to engage fully in the experiences rendered as they unfold.[2]

Most modernist lyric adheres to some version of this ideal of the poem as

performative self-reference.[3] Eliot, Pound, H. D., and Stevens wanted to extend this model to the long poem because that kind of poem conceived as performance might be able to measure the value of something close to an entire way of living rather than just highlighting segments of experience. They hoped it might be possible for a long poem to exemplify not only the vital force of moments but a general attitude toward the complexity and power of life itself: the performance would be continual over a broad expanse of imaginative space and real time. And the long poem might stress a variety of encounters with the world that cannot easily be gathered into discrete interpretive contexts. Significance would depend almost entirely on the display of language trying to bring to self-consciousness the texture of these events and relations among events.

Yet even with good reasons to explore the long poem, many modernist writers realized that there were almost insuperable difficulties in taking up that project. The poet could not easily turn to personal narrative like that of Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, because it is difficult in that mode to avoid becoming trapped within the dangers of the egotistical sublime. Why should readers be expected to make the commitment to a long poem tracking the expressive states of even the most interesting protagonist? And why should they agonize over the tension between the narrative moments and those moments when the writer tries to sustain general judgments about social practices? After all, this kind of poetry reduces Hegelian dialectic to how the individual self-consciousness can dramatize only the powers demonstrated in objectifying itself. There is precious little effort to come to terms with the historical situations primarily dramatized in order to intensify the personal adventures. At the other pole, modern poets realized that they also could not comfortably pursue the deliberate fragmentation and multiperspectival mode of Tennyson's *In Memoriam*. *In Memoriam* seeks unity for all this complexity by means of elaborating the course of a personal grief. But while the poem fractures the expressive subject, it still roots human authority in how the authorial presence explicitly creates order and significance out of those fragmented states. The subject still triumphs over the constructed object by affording it a complex psychological existence for the imagination.

Eliot and Stevens are my exemplars for choosing a different model, based on an insistent objectivity even when the narrative is personal. Their final long poems emphasize the capacity of poetry itself to build a model of habitation that addresses basic general human needs, satisfactions, and powers. I speak of "habitation" because that term brings to the foreground two distinctive features of certain long poems—the constant self-reflexive sense that author and reader have the linguistic

capacity to articulate or "realize" how consciousness finds itself positioned in the world as circumstances change, and the sense that this mode of consciousness is aligned with more than knowing. There is a constant appeal to something like will that affirms what it recognizes as the enabling conditions of the poem. The poem provides an elaborate range of possible identifications with modes of sensibility by which an audience can bind together in affirming the significance of the values involved in these elemental experiences.[4]

Finally, there is another dimension of affirmation that we must attend to. Suppose we ask what is expected of the attentive reader carefully attending the twists and turns of these poems. I will argue that foremost among the conditions of solicited response is a willingness to try to participate in how the authorial mind comes to adjust to what continually recurs even as the poet explores different venues for basic concerns. The long poem consists necessarily in a series of scenes and contexts for scenes that call attention to what the making might be doing in staking itself on a particular conjunction of attitudes. These modes of attention allow distinctive qualities to emerge because the art looks beyond objects to the forces making them visible and defining their possible satisfactions.

In other words, long poems can be performative and oriented toward the impersonal because, as Stevens puts it, the function of the poet "is to make the imagination theirs"—that is, to encourage the audience to share what is imagined—because the poet "fulfills himself only as he sees his imagination become the light in the minds of others." His role, in short, is "to help people live their lives" (*CPP* 660–61; see also the poem "Of Modern Poetry"). If we stress participation as the primary mode of response, we can treat ideals of habitation as constituting a distinctive field offering a highly visible means for self-consciousness locating itself in how ordinary practices can establish values for self-reflection.

I

Let me begin by trying to spell out what Stevens might have meant had he used the term "performative" as a descriptor explaining what his goals were in the long poems he turned to late in his career.[5] Stevens becomes most explicit on his idea of performance in the two crucial sections of "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," in which the poem itself becomes the major character as it establishes what might be involved in sharing the qualities of self-consciousness it exemplifies. In section XII we find the assertion that "The poem is the cry of its occasion, / Part of the res itself and not about it" (*CPP* 404). To imagine the poem

speaking is to suppress personal expression while making it possible to project there being a collective identification in which people participate in various occasions as if they sought modes of utterance. And, as we will see, the performance focuses on how "In the end" the combination of psychology and the details of experience "Together, said words of the world are the life of the world" (*CPP* 404). Performance in poetry is the overt celebration of how words can articulate values for the otherwise indifferent textures of reality.

Then in section XXVII Stevens makes a supplemental claim about the kind of judgments possible when the poem brackets the personal for modes of speech apparently called for by their occasion:

> This endlessly elaborating poem
> Displays the theory of poetry,
> As the life of poetry. A more severe,
>
> More harassing master would extemporize
> Subtler, more urgent proof that the theory
> Of poetry is the theory of life. (*CPP* 415)

Stevens has no way of successfully arguing for this understanding of poetry as the theory of life. His only recourse has to be to elaborate other forms of persuasion to take the place of argument. In order to turn this weakness into a compelling strength, he treats the continual performance of imagination engaged in a substantial variety of situations as exemplifying forms of self-consciousness and valuation that provide an alternative to the entire domain of argument. It is the poem that displays the theory of poetry. So the theory of life is itself embedded and requires participation in its ways of rendering sensuousness.

Stevens eventually provides in "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" a compelling version of how the long poem might offer an effective self-conscious elaboration of poetry offering this kind of affective engagement with the real.[6] Poetry as the theory of life does not subsume figures into general ideas. Rather, ideas themselves become self-conscious extensions of an agent's capacities for attention and care. The senses afford a direction for the mind's feeling for its own powers. In order to appreciate what is at stake for these powers, we have to turn to how the late essay "A Collect of Philosophy" develops contrasts between different modes of self-consciousness that can be deployed in the mind's efforts to engage the real:

> If the philosopher's world is this present world plus thought, then the poet's world is this present world plus imagination. If we think of the philosopher and the poet as raised to their highest exponents and made competent to realize everything that the figures of the philosopher and the poet . . . were capable of, or . . . if we magnify them, what would they compose, by way of fulfilling not only themselves but also by way of fulfilling the aims of their creator? . . . Yet we should never be able to get away, even under this extreme magnifying, from the sense that they had in common the idea of creating confidence in the world. . . . Thus the soul lives as the self. (*CPP* 864–65; see also the essay "Two or Three Ideas," (*CPP* 842)

The philosopher's world "remains to be discovered," while the poet's intended world is one that "remains to be celebrated" (C*PP* 864).

Poetry as a theory of life involves demonstrations that the imagination is not an evasion of the real but a way of complementing it by aligning it with our most intimate structures of desire. Such demonstration has to replace interpretation by celebration, or, more accurately, by the performance of celebration that aligns our capacities for affirmation to the world of fact.[7] This version of the long poem, then, has to meet at least two obligations. It has to use its length to indicate the varieties and qualities of encounter possible for celebration. And it has to develop capacities for the intensity of celebration by gradually realizing rhythmic and syntactic patterns that give depth and urgency to such celebrations as they develop concerns basic also to modern philosophy.

If the poem successfully meets these obligations it will correlate celebration with what Stevens called "realization." And it will show how "realization" becomes a sufficient cause for celebration because it involves much more than simple processes of making details take on vital presence. Stevens did take the notion of "realization" from Cézanne.[8] But he eventually recognized that there are historical and social aspects to the pressures of reality that a writer must acknowledge. So he tried to treat the variety in his long poem as making visible multiple modes of repetition that we have to attribute to basic forces underlying how presences emerge. And, more important, Stevens eventually saw that this relation between change and repetition could be the basis for an altered sense of how to represent conflict in general. Rather than see each term as negating the other, he could view each term as intensifying the significance of the other:

> The barrenness that appears is an exposing.
> It is not part of what is absent, a halt
> For farewells, a sad hanging on for remembrances. (*CPP* 416)

Realization affords the possibility of each paired element, like summer and winter, or pain and pleasure, or loss and recovery, to achieve its maximum intensity by being paired with its opposite. Then the most comprehensive test of will is whether one can be guided to affirm a necessary structure of opposing forces as a fundamentally positive dimension of living.

II

Getting to Stevens's long poems will take a while, since I have two preliminary tasks—making clear how eager Stevens was for the opportunity to develop images of something like salvation quite different from Eliot's vision, and showing how Stevens's poetry changed radically in its handling of will and self-consciousness. Given the mild contempt Stevens exhibited toward Eliot in his letters,[9] I like to think "A Pastoral Nun" comments on their competing ways of saying "poetry and apotheosis are one." This is the nun speaking:

> This is the illustration that she used:
> If I live according to this law I live
> In an immense activity, in which
>
> Everything becomes morning, summer, the hero, . . .
> The man that suffered, lying there at ease,
>
> Without his envious pain in body, in mind,
> The favorable transformations of the wind
> As of a general being or human universe.
>
> There was another illustration, in which
> The two things compared their tight resemblances:
> Each matters only in that which it conceives. (*CPP* 327)

The first illustration that poetry and apotheosis are one involves the nun's obedience to the law because it provides a general idea so powerful as to ease all pain at one's recognition that one is only an isolated particular will. The other illustration, not available to the nun, plays on replacing the "law" by a sense of "tight resemblances" between body and mind, that each exercise parallel powers of conception. My task here is to expand that "other" relation not available to the nun or to Eliot.

Stevens's quasi-Hegelian alternative insists on shifting from an ontology based on characterizing what is entailed in our relationship with objects, to an ontology that emphasizes dynamic processes of mind involving the continual generation and partial reconciliation of opposing forces. And realizing this alternative requires a form like his flexible three-line stanzas in order to explore the kinds of permissions for self-consciousness possible when poetry decisively rejects forms like the sonnet, which idealize discursive argumentative structure. Ultimately Stevens will see, in a secular version of Eliot, that the two orders of nature and faith become the play within the natural order of imaginative claims to align with the real, balanced by an awareness of the unreal that intensifies the force of its opposite. The various elements within this orientation fully come together in the forms of dailiness rendered in the modes of self-consciousness elaborated by "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven."

III

No doubt one could elaborate Stevens's stress on the work of realizing value in dailiness without my emphasis on constructivist modes of focusing on how the making of art exemplifies possible powers for an audience. But then one could not tell this story in a way that sufficiently addressed the place of art and poetry in making inner sensuousness basic to those intensifications available within daily life. So we have to take up what Stevens changes in the process of writing *The Auroras of Autumn*. Stevens's version of constructivist ideals is most elaborately rendered in sections VII and VIII of "A Primitive Like an Orb":

> The central poem is the poem of the whole,
> The poem of the composition of the whole, . . .
> And the miraculous multiplex of lesser poems, . . .
> The roundness that pulls tight the final ring
>
> And that which in an attitude would soar,
> A vis, a principle or, it may be,
> The meditation of a principle, . . .
> A giant, on the horizon, glistening (*CPP* 379)

The giant here does not come upon the scene but is in effect constructed out of the possibilities of a "nature to its natives." The giant does not need a logic imposed by divine intervention. Instead, we have to look to the process of making, again

not as imposition but as generated by attention to the immanent development of transforming lesser poems into a whole. Then the development can seem to transform the sense of a whole into a self-reflective awareness of how the artist's making affords something not given by nature yet experienced through nature. And we have to learn from this kind of experience to become aware of how our own intensities structured by imaginative participation afford complex realizations that pull tight quite diverse sets of energies.

Yet we also have to realize why this version of constructive activity could not ultimately satisfy Stevens. The most basic problem occurred as Stevens tried to match his concepts to his complex concrete experiences, which the concepts could indicate but not adequately analyze. The other problem is more directly self-reflexive: he had to indicate in verse the difference between an eloquence based on ideas that he hoped could be adequate to the real, and an eloquence emerging out of the ambition to realize fully what the mind encounters phenomenologically. It must have been terribly disturbing to write poem after eloquent poem in "Credences of Summer" idealizing powers of the imagination that were only at best partially articulated in how the poems staged concrete experience. Yet it was only by making visible those frustrations that Stevens could fully celebrate the contrasts involved when he did find adequate models for embodying conviction in poems like "Large Red Man Reading" and "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven."

The sections just quoted from "A Primitive Like an Orb," for example, are replete with elegant metaphoric claims for how imagination orders the real, but quite scanty in actual demonstration of anything like practical consequences or tests of these beliefs. (There may be too much of the pastoral nun still in Stevens.) It is true that one cannot ignore the combination of enjambments and appositions in these passages that reveal how concerned Stevens was to make his poetry enact what it asserts. Yet the action is all in the mind regarding what it can believe about itself, with very little sense of pressure by the real world or impact on it. The mind's capacities to enact its own forcefulness in language comes to seem almost a desperate cry for release into something less self-enclosed.

IV

It became the task of Stevens's prose in the early 1950s to compose a picture of poetry that might provide an alternative role for how poetry engages the world. The idea of supreme fiction mercifully disappears in favor of attempts to portray the imagination as a mode of habitation tying the will to

basic conditions of experience. The two lectures that he gave in 1951—"Two or Three Ideas" and "A Collect of Philosophy"—make powerful statements on the possibility of replacing the figure of the poet as hero by notion of poetry as "the revelation of reality." As "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" will dramatize superbly, poetry must seem to emerge simultaneously from the real and as the real, not as a rhetorical product sustained by its own eloquence.

Then there can be a clear link between the roles of construction and the will, based primarily on revising how Stevens wanted his poetry to stage metaphoric processes. Most of the poems from *Harmonium* to *Transport to Summer* staged metaphor as the celebration of the maker's powers to enact and affirm the possibility of enlivening the world by means of the sponsorship of imagination. "No Possum, No Sop, No Taters" (*CPP* 261–62), for example, situates the poet in a condition where "Bad is final in this light . . ." of "deep January." Yet the imagination proves capable of joining a crow with "malice in his eye" while managing to maintain its distance, "in another tree." That distance provided a necessary perspective whereby the imagination could maintain its independence as a distinctive source of value. However, Stevens was gradually understanding that there was in fact no other plausible tree where poetry could fully manifest its powers. Instead, the basic role of metaphor had to be to destroy its typical rhetorical effects by aligning imagination with realization and by stressing it alliance with apposition rather than with sheer expressivity: "For the style of the poem and the poem itself to be one there must be a mating and a marriage, not an arid love song" (*CPP* 846). Poems for the later Stevens are events that make manifest the limitations of how an insistence on virtue or on objective truth can snip the threads by which the imagination extends our sense of attachment to the real (see *CPP* 380).

Imagination had to become an instrument empowering its bearer to transform "grim reality" into "reality grimly seen" (*CPP* 405). Then the poem's constructive activity, its speaking of its seeing and of its ruminating, can aurally and figuratively make itself visible as a disciplined process of attuning our powers for affirmation to the necessities of living. Otherwise we indulge in practices of evasion and so lose any claim to self-worth. Poetry had to be objective in confronting the real. And it had to work as a constructed object in order to make it possible for the poem's reality to model the force of self-conscious affirmation.

For Stevens, to talk of self-consciousness was to indulge in a practice very close to philosophy. So he spent considerable energy defining that affinity, while being careful to reserve for his ideals of poetry a distinctive arena for their pursuits of the "revelation of reality." Otherwise, poetry risks the self-blinding status of perpetual

handmaiden. The need to fight off this danger makes it seem worthwhile here to supplement the passage I cited in my introduction to this chapter with two additional prose passages. The first one nicely links "realization" with the kind of habitation that makes "sure of every foot of the way":

> It may be said that the philosopher probes the sphere or spheres of perception and that he moves about therein like someone intent on making sure of every foot of the way. If the poet moves about in the same sphere or spheres, and occasionally he may, he is light-footed.
>
> He is intent on what he sees and hears and the sense of certainty of the presences about him is as nothing to the presences themselves. The philosopher's native sphere is only a metaphysical one. . . . The poet's native sphere is . . . what he can make of the world. (*CPP* 862)

The second passage summarizes what is at stake in this pursuit of situational certainty. Making is not making something up. Rather, a little note on the poem "*Les Plus Belles Pages*" written in 1952, praises the developments of interrelationships that transform the presence of the world into a realizing of how the world can take on vitality and force:

> The title also means that les plus belles pages are also those in which things do not stand alone but are operative as the result of interaction, interrelation. . . . The interrelation between reality and imagination is the basis of the character of literature. The interrelation between reality and the emotions is the basis of the vitality of literature, between reality and thought the basis of its power. (*CPP* 867)

Judgment in the production of art is no longer for Stevens the subsuming of particulars into generalizations. Rather, judgment has to become manifest in the forging of intricate relations that keep the mind active within a density that enables us to participate in establishing a full sense of the real. The need for dramatic concreteness is not an ideal imposed on poetry but something necessary if poetry is to establish its distinctive power to search "a possible for its possibleness" (*CPP* 411). And because "relation" is not imposed but works at seeming to discover what it asserts, this imagination need not be located in any kind of psychological power: imagination becomes simply a means of attending to possibilities inherent in observation and dwelling on them as opportunities for adjusting one's sense of an inner life. In fact, imagination becomes the condition of self-awareness that one has the capacity to dwell in these relations. Imagination does not describe; it enacts a power within the real—a claim virtually every modernist would make,

although few could organize a practice for consistently maintaining this Hegelian difference from description.

V

The new directions such statements represent make a striking debut in how "The Auroras of Autumn" stages experience in order to redirect what I have been calling inner sensuousness. This poem seems to repudiate the association of imagination with the transformative powers of the maker that bring feeling to sight and to processes of thinking—not by rejecting past generalizations so much as by developing increasingly complex and concrete relations among the "parts" of these generalizations. "Auroras" confronts the mind with something approaching an "innocence" of absolute presence that simply seems not to need any complementary act of consciousness. What can self-reflection contribute to this scene beyond awe and a sense of its own pathetic irrelevance? Stevens still tries to work in a role for the human will. Yet now affirmation must follow the same path as imagination—not from the maker outward but from what the act of realization asks of the author and of the reader intent on being responsive to reality grimly seen. Yet realization can also not be content with a process of tracking the mind's role in perception, as it was in "Study of Two Pears." Rather, realization takes on a social dimension, requiring engagement with the full pressures of reality as they take multiple forms of embodiment. And those pressures in turn create immense difficulties for will, since it must affirm all of life—its pains as well as its pleasures. Poetry must not just assert imaginative power but dwell repetitively in a variety of situations in order to test its adaption to the conditions of reality.[10]

The opening of "Auroras" confronts an amazing event that keeps changing as the auroras light up the New England sky. But Stevens does not begin with description. He begins with the figure of the serpent, as if the poem were going to be an adventure as much of composing metaphor as of attention to the sublime event of the brilliant changes permeating the present state of affairs. Then the poem seems to make it clear that this effort at figuration offers only a highly simplified model of realization. In fact, the poem disturbs as much as it pacifies, since it soon becomes evident that the security posited by the figure ignores all the anxieties and intricacies that put the realization process into a series of twistings and turnings. It is no accident that the deictic "this" takes on the burden of representing all that human consciousness might bring to the scene. On the one hand, the need for catching up with surprise almost requires something other than a specific personal

consciousness. This event affects anyone looking at the sky, so the poem needs a mode of response that is urgent, intimate, and transpersonal. On the other hand, "this" introduces a lack of specificity that seems endemic to the poem's evasions and hesitations, as self-consciousness has to measure itself against the evening's radical insistence on sheer event:

> This is where the serpent lives, the bodiless.
> His head is air. Beneath his tip at night
> Eyes open and fix on us in every sky.
>
> Or is this another wriggling out of the egg,
> Another image at the end of the cave,
> Another bodiless for the body's slough?
>
> This is where the serpent lives. . . .
>
> This is form gulping after formlessness,
> Skin flashing to wished-for disappearances
> And the serpent body flashing without the skin. (*CPP* 355)

Notice how as the speaking observes the scene, the scene itself seems to "open and fix on us," as if it could examine the speaker for what he might contribute. The world seems to put the speaking on trial, as the lines seek to find in the reality they confront something that orients the responding mind away from despair and toward some kind of affirmation engaging that despair. But invoking the figure of the serpent provides a significant challenge to any easy lyric attachment to the scene. Making here involves finding a place for suffering. The mythic serpent casts the scene as threatening—not because it is evil but because it has the radical innocence of self-completeness—without any sense of lack intervening. This innocence of the scene's apparent self-delight taunts because it does not need any self-reflexive justification or place in social interchange. Instead, the figure of the serpent evokes doubt about how the mind attributes significance to the image of the serpent it constructs.

The first response to the serpent is to attempt simplifying the observer position, in search of a corresponding innocence. Ideas have to be the first thing to be jettisoned. For ideas insist on the constructive role of the audience, in the process covering over the irony that this promise of presence is in fact a condemnation to a perennial absence of satisfaction for self-consciousness. This poem's response

to the serpent has to begin at what can constitute beginnings—at what gives rise to the ideas that then make actual recognition difficult. So "this" disappears just when a concrete scene emerges of a white cabin soliciting specific memories that do not quite come into focus.

Now the deictic has to switch to a "here," which constitutes accepting the lack of power to designate anything but the bare force of habitation. Yet by the end of section II, "here" comes to include not just the scene but figures for the observing of the scene that, in the words of "Large Red Man Reading," "spoke the feeling for them, which was what they had lacked" (*CPP* 365). The imagination begins to find an immanent locale for its makings. Those feelings, however, offer only a terrifyingly lush rendering of the difference between the fullness of the scene and the solitude inescapable in the position of observer. Here, the desire to participate seems painfully blocked by the drawn-out particularity and temporary lack of metaphor, followed by such a vision of the lights that the object seems of too immense a scope to allow merely human feeling:

> Here, being visible is being white,
> Is being of the solid of white, the accomplishment
> Of an extremist in an exercise . . . [Stevens's ellipses]
>
> The season changes. A cold wind chills the beach. . . .
>
> The man who is walking turns blankly on the sand.
> He observes how the north is always enlarging the change,
>
> With its frigid brilliances, its blue-red sweeps
> And gusts of great enkindlings, its polar green,
> The color of ice and fire and solitude. (*CPP* 356)

The space for performance is haunted by this inhuman blend of intensity and frigidity.

At this point the poem can only persist in exploring its disaffections. Engaging the change is only possible if we can strip away our ideas and our most intimate feelings that try to offer some alternative to this solitude. We have to understand how feelings linked to the mother and the father resist change, because they prove basic to our sense that the world might offer invitations to our participation. But here such congeries of connection cannot withstand the force of these sublime "enkindlings." While the mother's gentleness in accepting the world grows old and unable to adjust to change, the father's commitment to language makes him

perhaps too quick to adjust. He seems to adapt the serpent's disbelief by saying "yes / To no; and in saying yes he says farewell" (*CPP* 357).

That these alternatives seem the only feasible responses to such seeing seems confirmed by the return of the deictic at the close of section V, now linked with the first-person plural:

> We stand in the tumult of a festival. . . .
>
> A-dub, a-dub, which is made up of this:
> That there are no lines to speak? There is no play.
> Or, the persons act one merely by being here. (*CPP* 358–59)

There is no play, I assume, because there is no act of concentration capable of willing the details into something capable of affording a responding consciousness any kind of power that would allow alternative feelings to this commitment to sheer observation. But section VI recognizes that there is still a kind of theater, stripped of the human purposiveness, which might put something on the stage, if only to weaken the sheer power wielded by the scene as a threat to dominate consciousness. So perhaps there is something possible for the mind within the state of observation that can redefine and satisfy an alternative vision of self-conscious participation. That participation begins in the sense of fear that so much has to be destroyed. But in this destruction it might be possible to attach self-reflection to a scene of "lavishing of itself in change" (*CPP 359*) that does not need what humans want to bring to it as vehicles of intimacy. The poetry itself here invites a strange cold admiration that may model the possibility of a new dispensation for the imagination.

Unfortunately the possibility of such a dispensation in this poem seems more fantasy than actuality. The dominant emotion in this section is the persistence of fear as the scholar extends the flames of the auroras to "everything he is" (*CPP* 359). The felt challenge then is not to arrive at competing ideas but to find some way of changing perspective so that one does not obsess over the differences between the full presence of the auroras and the contradictions of human feeling. The poem accordingly turns in section VII to a series of questions projecting the possibility of different kinds of self-consciousness not so centered on human destinies:

> Is there an imagination that sits enthroned
> As grim as it is benevolent, the just
> And the unjust, which in the midst of summer stops

To imagine winter? When the leaves are dead,
Does it take its place in the north and enfold itself,
Goat-leaper, crystalled and luminous . . . (*CPP* 360)

Why would the imagination in summer stop to imagine winter? A reader can at the least say that we have traveled a long way from "Examination of a Hero in Time of War." Now, and in the rest of the volume, the focus is less on the heroic imagination than on the imagination as a simple "it," as if imagination itself could give up its anchor in the human mind and become a dimension of inner life as material and as natural as the objects that fascinate it. Yet bleak as imagination must become, its nature cannot be subsumed into its own "dark." It can find ways to make its presence known by matching inner life to material conditions. Then it might become content with those slight twists of description that reveal a mind still at an angle to bleak truths.

Sections VIII and IX focus on innocence because this seems the new locus of possibility for the powers of imagination to take up an affective position within the world that seems to complement what had been an alien and alienating mode of presence. The scene produced by the auroras threatens human interpreters with a feeling of their own irrelevance or openness to mockery. There is not a time or a place of innocence, because innocence might be defined as being free of the need for any kind of name, especially one grounded in metaphoric associations. But ironically this makes innocence a necessary equivalent for the work of imagination, which also has to learn to resist names that problematize our attaching to the force it provides. (Remember Picasso's efforts to liberate objects from the understanding.) Innocence offers an imaginative position without need or guilt. Identifying with this aspect of innocence provides a possible place for the mind in this effulgent and impersonal conflagration.

Humans probably cannot hope to produce comprehensive accounts of this innocent world, resistant even to desires for explanation. Suppose, though, that they could use the figure of innocence "almost as predicate," so innocence becomes capable of asserting its own version of active imagination. If the imagination can limit its ambitions, it might retain the power to provide frameworks for distinctively human modes of partaking in the physical world. For the imagination can still provide the "as if," offering affective analogues for our partaking—not by establishing analogues in myth but by providing the kinds of hypotheses that do establish the maternal function by which we might embrace what little we have. And in establishing that idea, the mother provides a language by which we can

think of each other—not in large generalizations about the human so much as about particular lucid ways of adapting feelings to situations "in the idiom of an innocent earth" (*CPP* 361). As the imagination increasingly gets located in forms of relationship that are based in objective conditions, it also proves capable of founding a commons where readers are invited to share how experience might take on value.

Notice how section IX quickly develops the social side of this idiom. "We" emerges as the condition of agency that has survived all the doubts produced by the immense challenge the auroras pose to mere human forms of predication. The social has its own place in a recuperated innocence because that innocence eventually subsumes human differences in the kind of wholeness represented by this night sky. There is still fear that disaster may be imminent, because the social seems always tentative and unstable: there is always the risk of the mind returning to its demands for individuality. But the stars seem to offer an alternative hope because they take a ready place in the kinds of metaphors that are sheer celebration, without any interpretive or self-defensive attempt at containment. Innocence proves effective as an alternative to thinking about time and place. The only condition necessary for that effectiveness seems to be that while the imagination of disaster emphasizes the bare limbs and bare trees of immanent tragedy, the metaphors for the stars stress the cloaks that mark the interplay between cosmic light and cosmic shadow. Innocence remains a continual possibility for a mind and a universe capable of meeting within a tender sense of what realization might demand:

> The stars are putting on their glittering belts.
> They throw around their shoulders cloaks that flash
> Like a great shadow's last embellishment.
>
> It may come tomorrow in the simplest word,
> Almost as part of innocence, almost,
> Almost as the tenderest and truest part. (*CPP* 362)

The final section of "Auroras" has a very different tone, largely because the poem tries to extend the predicate of "innocence" in order to summarize the implications of this entire self-reflective experience. Tone here has to navigate a cross between intense seriousness and the capacity to find formulations of general conditions less concerned with producing belief than with opening the possibilities of metaphoric adaption to the real. Then the poem can reflect on the imaginative positions the

questions provide. Interaction and interrelation make present their own form of innocent inquiry into the questions of happiness and unhappiness posed by the beginning of the poem.[11]

"An unhappy people in a happy world" (*CPP* 362) in one sense develops the mutual sympathy of the "we" finally achieved in sections XIII and IX. But this "we" is not celebrated as a resolution for the solitude that is the curse of the serpent. Rather, "we" here comes to seem a strategic way of positing an angle by which the imagination can try out feelings for generalizations that elaborate what has already been experienced, probably in multiple ways. Imagination by indirection finds direction out as it reads "the phases of this difference." So it must try alternatives, each of which comments on the satisfactions available from the other available options. Does "an unhappy people in an unhappy world" (*CPP* 362) provide a better synthesis for what the poem has explored? If we accept this formulation—itself an act of imagination—how then would we avoid "too many mirrors for misery"?

"A happy people in an unhappy world"(*CPP* 362) poses another possibility. But here there is nothing to roll on the expressive tongue, because human life would be too easy and far less interesting. We need our pains to frame our pleasures and our pleasures to set off why the pains are so disturbing. Realization must accept and plumb the oppositions that make values possible.

Finally, there has to be a fourth option in this Boolean measure of possibilities. "A happy people in a happy world" (*CPP* 362)—this would be festival. But the poem's brief treatment of it suggests that such a world would not be very interesting for the emotions: there would be no struggles and no efforts to attune desire to fact. So we are back now with "an unhappy people in a happy world," but this time less as mere hypothesis than as the grounds for imperatives. This hypothesis makes sense of our troubles with the innocence of the auroras. And it serves as predicate for the work this poem shows the imagination trying to perform in order to both express and soothe such unhappiness:

> In these unhappy he meditates a whole,
> The full of fortune and the full of fate,
> As if he lived all lives, that he might know,
>
> In hall harridan, not hushful paradise,
> To a haggling of wind and weather, by these lights
> Like a blaze of summer straw, in winter's nick. (*CPP 363*)

This is a strange ending. In one sense it perfectly addresses the situation set up by the opening stanzas and continued in the rest of the volume. Realization entails including sources of unhappiness and the effects of fatality that make the world for meditation a hall harridan rather than a hushful paradise. This is not Eliot's dwelling based on a transformed world. But the poetry here does have the necessary indirectness to establish how these lights, the auroras and the reflections, provide for the mind the figure of a final illumination offered by the "blaze of summer straw, in winter's nick." There remain many features of the poem that seem to pull against the synthetic imagination it asserts in the final stanza. Stevens does recognize that the illuminations he desires have to be matters of casual lights and delightful caprice, as the world lavishes "itself in change." Yet, at the same time, the poem seems also to realize that its renderings of imagination might entail giving up the rhetorical stance that can generalize about human powers based on analogies to the seasons (even though Stevens cannot yet give up on the idea that the poet must provide a mediation on the whole "as if he lived all lives."). The imagination may have to accept the isolation that proved so terrifying in this poem in order to find a world that solitary individuals might share just because they envy innocence and feel the frustrations of the failure of both maternal and paternal principles. The task of imagination may be to elaborate conditions of habitation by internalizing the intricacies of the tones involved in such partaking.

VI

Elaborating this task established a new theater for Stevens. Poetry could no longer serve as a stage for scripted plays. By defining the new demands on Stevens's poetry, "The Auroras of Autumn" sets the terms for the subsequent poems as they seek to articulate distinctive modes of inner sensuousness without lapsing into elaborate self-congratulatory rhetoric or continuing to seek abstract judgments about forms of happiness. In many registers, "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" is the climax for this line of development, in large part because the relation between imagination and reality that Stevens ultimately wanted had to be tested by an even longer poem. So we have to go there, despite the fact that criticism has to pale before the task of analyzing such work. When there is obvious rhetorical structure, criticism can focus on how that structure regulates the details. But when the structure only emerges in how the details provide variety, subtlety, and intensity, there can be no relief from patient and

lengthy explication. And then what seems inventive variation in the concrete rendering of sensuous details can become tediously repetitious when translated into critical prose, especially into my abstract versions of critical prose.

I tell myself that this situation can only be faced by trying to find terms for appreciating the intricacy and intensity of Stevens's constructive project. This poem seems devoted to working through the persistent demand of the will to find direction simply through how imagination rises to the challenge of maintaining the vitality of a play among differences. On one level this play of differences stages a mind that can encounter a complex range of threats to its desires while spinning out inventive "resemblance," where a lesser, more self-satisfied poetry would settle for repetitious semblance. More specifically, "An Ordinary Evening" becomes an instruction manual for inhabiting what the space of "and yet" can establish for our appreciation of how poetry affords modes of dwelling in shareable self-reflexive sites. For an overview, we might see the poem as rendering performative variations on four distinct but interinvolved struggles: (1) to understand all that goes into the opening "and yet" that resists the eye's plain version in order to establish a place for an inner life, 2) to secure the possibility that at its most active the mind cannot be reduced to personal psychology but provides substance for collective states of sensibility, (3) to create intimate spaces that evoke states sufficiently concrete to elicit our sensuously willing our own conviction, and (4) to flesh out a space where construction and perception seem inseparable because construction establishes a grounding in the force of constant complimentary oppositions. The poem moves forward by moving sideways, in a manner that builds cumulative effects by stressing how realization gradually allows consciousness to align with the full constructive capacities for poetry to serve as a theory of life.

The contrasts between the openings of the two poems under discussion could not be more striking. "Auroras" begins with a sublime event that troubles the speaker because the event is utterly remote from any kind of intimacy. "An Ordinary Evening" insists on the presence of that intimacy by establishing elemental feelings of disappointment with "the eye's plain version":

> The eye's plain version is a thing apart,
> The vulgate of experience. Of this,
> A few words, an and yet, and yet, and yet—
>
> As part of the never-ending meditation,
> Part of the question that is a giant himself:
> Of what is this house composed if not of the sun,

These houses, these difficult objects, dilapidate
Appearances of what appearances,
Words, lines, not meanings, not communications,

Dark things without a double, after all,
Unless a second giant kills the first—
A recent imagining of reality,

Much like a new resemblance of the sun,
Down-pouring, up-springing and inevitable,
A larger poem for a larger audience,

As if the crude collops came together as one,
A mythological form, a festival sphere,
A great bosom, beard and being, alive with age. (*CPP* 397)

I simply love these opening lines. Let me count the ways. First they enact a state of urgent need for self-consciousness to adapt to what the eye sees—and does not see. The poem cannot be content with perception but seeks a language that can perform this dissatisfaction. Then the poem might also make present a demand for a different kind of affective relation to the world, even if producing that relation has to begin with only vague gestures. This is Hegel's "romantic art" at its most elemental engagement with the limitations of binding the imagination to sensuous objectivity. Those "and yet"s can at least provide modern, untheatrical versions of Hegelian negation. Self-consciousness feels itself playing a role in the scene that calls out for elaboration and reflection. There emerges in the negative a significant potential for building positive self-awareness of what might satisfy the mind.

Second, the giant has become the source of questions rather than the heroic vehicle for producing plausible supreme fictions. And this quality of questioning perfectly complements the tone of intimate probing that asks what consciousness can make of these "appearances of what appearances." Indeed, this probing makes possible a depth to the simple expression "and yet" because the expression participates in the sense of never-ending questioning. No object causes this hesitation. The cause of hesitation resides in the subject, in a state of refusal to comply with every piece of information that the body provides, so long as there is no route for involvement. The possibility of a positive story must remain vague and implicit, but also must eventually address the enormous scope of the "and yet" experienced at the level of the eye. For the poem itself then is cast as addressing these intimate needs.

My third reason for loving this passage is how it comes to stage enacting one's capacity to inhabit one's world with full satisfaction. Poetry takes on the task of establishing linguistic practices that can serve as means of habitation for what in the mind cannot align itself with the eye. The more one stresses the poem's effort to speak from a space of intimacy, the better one can measure the possible significance of a contrast between this opening and the opening of "Auroras." "Auroras" does offer a repeated "this," foregrounding a particular interest in what transpires, as if "this" could modulate easily into "here." And "this" beautifully negotiates the sublimity of the startling and alienating vision of the auroras. How not to feel inadequate and lacking in relation to this full possession of innocence? With the first stanza of "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," however, the experience of negativity occurs on a very different scale, with very different demands on the mind. The thing apart is now not a sublime object/event but a fundamental state of plainness that results in a corresponding elemental plainness of the speaking's "and yet" as its way of expressing its own needs that are not satisfied by the speaking's alignment with the eye. While for "Auroras" the object of sight is too much and provokes a sense of inadequacy before the full innocence of the dynamic object, here the object of sight is not enough. "An Ordinary Evening" wants to work on a dissatisfaction even more elemental than the temptations to identify with the serpent of disbelief. This poem stages the entire process for orienting the will as at risk unless the priority of plain sight can be negated and overcome by what nevertheless remain qualities of empirical experience. Construction must elaborate fields of relation that can align imaginative labor with what would be without it utter poverty. In this regard it is crucial that "An Ordinary Evening" does not turn to elaborate metaphor, even metaphor extending perception, as was the case with the serpent of "Auroras." "An Ordinary Evening" will be a poem primarily about habitation not figuration. So the poem announces itself as accepting the task of providing languages that model internalized responses to all that realization has to become. Indeed, what is "ordinary" here is not the scene so much as the possibility for finding an elemental language by which we can see ourselves responding to felt inadequacies and adjusting our expectations of what is entailed in inhabiting this sense of the world. This language reaches out to define the intensity and power of imagination in "a visibility of thought" (*CPP* 416) that partakes actively in the permissions for will latent in that visibility. The ordinary and the transcendental seem capable of a moderate merger without mysticism.

Fourth, the opening section of "An Ordinary Evening" substantially modifies the figure of the giant in important ways that go beyond its being limited to the

role of questioning. In Stevens's previous work, including "Auroras," the giant referred essentially to the heroic powers of the imagination to establish value within the processes of living, so that these values seem "so far beyond the rhetorician's touch" (*CPP* 371). Here in "An Ordinary Evening," the giant becomes a question that is "part of the never-ending meditation" in which the mind feels its distance from these plain things or things reduced to appearances. Now there have to be two giants, or a second kind of meditation capable of elaborating new ways of engaging the real. Stevens at this point cannot resist an "as if" that introduces parallels between this way of seeing and the attribution of mythic forms for satisfying desire. But he adds the brilliant phrase "alive with age" that recontains the mythic within the simple realistic skills of fresh description, because even the stripped-down present contains imaginations from the past. There enters a new feature of the giant. "Alive with age" establishes the satisfactions of a freedom of mind seeking to play a fuller part in how the world emerges.

VII

But these local achievements cannot suffice. The poem will have to situate minds in various conditions, all of which combine to establish the self-reflexive force of "and yet" in relation to plain seeing and the habitations it elicits. This variety in turn seems fundamental to supporting the claim that Stevens separates linguistic expression from any personal psychology: it is the varieties of language and not of character that here hew to the world. The poem continually realizes what "and yet" might involve. Consider, for example, the changes produced by the opening of the second section as it modifies a linguistic orientation that shapes the reader's mode of engaging the world:

> Suppose these houses are composed of ourselves,
> So that they become an impalpable town, full of
> Impalpable bells, transparencies of sound,
>
> Sounding in transparent dwellings of the self,
> Impalpable habitations that seem to move
> In the movement of the colors of the mind,
>
> The far-fire flowing and the dim-coned bells
> Coming together in a sense in which we are poised,
> Without regard to time or where we are, . . .

Confused illuminations and sonorities,
So much ourselves, we cannot tell apart
The idea and the bearer-being of the idea. (*CPP* 397–98)

We might notice first the radical shifts in tone, perspective, and level of generalization from the opening section, although both are interpretations of what might be involved in "and yet." Here we are engaging not the eye but the mind, or perhaps the mind's eye. The primary activity is not seeing but supposing, within a series of cascading and intricate appositions. And it turns out that supposing is a tad too easy, so this mode of thinking in particular will have to undergo substantial revision. But for this moment in the poem, supposing sustains a lively and beautifully balanced movement from sight to hearing to "impalpable habitations." How can this movement not generate the presence of a "we" as the only feasible location for this kind of agency, without regard to time or to place. Poetry composes, enables, and enriches modes of agency, making "we" an entry into a world of thinking that would be distorted by any attribution of distinctive personality. To participate in this poem is to explore self-reflexively the possible naturalness of modes of dwelling based on how thinking composes a mind's dance, realizing for itself the flow from "transparencies of sound" to "impalpable habitations that seem to move / In the movement of the colors of the mind."

We should also notice how the opening stanzas of the section cited introduce what will be basic generative qualities of Stevens's style throughout the poem. No psychology based on an individual would explain this penchant for apposition that distinguishes the discourse of this section from the preceding one. This penchant seems to stem instead from ways the writing attends to the possibilities of interconnection embedded in what it has just accomplished. Such writing seeks a kind of repleteness of relations as evidence of how a sense of habitation can spread out in affective space while resisting the urge to offer interpretations of what holds the fields together. And this penchant for apposition establishes a hunger for interconnection that will pervade the poem. Constant apposition seeks a density of relations as evidence of how habitation can spread out in affective space while resisting the urge to offer explanations of what holds the relations together.

These constant appositions in this section also seem to demonstrate Stevens's desire to try out a genuinely new perspective on value: he wants to deny the tension between subject and object basic in "Auroras" by eventually attuning to a constant motion in which the two fuse in continual transformation of function, each acting out an "and yet" within the other. Apposition for Stevens is similar in function to

Whitman's catalogs: both poets explore the modes of feeling associations produce, and they both want to open the question of why these associations might appeal to us. And, more important, the appositions give Stevens concrete access to another feature of Whitman's thought—his resistance to worries about opposites canceling one another as contradictions. Stevens's sense of the force of appositions clarifies how living in change affords possible new attitudes toward opposition. In a world organized by enlightenment logic, contradiction must be erased. But in a world organized by the desire to find poetry within acts of realization, opposites can themselves become instruments of discovery.

The point becomes not to choose among the terms but to see how they interpenetrate and illuminate one another as sensuous qualities in life that lead the mind beyond those qualities to concentrate on its own participation in relational forces. Embracing these oppositions in section IV enables us to see the differences causing the oppositions as means of hearing ourselves "transposed, muted and comforted":

> . . . Plain men in plain towns . . .
>
> . . . only know a savage assuagement cries
> With a savage voice; and in that cry they hear
> Themselves transposed, muted and comforted
>
> In a savage and subtle and simple harmony,
> A matching and mating of surprised accords,
> A responding to a diviner opposite. (*CPP* 399)

I could go on almost forever in illustrating the various oscillating perspectives by which this poem secures its status as actual habitation rather than the representation ofhabitation. But I will limit myself to spelling out how the variety in the first six sections establishes a series of voices and almost a dialogue among perspectives as the poem comes to embody the affective range of its voicings. Then we can concentrate on large structural movements by which the poem wanders within its sense of comprehensive dwelling.

Section III turns completely away from the generalized oscillations of its predecessors. Here there is simple, intimate focus on desire "set deep in the eye" (*CPP* 398). And the mode of expression of that desire is tightly organized, repetitive syntax, as if this syntax could make present the energy necessary to get beyond

actual seeing without replacing the seeing with ideas about seeing. Then section IV, on the other hand, begins with the same kind of direct statement but finds its peace not in the desire for love but in the possibility of savagery as it identifies with the culture's demand for bleak truth. But rather than settle for this savagery, the poem expands its sense of mental space to include the play of opposites in which inhabiting the cold fully becomes a source of warmth and comfort, at least when the imagination can multiply the dimensions of opposition, as in the last passage that I have cited. What seems a standard opposition between winter and spring rapidly changes affective registers and imagined locations by bringing in the other two seasons, opposed not as states of nature so much as adaptions to spirit. "The cold volume of forgotten ghosts" puts all its sensuality in the play of "o" sounds as it reaches for a kind of coldness that can by its abstraction seem a "sheen" capable of romanticizing the heat making such contrasts possible.

Finally, notice in the following two sections how the fluidity of the three-line stanzas builds on this savagery of plain seeing in order to embody processes of abstraction that acknowledge the degree to which "reality" is composed by the mind—something we could not fully recognize without this encounter with savagery. Here all the action builds on how the idea of the romantic had concluded the previous section:

> Inescapable romance, inescapable choice
> Of dreams, disillusion as the last illusion,
> Reality as a thing seen by the mind,
>
> Not that which is but that which is apprehended,
> A mirror, a lake of reflection, in a room,
> A glassy ocean lying at the door,
>
> A great town hanging pendent in a shade,
> An enormous nation happy in a style,
> Everything as unreal as real can be (*CPP* 399)

Now the mind literally expands by apposition until the figure of the nation seems to allow a plain summary judgment. That judgment in turn allows the poem to return to a single elaborate figure embracing the divisions that oddly serve on another level to unite all perspectives in collective activities of mind. No wonder that the following section can simply stay on a single plane, illustrating abstractly

how "Alpha" and "Omega" can be seen as phases of one process. But that plane bears, and bares, danger because acceptance seems to displace self-consciousness into the dynamic variety embedded in the real.

VIII

Sections VII through XII make significant changes in how the poem approaches the real. Rather than worry about relations between eye and mind, these sections concentrate on how "I" may see itself as a part of "we." The scenes seem to explore intimate connections with events that might transform excited breathing into a sense of belonging within a social world:[12]

> The cry that contains its converse in itself,
> Into which looks and feelings mingle and are part
> As a quick answer modifies a question,
>
> Not wholly spoken in a conversation between
> Two bodies disembodied in their talk,
> Too fragile, too immediate for any speech. (*CPP* 402)

The scenes have become too capacious, too intricate, and too public for the perambulations of the first person. If worrying about the life of the mind within the quotidian teaches us anything, it is that the reasons for the instability of the "I" are not all negative. There is a possible positive attunement to feelings that open us to collective states. And our awareness of that openness will begin to release the personal will as a possible force by which to embrace the kinds of values this odyssey affords. By section XII the expansion of speaking possibilities modulates from a human "we" to the speaking powers possessed by the poem itself. Now the poem can offer itself as a figure of ideal attunement to the world—not by feats of intricate representation but by virtue of powers inviting full participation in how the world manages to appear. The poem can have the authority to speak because it does not interpret the world but presents it as an invitation to engage in how it deploys the intricacies of "as." In my *Wallace Stevens and the Demands of Modernity*, I offer an extended reading of this section as an example of what I call the "aspectual thinking" basic to Stevens's late work.[13] Aspectual thinking bypasses personal perspective because it acts as if the occasion were capable of inviting us to participate in how experience unfolds by gathering certain possibilities for

extending the physical parameters of given scenes. Various perspectives can all unite provisionally because they can become "part of the reverberation / Of a windy night as it is" (*CPP* 404). Then sight and insight themselves are not private states but become parts of the as-ness of how the mind composes its sensuous relation to place:

> The poem is the cry of its occasion,
> Part of the res itself and not about it.
> The poet speaks the poem as it is,
>
> Not as it was: part of the reverberation
> Of a windy night as it is, when the marble statues
> Are like newspapers blown by the wind. He speaks
>
> By sight and insight as they are. There is no
> Tomorrow for him. The wind will have passed by,
> The statues will have gone back to be things about. . . .
>
> In the end, in the whole psychology, the self,
> The town, the weather, in a casual litter,
> Together, said words of the world are the life of the world. (*CPP* 404)

The power of establishing aspects is probably clear here without any commentary at all: just think of how reverberation becomes a virtual synonym for the capacity of "seeing as" to transform plain sight, without savagery. But what is not clear, what was not even a question for me in writing the book, is what underlies our concern for these aspects. Or, to put the case more concretely, why do the final three stanzas of this section initially seem a substantial flattening of the almost ecstatic flow of reverberations that precede them? I think Stevens wants to honor what analogical thinking can make vital while also making visible powers of thinking that attach to the imagination's affective intensities the analogies rely on.

After indulging in a kind of ecstasy of connection, it seems as if the poem has to face up to the senses of change and of loss that pervade the analogies. The leaves are also residues or leavings that occupy the area between "is and was." So the poem has to ask whether resemblance can suffice as an account of the power of this occasion, given the satisfactions of being part of the res itself. The answer seems to reside in the momentary equivalence of "the presence of thought, / Resembling the presences of thoughts." The presence of thought inhabits the whirling leaves

because they remind us of how thinking becomes an active dimension of the scene as it is held up for self-reflection. But "the presences of thoughts" also introduce a very different set of entities. In one sense these presences are not as noteworthy as the more general singular state of thought that can be all-inclusive. In another sense they offer a distinctive model of mind—not absorbed in its own powers but observing those powers taking on particular presences, as if thinking and a sense of being could offer one and the same proximity to material reality. The presence of thought is an ontological condition that sees thought as inseparable from the objects of sight; the presences of thoughts involve a psychological condition embracing the ongoing transformational power of specific acts of self-consciousness.

Now the poem begins to appreciate not only the scene of transformation but the self-aware occasion of being "part of the res itself and not about it." By virtue of this level of concrete awareness, the mind can bring together the chain of appositions and allow the chain itself to be the ground for the final utterance of "words of the world are the life of the world": the life of the world is crucially different from a sense of a meaning for the world. Realization is not only bringing vitality and value to particular situations. Realization is the overall process of coming to terms with how language and value are co-constituents of our possible satisfactions in bringing the world and the word together. Here inner sensuousness retains its sense of process while enabling self-consciousness to see itself as continuous with a fundamental dynamic activity it shares with the entire scene.

IX

Were I capable of this level of poetic synthesis I would conclude here in this orgy of self-reflexive delight. Why does Stevens not do this? I think he thought that the poem's resolution, its heroizing of itself, was too easy, too quick to get to "we," without worrying sufficiently about what is involved in "reality grimly seen" as an alternative to "grim reality" (*CPP* 405). I propose, then, that this is why section XIII begins a series of quite particular engagements with an isolated and solipsistic set of characters, marked by a minimum of rhetorical afflatus and appositional processes. It seems now that the poem has to find an anchor for those processes by facing the mind's apparent need to engage the challenges to our sense of well-being posed by "the actual landscape" (*CPP* 405). "And yet" now seems too easy a negation of plain sight, so the poem has to return to difficulties involved in taking on an "eye that does not look / Beyond the object" (*CPP* 405).

This is the perfect time for Professor Eucalyptus to enter, because he does not want just satisfaction for the eye. He wants a mode of speech and of reflection

capable of locating divinity in human powers to see and to judge a complete picture of the real. His dream is to produce a more abstract language capable of extending the particulars of visibility into another dimension of self-consciousness without denying the "strength at the center" (*CPP* 407). For if he can take responsibility for how the world appears, he can also seek an individual will as his measure of happiness. But this capacity to produce value introduces a historical dimension to the poem's frequent reliance on theatrical metaphors. Does producing value open the protagonist to tragedy, or can the value afford comic conditions by fitting in with the world one has to negotiate? Stevens ultimately decides that these opposites are both traps unless one sees them as interrelated. It is possible—it must be possible—to reconcile the tragic with the comic if one sees that both dramatic forms have a rigidity of plot that misses the demand of the "commonplace."

Section XXI may be the most important thematic section in the poem because it recognizes the deep problems latent in the mode of thinking projected by Professor Eucalyptus. As in Hegel, realization cannot be thoroughly accomplished if one stresses only the first person, with its risks of evading much of the pressures history and necessity bring to bear:

> But he may not. He may not evade his will,
> Nor the wills of other men; and he cannot evade
> The will of necessity, the will of wills. (*CPP* 410)

So it should be no surprise that Professor Eucalyptus actually returns in all his pomposity, almost as if he has spent time offstage reflecting on what it might take to evade evasion:

> Professor Eucalyptus said, "The search
> For reality is as momentous as
> The search for god." It is the philosopher's search
>
> For an interior made exterior
> And the poet's search for the same exterior made
> Interior. . . .
>
> Creation is not renewed by images
> Of lone wanderers. To re-create, to use
>
> The cold and earliness and bright origin
> Is to search. Likewise to say of the evening star,
> The most ancient light in the most ancient sky,

That it is wholly an inner light, that it shines
From the sloppy bosom of the real, re-creates,
Searches a possible for its possibleness. (*CPP* 410–11)[14]

More generally, searching and brooding seem to possess significant family resemblances as they try to establish a new force within the real by engaging "the cold and earliness and bright origin" (*CPP* 411). That force is the sense of possibleness where imagination and brute fact seem capable of living one another's lives. Poetry becomes the space of possibleness.[15] And, as sections XXIII and XXIV present the case, the quieter the scene, the richer the habitation within "emptiness" (*CPP* 412), because consciousness manages to engage the presence of the possible.

I could go on to elaborate how the transitions toward the close of the poem are especially intricate because they have to reflect levels of intimacy forged by feelings of possibleness. Section XXV does not exactly repudiate what goes before. But it demands a sensibility capable of complicating what had appeared satisfying. There was more to "and yet" than the poem has yet understood. That sense of complication then shapes the rest of the poem. It had been content to track feeling—for objects and for modes of reflection in relation to the possibilities circulating around those objects. But I have gone on long enough about details and now must address the rather straightforward argument in the closing sections of the poem. While the points are clear, it takes careful attention to see how the writing makes the argument matter, in every sense of the term. For example, we have to feel the mild shock of the poem's turning from the situated moments that energize the previous several sections, to the sheer abstraction of the scholar's note in section XXVII, elaborating the relation between the ruler who "rules what is unreal" and the "Queen of Fact" (*CPP* 414). Then we can appreciate how the following section has to work from hypothetical generalizations back to a concrete world that turns out to be laden with speculation at the most concrete of levels. These concrete moments provide a home for the unreal so that a ground emerges for the poem speaking about its own processes of realization. Section XXVIII returns to the mode of section XII, where the poem self-reflexively attempts to define its own powers to engage reality:

If it should be true that reality exists
In the mind: the tin plate, the loaf of bread on it,
The long-bladed knife, the little to drink and her

Misericordia, it follows that
Real and unreal are two in one: New Haven
Before and after one arrives, or say,

Bergamo on a postcard, Rome after dark,
Sweden described, Salzburg with shaded eyes
Or Paris in conversation at a café. (*CPP* 414)

But now the poem is not just the cry of its occasion. And now there is no need for mythic rulers and queens of fact. There is only an emphasis on the power of logical hypotheticals to sponsor conclusions generating and supported by quite subtle and quietly intense feelings. How the real and the unreal interact in the rendering of detail is breathtaking. In these nine lines there are two basic sets of appositions, which perform quite different tasks. Huge psychological differences emerge under the guise of simple variations in fact and in angle of approach. New Haven before one arrives is a site for intense expectation; after one arrives there is another kind of unreality anchored in feelings of disappointment. Bergamo on a postcard is at once strangely exotic and utterly remote. Then the sequence of subtle feelings continues, all established by the imagination's capacities to involve itself in simple phrases. The unreal and the real become the true consorts, offering confidence that what is elemental in life can be richly satisfying if one opens oneself to one's fundamental powers.

The second set of appositions in this section is as abstract and speculative as the first is concrete. Now the situation has been prepared for extending the theory of poetry as realization of life to domains of possible behavior, all seen as having values virtually embedded in how they emerge:

This endlessly elaborating poem
Displays the theory of poetry,
As the life of poetry. A more severe,

More harassing master would extemporize
Subtler, more urgent proof that the theory
Of poetry is the theory of life,

As it is, in the intricate evasions of as,
In things seen and unseen, created from nothingness,
The heavens, the hells, the worlds, the longed-for lands. (*CPP* 415)

The basic challenge is here is to display a sense of total possibility that extends rather than replaces the concrete world. Enjambments establish one way to create this effect, because the readers have to participate in the emergence of the ideas, especially when the claims on the poem are revised via enjambment to those of the "more harassing master." Sound relations also help because they put the activity of mind concretely in the forms words take within the sentence, as adaptive rather than ecstatic modes of thinking. The two key words "in" and "as" are intricately folded into more elaborate words, like "evasions" and "intricate," as well as echoed in the crucial bonding of "seen" and "unseen." Finally, the somewhat vapid last line redeems itself in two ways. It matters that these worlds are all "created from nothingness" because poetry needs no distinctive ontological origins. And it matters that the list of appositions builds to the evaluative term "longed-for-lands." These lands are permanent possibilities for habitation taking place by imaginative projection that is in no way romantic or mythic.

X

The final three sections seem to me to function as a kind of coda or afterword, displaying the difference it might make to have accepted the overall sense of performative value enacted by this long poem. These sections do not build to much of a climax. Instead, they distribute possibilities of recognition, emotional attachment, and self-reflexive acceptance and contentment over different kinds of domains of reflection attuned to various experiences. They make the unreal inseparably an aspect of the real.

This hypothesis makes sense of the range of spaces and tones and interpretive modes in these closing meditations. Unreal and real prove themselves not just attributions generated by the mind. Instead, these conditions become manifest in a wide variety of simple situations whose possible significance they bring out as reflections on our investments in values. Section XXIX takes the form of a simple parable about different lands, which invokes the ubiquity and the power of change generated by the capacities for redescription. Section XXX turns to another kind of change rendered in an entirely different mode of expression. Here, change begins as the cause of significant melancholy because, in effect, nature also has the power to demand redescription: after all the seasons are aspects of its authorship. But the adaptive imagination need not be caught up in melancholy or despair. It can project possibilities of recasting even those redescriptions by shifting to a very different overall attitude that embraces opposites as modes of relation:

The barrenness that appears in an exposing.
It is not part of what is absent, a halt
For farewells, a sad hanging on for remembrances.

It is a coming on and a coming forth.
The pines that were fans and fragrances emerge,
Staked solidly in a gusty grappling with rocks. . . .[16]

It is not an empty clearness, a bottomless sight.
It is a visibility of thought,
In which hundreds of eyes, in one mind, see at once. (*CPP* 416)

The short sentences and end-stopped lines function as poetic versions of being staked solidly in a "gusty grappling with rocks." And the final negation offers the poem's last word on the opening "and yet." Now the thinking has found ways that "and yet" necessarily shares a space or a visibility with the structures of plain sight.

The final section turns from a natural scene to a cultural one. The sentence is intricate because of elaborate appositions that literally edge and inch toward some kind of final statement. Then, after all that labor, the final statement consists of a negative followed by a series of suggestions with no claim to any kind of certainty. Whatever the "force" referred to at the end, it will not be separate from this inching and edging. Instead, the force will be a condition of attention to the indirectness of how sounds take on significance:

These are the edgings and inchings of final form,
The swarming activities of the formulae
Of statement, directly and indirectly getting at,

Like an evening evoking the spectrum of violet,
A philosopher practicing scales on his piano,
A woman writing a note and tearing it up.

It is not in the premise that reality
Is a solid. It may be a shade that traverses
A dust, a force that traverses a shade. (*CPP* 417)

No wonder then that the premise "reality / Is a solid" has to be dismissed. The reference of "it" is deliberately too vague to sustain any premise. But in this case the vagueness is extraordinarily precise. Any statement about reality seems to run counter to the kind of performative engagement with shifting contexts

that the poem has been displaying. The relevant force here is the desire to flesh out and to celebrate the possibilities the poem can associate with what begins as plain sight. The reasons for this mode of activity, and the rewards for this mode of activity, will not be found in our repertoire of premises. Hence, the poem concludes with another negative that echoes the opening "and yet." Now, though, the negative is followed by the kinds of hypothetical permissions that activate a human sense of possibility, and so have the promise of ennobling how one engages with the objective world.[17] Stevens replaces the pursuit of "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" by demonstrating the power of treating fictionality as a fluid force fundamentally interwoven with our senses of the real. Reality may be what we have been encountering, and producing, all along by our passionate participation in these processes of unfolding. What is required to have a satisfying ordinary life for any person is simply to activate that person's extraordinary powers for dwelling in real possibility.

XI

I should probably stop here. But I want to report a strange experience of rereading *The Rock* in order to provide some answer to what his last long poem made possible for Stevens. I cannot ignore the simple material fact that Stevens probably felt himself too old and weak to sustain another extended performative space. It would have been utterly exhausting once again to extend the domain of imaginative intensities in order to elaborate various conditions by which "realization" modulates into habitation by giving a home to self-consciousness. But one also has to realize that given the prevailing tone of *The Rock*, the quest for variety would be redundant. "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" made it possible for Stevens to find a level of being where all places and all imaginative acts have fundamentally the same role, differing only in levels of intensity and modes of recognizing what can be involved in habitation. The poems repeatedly treat anywhere as everywhere, and performance by the "I" as realization of what "we" can assert for ourselves:

> Little by little, the poverty
> Of autumnal space becomes
> A look, a few words spoken.
>
> Each person completely touches us
> With what he is and as he is,
> In the stale grandeur of annihilation. (*CPP* 430)

It is almost as if the limitations imposed by a commitment to the real became in themselves a kind of guarantee that by accepting the demands imposed by a sense of necessity, one also gained the right imaginatively to absorb all space and time into the intricacies of virtually any present moment. Think of how important the indexical "here" becomes, literally in "A Quiet Normal Life" and "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour," and figuratively in what the figure of Ulysses brings to Penelope in "The World as Meditation." Think of what apposition becomes at the conclusion of "The Plain Sense of Things," where the poem fluidly shifts levels between what the rat sees and how the mind finds abstract predicates contained within the expansiveness of the scene. Think too of how the exemplary performer remains in "To an Old Philosopher in Rome," but now as a figure so aligned with the pleasure of embracing necessity that simple description establishes how he might display exemplary states of self-consciousness. Here self-awareness makes possible to encounter "every visible thing enlarged" without having to be metaphorically transformed.

And finally, think of how the simple image of the river in "The River of Rivers in Connecticut" allows an amazing correlation between the space created by an abstract and totalizing figure and a transformed site where the particular senses become fully a realization of inner sensuousness:

> It is not to be seen beneath the appearances
> That tell of it. The steeple at Farmington
> Stands glistening and Haddam shines and sways.
>
> It is the third commonness with light and air,
> A curriculum, a vigor, a local abstraction . . . [Stevens's ellipses]
> Call it, once more, a river, an unnamed flowing,
>
> Space-filled, reflecting the seasons, the folk-lore
> Of each of the senses; call it, again and again,
> The river that flows nowhere, like a sea. (*CPP* 451)

Here the imperative to provide names emerges simply from the awareness of what comes together "again and again" because of, and as, the flow of this river.

CHAPTER SIX

Making as Unmaking
How John Ashbery Altered the Ambitions of Constructivist Art

Have you begun to be in the context you feel . . . ?
—John Ashbery, "Evening in the Country"

Virtually all art emphasizes the manner of the making. But most Western art tries to naturalize that making by subordinating it to a coherent interpretive project. That interpretive project seems necessary in order to separate art from play as a means of establishing dignity of purpose: art can claim to interpret experience and to bring affective intensities by virtue of such interpretation. When we see Hamlet as melancholic character, we are also prepared to engage many subsidiary traits that seem continuous with that melancholy. So the combined interpretive work of the text and of the readers makes available quite subtle and intense affective responses to how we see these traits emerging. Lyric poetry has a more difficult task correlating interpretation with the rendering of aspects of the world, because it has to work with so much more compressed spaces and formal demands that reduce the available details. But that poverty can become a virtue if the poets produce modes of intense attention to how language might fuse with experience to provide momentary senses of liberation from our fates as social beings.

From James Thompson to the present, American and English poetry has cultivated this model of description emerging into surprise, or into a sense that blessedness of some kind is at hand. I have called this the epiphanic mode because I want to stress how diverse energies in writing initially subsume themselves under the parameters of practical understanding, only to create affectively charged

surprise by what can ultimately emerge from this plain sense of things. What resides within the describable can become an object of attention and invitation to speculative wonder.

This orientation was not satisfying for the writers I have been dealing with in this book. They sought a different ratio among making, describing, and interpreting. For it seemed to them that however enriched the understanding might become in attuning itself to works of art, devotion to that faculty severely limits the kinds of attention, passion, and speculation that art might provoke. Then these writers had to reconfigure what making asks of audiences, perhaps in the process calling into doubt the roles of dramatic interpretation that are the basic conduits whereby the understanding takes its hold on artworks constantly wriggling to escape its grasp. (As a youth in Long Island I used to fish for eel.)

This reconfiguring leads to new, or at least different, images of how audiences best respond to the works being produced. The new content minimizes dramatic situations that rely on descriptions capable of sustaining emotional investments. Instead, by stressing the making, or even foregrounding a logic or formal structure driven by the making, writers can offer readers states of self-consciousness that have to provide a sense of reality in how they produce configurations of affective experience stressing internal coherence. By inviting audiences to identify with the activity embedded in the writing, texts can put that audience in the position of feeling its own creative capacities to compose what counts as experience. Hence Picasso, hence Malevich, hence Pound and Moore and Loy and Williams and Eliot and Stevens.

John Ashbery was not that kind of constructivist poet. It is true that in his prose he emphasizes the act of making and identifies with surrealist freedom from the imperatives of practical understanding. But Ashbery wanted more distance than his constructivist predecessors from the pieties of humanist culture and the self-congratulatory rhetoric of what the artists were accomplishing for those of us less gifted. Take, for example, the fact that his poems often relish description, as in "The Instruction Manual" and "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror," although the route from description to the real world is highly mediated by complex attitudes that shape and foreground the making. More important, the constructivist dimension in Ashbery's writing is not primarily oriented toward the kind of inner sensuousness that emerges from highly structured formal and grammatical modes of patterning, as, for example, in Moore's and Eliot's best work. For Ashbery, composition becomes the quest for a continuous present afforded by constant invention. "The telling of the story is the story"[1] because it invites attention directly

to the processes we use to produce worlds rather than comment on what exists independently of the writing. It is not events but "their way of happening" in writing that most engages him (*SP* 12).

Because these ways of happening establish a focus for continuous attention, reading becomes a process of allowing modes of flow to replace structure as the major factor in defining the shape and power of the art object. And the emphasis on a continuous present creates a strange quality of absence because there seems a perennial deferral taking place between that writing and the conditions that motivate it.

As we will see, this is not quite a poetics of negation or privation. Rather, Ashbery emphasizes how what is becoming present as the experience of experience is also half-concealing something that remains on the margins and resists efforts at explicit formulation. The absence on the margins has to be suspected of playing a large part in what motivates the speaking and the thinking pursued by the text. Yet that large part cannot be subsumed within our standard stories of hidden inwardness, because the sense of enigma is so fully embedded in how surfaces take on presence in the poems. Ashbery learned from surrealism to cultivate an active "unknowing" cultivated by constructing planes of experience where the subconscious and the concrete mingle on equal terms.[2] This unknowing becomes a major feature of self-consciousness and hence of inner sensuousness redirected toward a space of exchange between mystification and mystery.

Traditional Western poetry assumes that readers and writers agree on the nature of the world invoked, so that they can focus on what is being highlighted in that world that seems worthy of emotional involvement. Ashbery's most interesting writing typically seeks dimensions of that shared world that hide in its recesses and elicit a writing to which they do not quite yield. This writing is charged with affect primarily because it must continually confront elements and forces that do not engage ordinary attention. Affect emerges from a strange combination of feelings for the inadequacy of what can be joined with the momentary eloquence of the saying. Both features beggar description, forcing affect to be located primarily in an inner sensuousness based on how self-consciousness comes to the foreground as what the poem substitutes for interpretation. Fascination with the stages of the saying can suffice.

Ashbery's texts focus on states that range from attention to the effects of light, shade, and subtle shifts in voice to the many ways that we might hear in our utterances the distorting residues of various texts embedded in cultural life. When we hear ourselves think, we provide an uneasy home for intricately interwoven and

sadly inadequate social sets of expectations and pressures.[3] And we discover that thinking itself offers its own domain of affective concreteness. But now the basis of that thinking is not the manifest qualities of structure but the pull of all that resists control by the mind. Inner sensuousness then is not a process of subsuming the world into writing but of finding that self-consciousness has to dwell in what is dimly but provocatively realized as one writes.

I will argue that while Ashbery shared the constructivists' passion for transcending the order of practical understanding, his version of resisting the authority of the understanding was insistently horizontal, not vertical. He realized that the more writing insists on its own processes of making imaginative states present, the more powerfully it could invite modes of apprehension that are at a considerable distance from the ways in which representational work seeks alliances between the understanding and the epiphanic. Writing appeals directly to an audience's capacity to orient itself to what seems to motivate the making. Unlike the modernists, however, Ashbery's stress on making allows him to envision states by which alternative modes of engaging the work are called for simply in the many ways complexities overflow the senses and resist submitting to any rules humans propose. While his ways of cultivating self-consciousness as inner sensuousness flow directly from modernist ambitions, self-consciousness in his work becomes largely a matter of tracking the affects that writing makes present as irreducible to the practices of ordinary understanding. The task of writing is not to interpret the world so much as to supplement what people take as real by providing modes of activity that become objects of fascination in their own right.[4] This resistance to the entire domain of interpretive practices does not stem from a structuring that proves itself capable of providing a body for passion. Instead, irreducibility in Ashbery derives from what we experience as intricate and delicate feelings for how half-hidden qualities of experience elicit energies for which practical thinking has no categorical frames.

I

I have two basic tasks in this chapter. The first is to provide a language for appreciating Ashbery that takes as its core his ways of continuing and of transforming the modes of inner sensuousness cultivated by constructivist values. The more that contemporary criticism becomes suspicious of any language for inwardness, the more difficult and the more potentially useful this task becomes. The second is to show how younger writers develop aspects of what

Ashbery makes of a process-based constructivism.[5] One could cite several writers who explore various parallels to Ashbery's commitment to emphasizing qualities of presence in the act of writing that cannot be subsumed under discourses emphasizing modes of knowing or constructivist desires for an art that could compose distinctive forms of order for experience. One of my favorite poets is Lisa Robertson, who turns to musicality and to grammatical resources for a lyric language that continually weaves absence into presence as inseparable dimensions of desire. Renee Gladman combines the skills of a visual artist with a constantly generative writing that pursues multiple modes of unmaking in response to the constant need for imagination to supplement the space of experience. Adam Fitzgerald is perhaps closest to Ashbery in his elegant renditions of negotiating the overdetermined qualities of public language. And Emily Skillings explores an Ashbery-like ontology of contingency, incompleteness, and inescapable contradiction.

But here I have concentrate on just one poet who must represent now two generations of writers who have tried to absorb and extend Ashbery's versions of the constructivist impulse. So I chose Geoffrey G. O'Brien because he has written most comprehensively on Ashbery, and he has developed an elaborate theoretical position on the importance for readers of encountering incompleteness and having to see their own efforts to negotiate that incompleteness. O'Brien also shares with many of his peers an obsession with politics that leads him to want to embrace a language of materialism, but only if it can be expanded to find ways to account for how and what making art can involve. As O'Brien puts it in "Sonnets So Far," from *Experience in Groups* (*EG*), obliquely commenting on Ashbery's reluctance to take up political concerns,

> . . . What is wanted
> Again for the first time is a pronoun
> For the we things don't run, a me
> Dreaming of more than Guadalajara
> From an office in the tower. (*EG* 30–31)

Now, though, we have to begin with Ashbery's work between 1966 and 1979, because that is the period where he was most engaged with what I have been calling constructivist concerns. Not surprisingly, this work has been central to the work of very fine critics, so there is not much new one can say. But I hope to add a general perspective on his enterprise during those years that can go a long way toward resisting two dominant views of Ashbery's poetry, while dramatizing what

in modernism still drives his work. One view stresses postmodern challenges to every kind of coherence and even every pursuit of presence as a dominant value: presence has to be a rhetorical construct that belies any claim to an enhanced mode of awareness of particular evanescent states of being. On this topic I will be brief and direct. Such criticism fails to distinguish between presence as an ontological fantasy promulgated by and then exposed by followers of Heidegger, and a presence entirely based on how the many dimensions of making can call attention to themselves. Such attention to sheer performance establishes what I will treat as a poetics of fascination rather than a poetics devoted to modifying how lyrics can stage models of perception. Here my guide is Roland Barthes, who ultimately defines fascination in terms of a distinction between the text of pleasure and the text of bliss (or *jouissance*). In the latter, "the subject is never anything but a 'living contradiction': a split subject who simultaneously enjoys, through the text, the consistency of his selfhood and its collapse, its fall."[6]

The second line of criticism is more recent and more troubling to me because it relies on invoking cultural contexts that challenge the effectiveness of any model of self-consciousness about making. Such criticism captures the anxieties of several contemporary poets, like O'Brien, that mind is no different from other natural functions, so writing poetry has to worry about accommodating itself to the findings of science, often in the hope that effort will locate capacities of human agency still to shape experience as well as to suffer it. The story of these anxieties, and so one context for this chapter, is superbly rendered in Nikki Skillman's *The Lyric in the Age of the Brain*, probably the best book on post–World War II American poetry in at least the past decade. Her primary interest is how Robert Lowell, Robert Creeley, A. R. Ammons, James Merrill, John Ashbery, and Jorie Graham deal with what poetry can become when "the poet becomes so vividly conscious of the billions of operations that stay his or her forms of thought, perception, memory and imagination" (p. 3). For example, Lowell in *Notebook 1967–68* devised a poetic form that was "a desperate, despairing picture of flesh itself, atomized and embedded in arbitrary arrangements of nature and history" (p. 45). More generally, Skillman traces how all these poets "exercise their genre's special aptitude for registering the powers and limits of human consciousness in the age of the brain" in order to come to terms with what they sense as "boundaries of 'interiority' per se" (p. 4). The poets have to ask "what human possibilities scientific reconceptions of selfhood and subjectivity have seemed to open, to foreclose, and to bring back into focus" (p. 5).

In Skillman's view, Ashbery handles this sense of the powers of nature over

what had been idealized as mind by cultivating what she calls "mindlessness," or the will to relish what does not submit to imposed order:

> Ashbery evokes mental life in its wholeness through constant negation, relishing the possibilities of the incomplete. Ashbery's unawareness, his forgetfulness, his narrowness of vision, his distractibility, his failures of comprehension, are qualities I condense in the term "mindlessness"—a condition he ascribes to objects and people alike, declining to distinguish between the nonconsciousness of insentient matter and the forms of inattention and non-comprehension that distinguish "the experience of experience," his major theme. (p. 169)

I agree completely with this emphasis on incompleteness and failures of comprehension. I disagree completely with the practical and historical implications of treating these traits as soliciting a term like "mindlessness," because it gives up far too much to the proponents of scientific models of the mind. Ashbery's deployment of the negative is far from mindless. Much of the success of his poems involves recognizing the effects of deliberate and careful choice. So my general quarrel with Skillman is with her projecting an essentially privative term like "mindlessness" in order to account for details and textual strategies that Skillman would admit often establish playful and celebratory moments of delight in the modes of self-consciousness that are freed when prevailing notions of mind are successfully challenged. Ashbery is not concerned with the absence of mind but the possibility of transforming our notions of how art can stage states of mind that can resist submitting to a world increasingly driven by the pathos Skillman so accurately diagnoses. (Although Skillman cites Andrew Dubois's *Ashbery's Forms of Attention*, her claims about the poem's failures of attention never face Dubois's insistence that Ashbery's primary accomplishment is the refocusing of attention away from the habits of epiphanic lyricism.[7])

II

Let us put an entire poem up as an example of mindful working against culturally preferred models of mind, before I begin to generalize about Ashbery's particular versions of how he can link an ideal of inner sensuousness to the workings of a constructivist imagination decidedly resistant to everything Modernist Constructivism thought necessary for the arts. This is "Street Musicians," the opening poem of *Houseboat Days*:

One died, and the soul was wrenched out
Of the other in life, who, walking the streets
Wrapped in an identity like a coat, sees on and on
The same corners, volumetrics, shadows
Under trees. Farther than anyone was ever
Called, through increasingly suburban airs
And ways, with autumn falling over everything:
The plush leaves the chattels in barrels
Of an obscure family being evicted
Into the way it was, and is. The other beached
Glimpses of what the other was up to:
Revelations at last. So they grew to hate and forget each other.

So I cradle this average violin that knows
Only forgotten showtunes, but argues
The possibility of a free declamation anchored
To a dull refrain, the year turning over on itself
In November, with the spaces among the days
More literal, the meat more visible on the bone.
Our question of a place of origin hangs
Like smoke: how we picnicked in pine forests,
In coves with the water always seeping up, and left
Our trash, sperm and excrement everywhere, smeared
On the landscape, to make of us what we could.[8]

This poem actually plays off epiphanic poetry in the sense that it comes to a surprising resolution based on narrative elements in the poem. So even in this dimension it is far from mindless, because mind is acutely at work in varying the epiphanic elements.

It is true that the narrative is deliberately not clear in its elements. But mind is also clearly at work putting a great deal of pressure on the possible logical framework provided by the two "so"s. These grammatical elements are manifestly central to the transition between stanzas, especially when we see how they also stage relations among pronouns. Therefore it is possible, and perhaps necessary, to speculate on how the abruptness of the transition established by the relation of each "so" to the "other" itself provides a figure for alternative models of thinking. Asking what it feels like to have to guess about pronounced transitional grammatical

elements may in fact be a good way to share Ashbery's concerns in the poem to make something of our appalling naturalness.

I surmise that the first "so" involves a coming to self-consciousness about what follows from the poem's effort at narrative. The best that narrative can produce here is a kind of knowledge that demands pronouns like "one" and the "other" because the lack of intimacy or expressivity is crucial to the situation. The distance embedded in the pronouns matches the mode of the telling, as if the basic effect of the revelation were a repetition of the original situation. The only change the narrative registers is the change from a sense of possibility denied by death to an increasing alienation or sense of eviction perhaps accompanying the desire for sheer accuracy. This "so" adapts to strict causality as the presiding aura of reflection: it seems that no human bonds can escape the perennial story of growing "to hate and forget each other."

Not so with the second "so." This "so" implies the possibility of expressive causality in the sense that the agent seems to have justifications that spread beyond rationality for cradling this "average violin." And this "so" seems to enact agency, as if it were the result of hearing the initial claim. Here the switch in pronouns provides one way of interpreting the difference from the first stanza, because we are now in the midst of first-person pronouns trying to anchor themselves in performance rather than in description. Now the speaker is not observing the musicians but imitating their playing. We have to shift from worrying about a narrative to wondering what seems to be in the process of replacing the need for narrative in the first place. The "free declaration" actually provokes description of the November scene rather than depending on it. But this "I" has to learn what it means to be subsumed into the first person plural. And that means having to face the core of all narrative—the question of origins. In one sense, that question just returns to the despair of the first stanza in a finer and more elegant tone. Yet there remains a condition of acceptance and solidarity quite different from that first stanza. I think the difference is carried by how the verb "could" correlates with the series of first person plural pronouns. "Could" adapts much of the indefiniteness of the poem into a profound yet limited sense of possibility for investing emotionally in all that description makes difficult to accept. That sense of hope's vague opening to the positive seems all that is necessary to get somewhat free of all that the reliance on description entails.

Minimally this stanza provides terms for solidarity and plurality in relation to what "could" be the case, without the divisive despair that results from the first stanza's efforts at narrating dramatic situations. There is also a more specific

eloquence involved in the final pronoun being the "us" of acceptance rather than the "we" of struggle. There is no "would" involved in this "could," because "could" involves bare engagement with human wastefulness and wastedness. That shift parallels the "could" of limited options opposed to a possible "would" that would turn on the agency possible for "we." Listen again to how the phrasing here has a weight provided largely by the elegant enjambments giving this "could" a dimension of respect despite its very bleak setting:

> In coves with the water always seeping up, and left
> Our trash, sperm and excrement everywhere, smeared
> On the landscape, to make of us what we could.

("Smeared" is especially felicitous because of how its duration combines overt echoes of "sperm" and more subtle parallels with the other "e" sounds in the line.) By becoming "us," this final "we" takes on a clarity capable of accepting what our history reveals about human impositions on a natural order. And it evocatively provides a drastic shift from the echoes of how this expression might normally read—as "making of us what it could."

"Could" then becomes a way of gathering and holding out what may be quite minimal hopes for something not bound to utter repetition. Given the lucidity of these lines, these hopes seem inseparable from a capacity for sheer and precise acceptance. We can summarize the action of the entire poem as performing a turn from the space of narrative echoed in the enjambments to asking readers to accept a cogent suggestiveness that cannot make explicit assertions without entering the domain of rhetoric and so the domain of self-delusion. Objectivity provides an unshakable contrast with an indefinite condition of agency that may be mostly illusion, but also cause for turning toward what might be positive achievement.

III

What in this poem might be considered an adequate reflection of Ashbery's poetics? I see four major elements. First, the poem is fundamentally performative rather than descriptive. Its power depends not on the situation or a dramatic evocation but on how the specific making defines itself as a mode of self-consciousness inviting audience participation. The poem subsumes its own opening narrative into something for which it takes responsibility. Second, that performative power depends in turn on the poem's capacity to create for itself a present tense in which the working of the poem challenges and directs the

audience's understanding of their capacities for emotional investment. Meaning occurs primarily by working with uncertain hypotheses that develop value for what we might call "a space in between knowings." In this respect the vagueness of "could" is a marvelous location for building an elaborate edifice that might support self-reflection on why vagueness could matter as a gathering site for significant states of mind.

Third, what is performed is primarily a matter of multiple relations among the voices echoed in the poem. "Street Musicians" is by no means the best example of this. And we can see how the journey in the first stanza through "increasingly suburban airs" invokes sociological prose and then gives way to darker versions of an existential language as the poem shifts to the metaphoric register of a family evicted into the philosophical register of "the way it was, and is." But the precision of the final monosyllables suggest a final register that may be distinctive to poetry because of its power to position self-consciousness without the aid of concepts.[9]

Fourth, there is what the poem asks of its audience. There is a specific experience produced by the sequence. But the poem seems less interested in persuading the audience of anything than of fascinating it into caring about this display: poetry seems to supplement description by inviting us to partake of affects that uneasily but inescapably attach to that rending of objectivity. Hegelian language still provides the best theoretical fit here because Ashbery combines resistance to any description securing the authority of outer sense while inviting the audience to reflect on how they might participate self-reflexively in the qualities of movement captured in the speaking. His poems frequently stage reflective experience while undercutting any explicit program for interpreting what is being staged. The precision of the language in its play between "the extreme austerity of an almost empty mind / Colliding with the lush Rousseau-like foliage of its desire to communicate" (*ACP* 519) constitutes the primary sensuousness of the poem as it comes to life for self-consciousness as the minding of "mindlessness."

IV

Now we have a concrete example that both sustains and clarifies basic claims in Ashbery's critical writing. So we can now turn to cataloging how what we have isolated in a particular poem reflects central concerns in his ideas during the period under consideration of what poetry might pursue as a cultural practice distinctive to imaginative conditions of life late in the twentieth century. The most important feature of this critical prose is its almost constant reminders

of the kinds of presence both painting and writing can establish, perhaps because he is adamant that audiences not turn to interpretive questions that displace the work into generalizations mediated by it. To seek presence is to attend carefully to what is actually going on within the work. Ashbery's poems stage feeling-laden thinking as a set of processes for absorbing features of the world within the powers of medium—in the hope of intensifying fascination with style as an aspect of experience.

This insistence on presence manifests itself from Ashbery's earliest critical writing. Take, for example, his brilliant early essay on Gertrude Stein's *Stanzas in Meditation*.[10] The kind of presence he values involves a sharp contrast between reference to events and their way of happening in the text. Not surprisingly, he draws an extended parallel with the late work of Henry James while recognizing Stein's unique passion for creating "a counterfeit of reality more real than reality" (*SP* 15):

> Just as life seems to alter the whole of what has gone before, so the endless process of elaboration, which gives the work of these two writers a texture of bewildering luxuriance—that of a tropical rain-forest of ideas—seems to obey some rhythmic impulse at the heart of all happening. (*SP* 13)

Presence involves becoming absorbed in or fascinated by the processes of elaboration pursued by the text. Stressing the modes of presence achieved by the work has significant parallels with the notions of the heresy of paraphrase that Ashbery imbibed as an English major at Harvard, graduating in 1949. But there are several significant differences from New Critical values. Most important, Ashbery does not have to make a case for the autonomy of the art object, apart from the messiness of life. His concern is simply with how attention to the processes of writing provides a distinctive access to significant experiences that are unavailable to empiricist versions of the mind in action. It is the experience, not the work per se, that is drastically simplified by interpretive paraphrase.

Ashbery's remarks on Jasper Johns provide a useful index of how Ashbery modifies what he actually calls the work's "fascination and autonomous power" (*SP* 73) in directions very different from Kant's. For autonomous power is not an alternative to reality but a way of engaging it by resisting any standing still (*SP* 65). The art itself defines this motion and takes responsibility for it—as the artist's way of distinguishing between the dependency of description and the plenitude of construction, often with something different for each reader:

> [A painting by Johns] "can't be explained in any other terms than its own, and is therefore necessary. . . . This is in fact what the work does for itself: it produces a charged atmosphere of conflicting invitations and exclusions. . . . We cannot "understand" the record of changes Johns has kept, but we can appreciate the amplitude of the means with which he orchestrates his untranslatable statement. (*SP* 69–70)

The untranslatable becomes precisely what affords the work its reality as experience. This version of the real resists displacement and substitution far better than Kant's because there is no talk of symbol or of the morally good. There is only the amplitude of means by which aspects of the real take their place in the artist's enterprise.

Second, this amplitude of means takes the form of a kind of generosity of the text that breaks sharply from the imposition of discipline basic to modernist ascetic resistance to all kinds of rhetorical self-congratulation. Rather than presenting itself as an ideal object, the poem becomes an unstable offering; poets have to recognize how diverse their audiences are and how diverse the poem can be in its range of imaginings. Ashbery writes in constant fear of any kind of monumental or interpretive ideal (see, for example, *SP* 18) because the poem that can be object is in a sense already dead, conquered by its history of commentary rather than breaking out as surprising invitations for further development. The poem has to issue from a subject seeking to connect to other living subjectivities—hence one reason for the gaps in sense that virtually require different ways of going on among readers. And going on might involve inventing on the basis of what has just been invented. An open-ended poetry can be committed from the start to resist the kinds of closure that involve growing to hate and forget each other's creative uncertainties.

A third difference from New Critical views involves quite significant changes in thinking about the nature of the presences afforded by a poetic text. When Derrida engaged what he saw as the fantasy of Heideggerian discourse about art, he referred to a metaphysical ideal of presence: art was asked to bring something out of forgetfulness to the insistent vitality of constant becoming. By casting the issue this way, one could expose how criticism in the arts had minimized the importance of the medium. The presence achieved by the work is a staged presence or rhetorical presence—not achieved by insight or openness so much as by the technique of the artist that has to be erased if religiosity is to reign. But presence for Ashbery is not a condition of reference to the world, at least not directly. Nor

is it an ideal to be ironized in the fashion of Language poetry. A sense of presence is established in Ashbery's work by how the artifact engages the audience. This matters because then there need not be a sharp opposition between presence and absence, or value and fact. Presence is a framing condition and not an attribute of specific references. The pursuit of presence becomes a framework for every kind of experience. Presence can include the negotiation of absences, since the more an audience emphasizes how the text becomes present, the more they are likely to become involved in the auras or shadows circulating within an engaged reading.[11]

I can best illustrate my claim here by turning to two eloquent passages. The first occurs in a discussion of Raymond Roussel late in Ashbery's career:

> Succinctness was perhaps his chief aesthetic concern, but it was a highly verbose concentrate that resulted, leaving one to guess at all that had been left out to arrive at writing that has incredible specific gravity. The monumentality of what has been left out is the key to the humor. (*SP* 293)

This is not a leaving out business that can be aligned with any language of "mindlessness." Ashbery does introduce *Three Poems* with this comment: "I thought that if could put it all down, that would be one way. And next the thought came to me that to leave it all out would be another, and truer way" (*ACP* 247).[12] But his comment on Roussel indicates what he meant, especially since the quotation occurs early in a book that leaves a great deal in, and "leaving out" seems dialectically intertwined with putting it all down. Leaving out is primarily a dramatic means of allowing the perimeters of scenes, absent and present, to attain equal status with what might have been in the center. Unmaking is one way of intensifying the effects of making—while also undercutting modernist claims to monumentality and explicit universality.

The second passage cites Ashbery on Pierre Reverdy, being careful to define the kinds of presences that emerge, because the French poet focuses on what would seem absent in any rendering more eager to get the facts of the matter:

> Even such a poem as the following one from *Plupart du temps* which seems quiet as a breeze, as simple as a glass of water . . . is a highly complex organism: like a plant's, its growth obeys hidden pressures and atmospheric changes, the subtle alteration of the sense of a verb, the introduction of a new pronoun are like very fine traps constructed to catch something invisible which was passing. (*SP* 22)

This passage does not quite identify with Reverdy. Rather, it uses him to open audiences to the values of stressing what is hidden in relation to our typical interpretive

practices. Ashbery's primary mode of absence is quite different. It is questions about voice and voicing that are the most important sources of Ashbery's deliciously incomplete modes of presence. This awareness of the limitations of any given voice allows what becomes present to verge always on a kind of absence because it proves virtually impossible to fix in the form of stable substance.

This dynamic ranges from his play on indecipherable pronoun reference to his constant switching levels of diction to his producing a sense that voice is made up of other voices in the public sphere. This multiplicity gives the lyric considerable resonance but also challenges any ideal of authentic personal expression. The presence of these voices, these traces of voices, and the desire for more explicit voicing calls attention to how unreliable the psyche is—especially when it feels urgent desires to give a reliable account of itself. In one domain of voicing, sheer intricacy of nuance overwhelms our efforts to fix distinctions and attribute purposes. Voices reveal other voices. Think of how need pervades bravado, or how desires of many kinds interweave with forms of caring or forms of dispute, or how the description so prized by the empiricist spirit can contain within it states ranging from fear of inadequacy to a longing for more explicit states to emerge where values might be entwined with those descriptions. And there is the domain of social coding or ideological structures that pervade much of our interpersonal interchange without quite being identifiable as serving particular purposes. We hear the social embeddings but we cannot be clear what force they have on the particular discourse, although we also know we have to put the impersonal under scrutiny as we attempt to clarify what might be personal in a given expression. The complexities of voicing as invitations for readerly participation become the domain of inner sensuousness.

V

I now have the impossible task of choosing one poem by Ashbery that will combine all these features in a way that establishes the modes of inwardness pervading his surfaces. The poem chosen has to be long enough to stress the fluid vagueness and abrupt shifts in register that constitute the primary connective threads in the poem. But it also has to make such permutations significant because of how one's sensibility might be modified by conceiving these vacillations as calling upon significant powers available for self-consciousness. I have chosen "Soonest Mended," for two reasons. First, Ashbery sees the poem as his "OSFA (i.e., one size fits all) confessional poem" (*SP* 6). This description is

perfect Ashbery—deeply ironic but not dismissive, since he realizes it is far easier to mock the confessional than to escape it. We then have to ask how Ashbery can adapt to the demands of the confessional impulse while producing an ironic awareness within the inevitable traces of this version of the epiphanic impulse that, rather than put the self in nature, puts nature within the self.

This question leads to my second reason. The lines are so lively that one easily overlooks the prosaic nature of the actual sentences. This matters because Ashbery makes patently visible his major innovation as a poet (an innovation that in fact restores a major source of vitality of Renaissance poetic traditions): he replaces a focus on the dramatic epiphanic image by stressing the twisting and turning of sentences that vary between providing information and providing self-reflexive ways of absorbing and deploying that information. In "Soonest Mended" the play of sentences combines two kinds of activity basic to the confessional impulse. The poem's sentences must temporarily stabilize the self to the degree that some actual version of its interests and stylistic fascinations become visible. But this stabilization must also honor the sense of multiple voices contending for the confessional stage, with each voice suggesting differently inflected selves.

The title "Soonest Mended" relies on the proverb "Least said, soonest mended." Ashbery probably dropped the first part of the expression because he wanted an ironic reminder that in his world there is no "least said," or at least no "least thought." Yet the poem's forgetting is also a reminder of the reader's possible remembering as one background for the poem. And, at the other pole, there is the possibility that mending is all that we do when we turn to personal expression. To try to confess is to enter an endless chain of various speakings and unstable gatherings. That suppressed aspect of the proverb makes what was originally a source of emphatic closure actually hang in the air, a talisman that both provokes and provides a telos for much more saying. Yet what hangs in the air perhaps holds out a promise that there can be mending if one manages to shift one's attitude toward this compulsion to speak.

If speaking desires to close off a topic, it is doomed to frustration. But if one can learn to hear the absences generated by this speaking's efforts to find adequate language, one can simply embrace the constant need to start over as all there is, and perhaps all there need be, because each language reflects a partial home. Accepting that kind of constantly provisional home may be our means of seeing what the act of mending holds out as real possibility. Here making and unmaking live one another's lives and die one another's death—a sharp division from the making that can by means of form provide a compelling image for its own passionate

self-consciousness. Making and unmaking become a rough parallel to Stevens's imagination and fact each dramatizing the significance of the other.

Ashbery begins this chain of speakings by modulating between the voice of sociology and the voices by which the subject relies on imagination in order to identify with (while also displacing) the condition described:

> Barely tolerated, living on the margin
> In our technological society, we were always having to be rescued
> On the brink of destruction, like heroines in *Orlando Furioso*
> Before it was time to start all over again.
> There would be thunder in the bushes, a rustling of coils,
> And Angelica, in the Ingres painting, was considering
> The colorful but small monster near her toe, as though wondering whether forgetting
> The whole thing might not, in the end, be the only solution. (*ACP* 184)

Then the poem cites another time when a cartoon figure represents being watched over, only to turn self-reflective, first about the moment in time referred to and then about how its own judgment gets rendered. Notice the plain conversational style, without the play of metaphor; and notice how the speaker constantly hears and comments on his own speaking:

> Only by that time we were in another chapter and confused
> About how to receive this latest piece of information.
> *Was* it information? Weren't we rather acting this out
> For someone else's benefit, thoughts in a mind
> With room enough and to spare for our little problems (so they began to seem),
> Our daily quandary about food and the rent and bills to be paid?
> To reduce all this to a simple variant,
> To step free at last, miniscule on the gigantic plateau—
> This was our ambition: to be small and clear and free. (*ACP* 184)

The language tries to attune itself to this desire for precise clarity, which it is at times capable of achieving. But the sense of being in someone else's power haunts even this speaking. "Quandary" is an academic and imposed word. This emergence of theatricalized pathos suggests how far this wish is from any kind of freedom or clarity. The more the speaker asserts, the more he makes problematic, because the control is always partial and fleeting, but also constantly generative of other voices.

In this case the poem shifts attention to the summer's waning energy before setting up a contrast between an exaggerated pathos rife with metaphor, and a

helpless listening to how the psyche's terms betray a profound self-evasion, even as they seem accurately to state the dilemma of a generation:

> Now there is no question even of that, but only
> Of holding on to the hard earth so as not to get thrown off,
> With an occasional dream, a vision: a robin flies across
> The upper corner of the window, you brush your hair away
> And cannot quite see, or a wound will flash
> Against the sweet faces of the others, something like:
> This is what you wanted to hear, so why
> Did you think of listening to something else? We are all talkers
> It is true, but underneath the talk lies
> The moving and not wanting to be moved, the loose
> Meaning, untidy and simple like a threshing floor. (*ACP* 185)

Here the poem gets lyrical, and dangerously seductive. It makes present the effort of holding on to the hard earth with a new attention to detail like the robin's flying. And that detail seems to invite an appeal to "you"—as if the turn to the world warranted a turn to other people, or at least to this ambiguous pronoun invoking other people. But if "you" is unanchored, it produces endless anxiety about the other person's attentions and intentions. So there is considerable pressure to subsume this indefinite "you" into the promise of agreement by turning to the collective "we," now buttressed by a complex awareness of both the need to talk and the need to listen for what occurs beneath the talk. Presence and absence come to seem inseparable—as perhaps the condition enabling the fantasy of speaking for this collective subjectivity.

Yet the poem immediately recognizes that this sense of "we" is only the felt aspect of its projections of memory and appeal for sympathy. If there is a "we," there has to also be a "they." And when "they" emerge, there also emerges an objective condition that threatens any felt inwardness. This threat intensifies the need for what pathos can stage, since this staging at least introduces a level of feeling able to resist those sentences that try to erase selfhood into knowledge. That knowledge however can only sink in if it can also pervade the space of metaphor in which the pathos of the agents has been playing itself out—here with extraordinarily ornate figuration, as if the energy of the claimed realization could substitute for any tests of its truth:

They were the players, and we who had struggled at the game
Were merely spectators, though subject to its vicissitudes
And moving with it out of the tearful stadium, borne on shoulders, at last.
Night after night this message returns, repeated
In the flickering bulbs of the sky, raised past us, taken away from us,
Yet ours over and over until the end that is past truth,
The being of our sentences, in the climate that fostered them,
Not ours to own, like a book, but to be with, and sometimes
To be without, alone and desperate.
But the fantasy makes it ours, a kind of fence-sitting
Raised to the level of an esthetic ideal. (*ACP* 185)

Two features substantially qualify this apparent moment of achieving self-possession. The neediness driving the poem comes out again in the clause "and sometimes / To be without, alone and desperate," even when the dominant mode is of a kind of triumph. The second feature consists in how quickly the subsequent lines change course, accepting the constancy of change and seeking "to stay cowering / Like this in the early lessons" (*ACP* 185).

That acceptance seems to generate a surprising dialogue between "you" and "I" that professes skepticism about all efforts to make sense of time: "probably thinking not to grow up / Is the brightest kind of maturity for us, right now at any rate" (*ACP* 186). Then the poem has to face the question of what reasonable alternative there is to growing up. Amazingly the poem does come up with an alternative that actually addresses the demands of confessional poetry:

For this is action, this not being sure, this careless
Preparing, sowing the seeds crooked in the furrow,
Making ready to forget, and always coming back
To the mooring of starting out, that day so long ago. (*ACP* 186)

This one-size-fits-all confessional poem resolves not by locating an inner self but by understanding the kind of "thisness" that grounds all needs for expression. This speaking does not find any epiphany, but it does reconcile itself to the importance of seeking epiphany. After all, a crucial impulse to self-consciousness resides in the quest for a language that allows its feelings of distinctiveness, and its worries about authenticity, to become embodied in language while recognizing that for a

speaker that language might reflect real situations only in its awareness of starting out over and over. Continually starting out will not satisfy the mind's need for answers to its questions. But it can perhaps satisfy that other hunger of the mind oriented toward feeling that something central to the self can be visible solely by virtue of its continuous activity. Here the mind can feel the enjambments as sowing the seeds and always coming back to the mooring of starting out.

Such acceptance would come to terms with the sense of impermanence resulting from the poem's awareness of destructive aspects of time. The concluding phrase "that day so long ago" indicates that even the stability of accepting the need for continually starting over will not quite erase the mind's competing desire to use the present to flesh out memory. But the acceptance may at least temper despair over how time erases all beginnings, because the poem has attuned itself to another kind of mooring that one can reasonably hope will endure as a commitment to process rather than to any belief in the self as substance. This is the way talk gets mended—by coming to identify with those states of self-consciousness where we see the inevitability of the dissatisfaction that has to be our satisfaction. There is for this poet only the pleasures involved in exploring modes of flow that undermine the referential power of language, because this focus on process actually adapts to the generative conditions of having one's mind fully attuned to living in time.

VI

O'Brien specifies his affinities with Ashbery most clearly in his essay "Clepsydra."[13] O'Brien's affinities with Ashbery begin in his complete agreement with the older poet's judgment that American poetry is in crisis because its mainstream practitioners have failed to break from what are now common and boring modes of structuring experience. Both poets think that popular lyric forms virtually demand easy sympathies and satisfying emotional attunements to carefully prepared concluding senses of revelation. So both poets need to pursue radical strategies for freeing the mind from the blinders of tradition and the pomposities so often found in work that celebrates its own sensitivities. On the level of authorial purpose, they want to provide alternatives to work that relies on epiphanic models for lyric intensity because those models encourage clichéd strategies for moving from description to something like wonder. It just seems too easy, and too misleading about what really matters for the mind, to emphasize forms of attention based on description while ignoring the unrepresentable recesses that emerge through the writing process.[14] This is why both Ashbery and

O'Brien offer not mindlessness but the resistance of the energies of mind to cognitive roles. And in pursuing this goal they produce examples capable of resisting the kinds of interpretation of consciousness typically pursued by contemporary neuroscience.

But neither poet spends much time complaining. As O'Brien puts it, both poets focus on the movements of mind elicited directly by the writing rather than the production of images and metaphors "aimed at calculated illusionary effect" (QT 35). Their primary concern is not to absorb the reader within a situation that has a kind of independent reality, like that of Yeats's Irish airman foreseeing his death. Instead, they want readers to recognize at every moment how the text is soliciting their participation in the sonic and grammatical gestures by which the poem engages its subject matter. In reading both poets, then, we have to become aware of our own reactions to how specific stylistic choices engage self-consciousness as it responds to the "'is'" of writing.[15] That "is" offers a mode of presence that proves inseparable from states of incompleteness and longing that have no dramatic resolution. The goal of writing poetry becomes not the realization of deep truths but the exercise of participating in how imaginative writing processes the medium by which feelings are elicited. Both poets are bound to states of inner sensuousness mediated by self-consciousness focused on what happens in the writing.

The sharpest reading I know of the enigmatic lushness characteristic of Ashbery's work is O'Brien's reflection on why the water clock invoked by "Clepsydra" can be a significant figure for writing:

> The beginning of "Clepsydra" stages a present moment of reading already set between two lacks, and as its present moves forward through the poem these times to the right and the left will remain, unresolved and unrequited. In refusing to be specific or end itself (these are the same thing) the poem's first question becomes the question of all speech: what, where, and when is it? As water passes through the waterclock the world's pace can be described, but on either side of the moment of measurement is only undifferentiated water, water that is either the lost past of measurement or the potential for more of it. (QT 135)

Then O'Brien hones in to observe the possible effects of grammatical intricacy:

> These two kinds of indifferentiation look, unsurprisingly, the same: "Each moment / Of utterance is the true one; likewise none are true." The possible subject-verb disagreement of "none are true" makes even "is" and "are" seem the

> same, acceptably athwart the false and the accurate. Not the utterance but the time it measures is true and on both sides of that emphatic moment of speaking are its recyclable materials. . . . In fact what becomes "felt but unavailable" in this constant movement persists as "implication, expectation, and blur." (QT 138)

Perhaps I should apologize for the length and density of these quotations. But they put us in an excellent position for moving on to more general observations illustrating how O'Brien is superbly attuned to Ashbery's overall aesthetics of presentation. He takes over three basic principles in Ashbery's writing and to a substantial degree alters and develops their valences. The most emphatic one is a commitment to what I have been calling "presentation," or an emphasis on "the is of writing": the poem develops by hearing what it displays as a condition of reading the world "rather than building to a meaning." Second, the resistance to conventional models of lyric meaning requires that the reader's self-consciousness is the focus of the poem. O'Brien emphasizes all that is involved in continual movement for a reader rather than in the kinds of coherence produced by interpretation.[16] Finally, reading takes place in a "a placeless place" where we read "not of things but of dispositions toward the thingly" because reading poetry need not be a matter of referring but can invite the negotiating of understandings that derive from a common language but seem without any clear anchor.[17]

VII

Here our primary task is to stress how O'Brien adapts these features of Ashbery's work to a very different agenda, providing models of invoking states of inner sensuousness for readers who participate fully in the movement of his lyrics. Ashbery elaborated an intricate fluidity of agency within these voices and the play of personal pronouns with multiple possible referents. O'Brien seeks a very different kind of fluidity. He does not emphasize the enigmatic flow of discourses into one another, and at times through one another, as in "Soonest Mended." Instead, O'Brien calls attention to a different kind of flow based on constant conflict between the weight of individual lines and the processes involved in the reader's efforts to stabilize relations between these lines.

This poem, "Constantly So Near," exhibits the richness of O'Brien's technical skills in 2002, a time when he was barely thirty years old. I quote the first twelve lines from an eighteen-line opening sentence:

I thought the thinking of going to sleep
thrown on like a coverlet of flame

which urges the body beneath it
to a sultry kind of ownerlessness

in which the famous obedience of limbs
submits like the non-public aspect of flame

to being only the yellow ash
of some almost glimpsed but yielded thing

in a space not quite lashed by experience
but still lent to the losing of it

or a just-missed train whose passage hangs
about the station in a great veil of dust.[18]

The title here tells us a lot about O'Brien's ambitions as a poet. He does not seek dramatic coherence that might express aspects of personal identity. Instead, he wants to display how a mind can find comfort in the dynamics of a sense of proximity, where states of similarity and of difference keep invoking one another. How else can one write about being on the border of sleep—able to envision its releasing one from care but only because the speaking is caught in a thinking that cannot slip into the sleep, which its inability makes extremely attractive? The title also refers to the style, especially to the refusal to complete the sentence and to the constant modification that becomes the generative principle of the poem. Each line connects oddly but effectively to its predecessor. And each pair of lines seems to have considerable independent weight, which is nonetheless open to the process of modification generating the following two lines. Rarely does one see poetry so attentive to the ways in which relative clauses mobilize thought. And it is even more rare to feel the constant need for adjectives so prevalent in lines 4–8. Our poetry instructors like Pound tell us to go in fear of adjectives. But these instructors very rarely develop a mobility and delicacy of sensibility that requires gestures tying the activity of mind to a sense of substantial weight, even though the poem's inventiveness keeps defeating those gestures.

O'Brien formulated everything I am saying about the poem several years later in an essay on the left margin of Whitman's poetry. And that essay in turn will lead us into the efforts in O'Brien's relatively recent work to keep expectations of stability constantly so near, but never triumphant over what we can call, paraphrasing Ashbery, the moorings of always starting over again:

> My topic is the left margin, that space of reinauguration that has traditionally been emphasized, perhaps almost by default, when a poet deliberately refrains from using traditional right margin resources such as rhyme or even meter which, though everywhere in the line, finds its identity only when completed at line's end. This matters to me as both a practitioner and reader for two reasons: 1) because we seem to be living in a time in which most of those right-margin forms feel unavailable—overfreighted with bad histories or standing as nostalgic, falsifying pattern-consolations for the abyssal complexity and damage of everyday life; and 2) because even if rhyme and meter are currently nearly vitiated, I think their effects must be produced by other means; otherwise poetry suffers an actual loss of system complexity rather than simply enjoying a permutation of method. Poetry can ecstatically or soberly give up any form, but when it gives up Form I'm not sure it's still a genre.[19]

The right margin is the place of all sorts of closure, ranging from the intensities of rhyme and meter to the completion of dramatic scenes and eloquent argument. The left margin, in sharp contrast, is the place of revision, hesitation, and beginning again to test alternative formal modes of eliciting thinking and of feeling. For it is at the left margin where the reader enters and keeps reentering the poem. Attending to the work of the left margin requires careful engagement in what happens as the reader makes decisions that bring life to an otherwise inert object. And it is the left margin that offers us a way out of the potentially constrictive framework imposed by Modernist Constructivism, where virtues like balance and integrity retain supreme. Modernism takes control over what flows by attending to the structures that support it. (Think of Malevich for how balance is achieved within flow. And think of Moore's "A Grave" for a radical sense of closure on every level as the grammatical figures close off all possibility of varying what the mind must engage.)

In short, O'Brien's shift in emphasis manages to continue Ashbery's concentration on the reader's roles in the poem while constructing for that reader a range of self-conscious formal events reminiscent of modernist projects like Eliot's. But now the medium is neither fully expressive as a single coherent experience or rife

with the indeterminacies beloved of the Language poets. O'Brien seeks a poetry that is "multiply determinate":[20] instead of the object determining the shape of the preferred experience of the work, he foregrounds the reader's activity as the basic vehicle for fleshing out what form has the potential to achieve. Because of this insistence on shaping readerly experience, the force of O'Brien's poetry results directly from making the process of reflection both the subject and sensuous object that we produce as readers. Set against this direct link of mind and object, the carving of images does not seem a compelling task.

The fundamental source of vitality at the left margin for O'Brien becomes his work with enjambment as a figure for and instrument of the basic modes of sensuousness that emerge. In Ashbery, the reader is invited to get caught up in the play between registers of discourse and multiple possibilities of reference. O'Brien is more directly concerned with engaging readers in reflecting on what powers they have that can make it possible to break from dependency on conventional lyricism.[21] Where Ashbery seems to have transcended oppositional stances, O'Brien is very much on the front lines of the battle for how ambitious poetry is likely to be written now. His emphasis on enjambment brings an awareness of the force of grammatical structures into play as one fundamental ground for the mind's activity in something substantial and potentially sensuous. There emerges for the reader a persistent dialectic where grappling with a sense of being lost, as one struggles to produce individual meaning, is tempered by the sense of seeking in oneself resources that allow at least a partial construction of shareable terms for processing these kinds of experiences. As deployed in O'Brien's most recent volumes, such practices of constant enjambment allow the poems to take on powerful connections to the real world—not by providing images of it but by focusing on the activity of completing a possible sense for initially incomplete statements:

> Poetry gets most of its charge from its distance from instrumental speech and most of that distance from its formal features, the determination of line being particularly crucial because it interrupts syntax for rhythmic reasons . . . but produces new syntactic entities . . . by that interruption. You thus can't talk about enjambment except as the interaction of syntax and form: all the reasons and methods the poem has for breaking a line.[22]

Enjambment forces the making of decisions among possibilities and shifts the poem from absorption in the senses to the domain of self-conscious awareness of the working of the reader's own powers. Line becomes partially free to complicate or pull against the flow of the sentence of which it is part, so that there

can be momentary doubts that "syntax is continuing at all." Readers then are virtually forced to become conscious of the choices they are making to fill out how relations between syntax and form can be reconstituted. Enjambment revels in a play between the stable pleasure of sounds in their full weightiness and the always open-ended semantic structure. It is as if the poem consisted largely in how the space of structured sound could be reconciled with the qualities of time that we feel operating in us as we work to synthesize meanings within complex sets of possibilities.

VIII

Now it is time to see how O'Brien's recent work develops these evocative qualities made possible by persistent enjambment. Consider this sonnet from *People on Sunday* for its ways of asking the reader to elaborate affective states based on imaginatively participating self-reflexively in the grammatical resources of language:

> Pulling back the blinds, the other
> Ones, the entire play of nowhere
> In its proper place, inviolable;
> Getting back to a natural posture,
> Patient with the newcomers, friends
> Of these conditions voices are
> The bride of, that really could go
> Either way rather than entirely
> Where yesterday's sharpness fades
> On the branch of having to,
> A surprise that doesn't go away,
> Carries invisible content out
> To lure back even the diffident
> Who are an old patience becoming.[23]

"Pulling Back the Blinds" is part of series of reflections on how writing poetry can occupy the same space as other arts—like painting, music, and film—without much effort at ekphrasis, the verbal effort to mime visual qualities. For O'Brien, ekphrasis has to dream of an art whose outside surface can be satisfied with capturing an appearance—either of sight or of sound. O'Brien wants instead lyric expression that addresses the inside—both of the work and of the audience—rather than material details. And this sets up a constant theme of how to imagine place

so as to inhabit the inner dynamics embodying a "nowhere" that can nonetheless be "here." Ultimately he wants a perspective on all kinds of spaces and edges that make them literally projections of mind at work, visible if one learns to look for an inside making possible what seems to be the outside in any art medium. Perhaps this is a way of realizing sensuous inwardness different from modernist ambitions.

This sonnet offers a striking attempt to address and to activate the conditions of inner sensuousness that hover behind the blinds of appearance. The poem is almost painfully aware that sonnet form has been traditionally focused on how a verbal art can bridge the divide between language as eloquent rhetorical making that tests the limits of craft, and the poet's desire to stage that making as capable of engaging how we think about actual experiences. The sonnet's tight formal structures intensify the question of how self-conscious rhetoric can be itself a means of sharpening our capacities for experiencing the actual world instead of merely fostering divisions between artifice and description. O'Brien addresses the possibility of reviving the mediating force of the sonnet by posing three fundamental challenges to the audience: (1) to reflect on what syntax is doing as a positioning of sensibility, (2) to experience the difficulty of determining paths through that syntax so that mind and medium can coalesce, and (3) to locate how it feels to determine those paths as alternatives to basing emotion on the dramatic logic of epiphany and ekphrasis.

The most important feature of the syntax in this sonnet is how the single sentence that is the poem unfolds by what seems an intense listening to its own somewhat enigmatic processes. This voice comes out of nowhere, and continues to radicalize the left margin because the poem keeps circling on its situation. That syntax has the task of defining the "other" that "nowhere" becomes, as if this poem were also an Ashberyian inquiry into how presence can solicit absence without quite referring to it. But here grammar offers an ascetic version of the role played in Ashbery by effusive rhetoric. Grammar both constitutes voice and tries to limit it to what might be semantically comfortable. So the poem has to try indirection in order to locate and ultimately to contain the "placeless place" of "nowhere" by starting with the two self-balancing participles that manage to govern the opening series of appositions.

Yet syntactically the capacities of these appositions to wield expressive power only becomes clear when we arrive in line 11, where the actual subject of the sentence emerges in the expression "surprise that doesn't go away," an expression that also carries a modifying relative clause. This sentence clearly creates the impression of trying to contain the other behind the blinds that drive its version of patient

unfolding. Uncomfortable as this process is, it may be necessary if the poem is to resist how all of our conventional orientations toward action are devoted to denying or destroying this "other." Any more assertiveness would risk encouraging a false confidence in the adequacy of human habits for producing meaning. In such a case, the poet might become an ideologue for bourgeois modes of insisting on making clear and practical utterances.

It may be the primary role of constant enjambment in this poem to resist those bourgeois stabilities and make surprise actually happen. Here enjambment comes to the rescue, especially in the superb sequence, "friends / Of these conditions voices are / The bride of, that, . . . " The first enjambment here begins with an apposition that promises concrete development. And there is that development, but in an unexpected way that brings out the power of the genitive to expand the field of reference to include abstract states like "conditions." We might only be able effectively to link "friends" and "conditions" by virtue of the regearings made possible by enjambment. Then the next line reverses the power of "of," expanding it in the process. The line ends with a copulative verb, not a noun, and it seems to complete the sense of the sentence. But this verb also expands the scope of the sentence by developing a metaphor that in turn picks up on the recursive power of the genitive: the bride is married to the voices that probably flesh out what the conditions of "nowhere" can be.

It is only by completing an emphatically dangling expression that the poem relocates issues of seeing and adapting into a far more intricate imaginative site than the poem seems initially to offer. As we work out a rationale for the pauses, we must decide on several questions. Are the voices the conditions themselves or are they the "bride[s]" of those conditions, bringing them into articulate collusion with the world? Then is the antecedent of "that" "conditions" or "voices"? Finally, "On the branch of having to," resolves on a verb that becomes a noun and so lacks an expected supplement to complete the infinitive. The line that is syntactically incomplete turns out to be semantically painfully complete even with its double meaning. "The branch of having to" could refer to having to fade or "having to" as a sense of obligation that kills one's openness to possibility. So we realize why it might be valuable to align our reading with the imaginative presence of a specific domain that is "nowhere."

The poem's one sentence finally produces a main clause in lines 11–14—a syntactic surprise about surprise. Here surprise is cast as an alternative to what must fade "on the branch of having to." And what must fade is inextricably woven into the ways that duty, or "having to," blocks openness to experience. Now the

poem's movements resolve into a promise of eventfulness capable of luring back "even the diffident / Who are an old patience becoming." Yet what becomes the affective appeal of "nowhere" cannot be cast entirely in positive terms, because that would collapse its otherness into our systematic contrasts between negative and positive. This poem uses the complexities of grammar in order to merge doubt and discovery.

The audience for the surprise can hear in its "patience becoming" the lure of the invisible content. But the poem also emphasizes how those who hear also are likely to possess a patience that is antithetical to change. The diffident simply become fixed in an "old patience becoming" that is inseparable from the endless repetition of a life governed primarily by a sense of duty. Repetition in time precludes dwelling in this other space. Yet one cannot not hear "patients" in "patience," although the term appears nowhere. So reading actually makes "nowhere" appear. And when we engage that hearing, we actually find that the construct "old patients" offers a faint possibility of humans actually becoming something new thanks to the music they begin to hear. This music proves inseparable from the possibility that all these multiple registers of meaning suggest something beyond diffidence and patience, something attuned to "becoming." So while the poem accepts an overall bleakness, it also strives to overcome that bleakness without quite making the dangerous move of allowing itself to completely accept the belief that change is possible. Perhaps it is the poem that is the ultimate old patient becoming.

Where even impersonal modernist poetry seems emphatically the performance of the author, O'Brien manages to make a parallel exhibition of control an appeal to (and a demand on) the capacities of readers to observe how they make decisions and so, in a sense, take a kind of ownership of the poem. The reward for honoring these demands is that the poem's serious readers need not feel relegated to being passive interpreters of programmed rhetorical gestures or highly plotted epiphanies. Instead, readers are invited to regard their own self-conscious decision-making as an aspect of the poem's coming to mean anything at all. They have to recognize the degree of control it takes to give up mastery in order to dwell where patient becoming might be possible. And they have to recognize how this "nowhere" derives at least in part from the possibility that language itself need not be used up in referring. "Nowhere" becomes the space of deprivation and anxiety as we struggle with meaning. But "nowhere" also suggests traces of freedom and possibility. Ultimately, "nowhere" becomes a space that one composes by choosing, or at least determining, a path through the poem that one knows cannot quite be an objectification of what the writer might have "intended." That choosing, then,

both establishes and mobilizes the possibility that this "nowhere" composed by imagination is also potentially an everywhere ("now here") in which reading might assume its full powers to develop inner sensuousness.

IX

Since O'Brien published a new book of poems, *Experience in Groups*, in 2018, it seems to me worth closing by focusing on a single example of what has changed and what persists through change in O'Brien's work. For our ultimate subject in this last chapter is what poets can develop out of Ashbery's version of constructivist fluidity. And in O'Brien's volume, he directly faces the huge problem of how a poetry that eschews representation can still engage the social world. His basic adventure is demonstrating how an art inviting participation can have consequences in a world defined by all too many tellings. Think of poetry as having to fight the information businesses by reviving interest in how kinds of information come to make different kinds of sense.

For *People on Sunday*, the central question was how the writing of poetry can be fostered by the other arts and still maintain an integrity setting the power of the word against the ekphrastic image. O'Brien's new book still finds in all the arts a "nowhere" out of time that demands specific mediation if each art is to realize how that "nowhere" might best contribute to fleshing out attention to the demands on us made by particular times and places. But *Experience in Groups* shifts its governing spatial metaphor from the "nowhere" of art to what "The Rhyme of the Left Margin" casts as the possibility of writing's producing the space of an "immaterial commons" in which "we read not of things but of dispositions toward the thingly" (p. 93). Poetry for him still has to be abstract, indirect, and focused on grammatical relations, because now he sees himself facing two antagonists—a capitalist social system that wants to repress the effects of inequality by treating injustice as written into something like historical necessity, and an engaged poetry that makes promises of political effectiveness that it cannot sustain. Poetry might be able in the long run indirectly to influence social change because we can find in that commons the sense that our cares and our responses to those cares have a great deal that is shared. And we find in this space the possibility of celebrating one another's freedom because these freedoms are grounded in this group awareness.

Consider this opening sonnet in a sequence of sonnets, "Sonnets So Far," that links individual poems by enjambment:

The past of having makes the present
Bleed and then we're asked to
Forget it like imagined slights,
Turn back to cleaning up the could
Have been cloudshadow on hills
During January drought. Surely there
Are other things to think about,
The way the rain finally comes down
With insurgent care, stopping
The latest protests short of becoming
A fact of life. Surely there are
Other things. That problem,
And expression the difficult name
For how the problem moves, runs

The town in both senses, fleeing
To its maintenance.[24]

The title of this sequence tells us a great deal, with O'Brien's characteristic economical blend of the impersonal and the incomplete. In one sense the title offers pure appreciation by recognizing the poet's dependence on other writers who have developed the form's capacity to structure the poetic on the basis of rhetoric and logic. But the title also recognizes two challenges. "So Far" has a temporal dimension looking back and a spatial dimension looking forward. The sonnet has only gone so far, and not further, because it has often traditionally sided with a "past of having." Yet the sonnet also offers significant possibilities now that take us a long way toward a sense of social reality based on the resources of rhetoric for clear and passionate thinking. Poetry must try to attune itself to the historical conditions causing such naked suffering, without overextending the poem's particular claims to provide paths through a world dictated to by historical forces. In order to demonstrate O'Brien's understanding of these obligations I will have to elaborate two major shifts from the poems of *People on Sunday*.

The first and most important shift is in how the diction proposes this access to the world. Notice here the calm impersonal voice, identifiable as O'Brien's only by the abstract nature of metaphors like "the past of having," and by the looseness of transition that has to be processed. There are far fewer flights of grammatical

complexity, and the second sonnet explicitly repudiates Ashbery's ruminative indirectness before history.

Instead, we get virtually a poetry of statement, almost as if Auden's early work could be fused with a Stevensian music formed by giving exceptional weight to every line. But O'Brien develops a unique version of statement, because the thinking embodied in these poems does not seek persuasion so much as enactment by which the reader has the experience of putting the pieces together and taking responsibility for what results. To seek any more direct persuasion would be to risk becoming history's accomplice as a purveyor of havings who insists on righteous closure. O'Brien's version of statement is so abstract, and so committed to the concreteness of such abstraction, that the thinking it embodies requires self-reflection on the part of the readers as they put together paths through the experience of the text.

Consider, for example, the work we have to do in order to appreciate how there may be no more concrete figure for capitalism than the blend of metaphor and naming in "the past of having makes the present / Bleed." And there are few more comprehensive uses of enjambment than to ask the reader to follow this mention of "present," which seems at first to complete a statement, with the blend of literal and metaphoric provided by "bleed." This asking opens the space of a potential commons based on shared suffering but also enabling a comprehensible and willable range of subjective responses. Entering a commons becomes a feature of how O'Brien understands inner sensuousness: the poem does not face outward to what can be processed by the senses solicited by the world, but instead depends on the inner activities of imaginatively completing meaning and recognizing a social dimension to this activity.

O'Brien's peculiar way of blending abstract and concrete stems from his desire to base the thinking of these sonnets on the most elemental expressions possible in order to secure a concreteness for his habits of abstraction. "Having" is a common desire and a common action. We can imagine the presence of psychological states without relying on images, especially when the verb and noun functions coalesce. Thinking and feeling center on ways of having *tout court* rather than about things we might want to have.

I think similar effects occur with "the could / Have been cloudshadow" (a brilliant grammatical play on Baudelairean correspondences), or with "becoming" hovering over a line as if it had momentarily the function of noun. Conversely, where there are pronouns like "it" in the third line, the blend of abstraction and

concreteness takes a different form. "It" lacks a clear referent. But given how the concrete verbal nouns refer to themselves as conditions, we probably should confer on "it" the same privilege. "It" can refer to the conditions of being a kind of "it" that resists clear reference. Similarly "expression the difficult name / For how the problem moves" presents two crucial elements as if they did not need further qualifiers, or as if each reader had to produce those qualifiers while retaining the abstract category. The reader familiar with O'Brien's work probably should not produce qualifiers at all but see the poem gathering around the sheer fact that the problem might be undefinable. This is how O'Brien manages to include within Ashbery's panoply of voices a distinctive philosophical and political mode of speaking that crosses grammar with function.

Let me develop two instances where the generalizing political effects of this diction are especially striking—one involving verbal nouns and the other different possibilities of using enjambment. Notice that the verbal noun "having" plays a quite different role in this poem from the one it played in "Winterreise." In the earlier poem, traditions of "having" diminished the surprise of yesterday's sharpness because possession seemed inevitably accompanied by self-satisfied habit. "Having" plays a far-more-active and ominous role in the later text. "Having" becomes a synecdoche not for habit but for an entire economic and cultural system. The desire to have causes bleeding in the social fabric because it sets individuals against each other. And that desire defines individuals as fulfilled only in isolated struggle. Those who have become powerful enough to cause bleeding tell others their sufferings are only "imagined slights"—as if they could take on the roles of poets aware of the fragile nature of their imaginings. "Having" fully takes on the roles of an abstract noun given affective specificity by retaining its qualities as a verb.

I find even more intriguing the effects of O'Brien's literalizing Ashbery's indeterminate pronouns. Now the pronouns are both indeterminate as references and devastatingly concrete as emblems for kinds of agency—here in terms of the agency in the first person. "We" begins in the second line as a generic condition of shared victimhood whom the havers in the world keep under submission and stuck in an optative mood. This "we" is casual, as if it arrived on the scene naturally as part of description not driven by authorial will. Not so the second "we." That appears in an intricate grammatical formulation by which lines 3–6 of the second sonnet propose what seems a solution to the problem perplexingly referred to at the close of the first sonnet. The lines do sufficient work to warrant citing them a second time in a quite different context:

. . . What is wanted
Again for the first time is a pronoun
For the we things don't run, a me
Dreaming of more than Guadalajara
From an office in the tower.

"We" here is sharply opposed to the power of things (a common opposition in the volume)—even to the extent of replacing the grammatically correct object form of the plural pronoun. I assume that this pronoun is wanted again for the first time because things put "we" constantly under attack, despite constant attempts by both philosophers and political leaders to carve out some space for deliberate human agency.

Grammar helps here because it allows a "we" that does not require complete agreement. It is not normative but fully intersubjective. Here "we" states an aspirational condition, as if the feeling of puzzlement and choices involved in determining meanings requires that the isolated subject hold out some common goal, or goal of a commons, in order to distinguish itself from what things do run. But at the same time the hope of agency is perhaps haunted by the identification between "we" and "me"—a dangerous condition because of the object status of this pronoun. So it should not be surprising that this "me" proposes for itself in the middle of this second sonnet the roles of an assertive "I" waking to its own potential. Yet potential can only be a cognitive awareness of how its newly discovered vitality seems completely absorbed by the world of things as they come to constitute "a present that deserves the past tense" (*EG* 31). Time and grammar collapse into one another, erasing all possibility of agency. But we do know now what the task of these sonnets is—to find a past that can deserve a present, like the tradition carried on by these sonnets. That finding would be proof that there is "we things don't run."

My second major shift occurs in the ways that O'Brien deploys his habitual reliance on the effects of enjambment as a basic instrument for the self-conscious participation in a shared space or commons that the poem can produce. The stress on enjambment provides a powerful means for making the sonnet tradition an active and viable one, because the readers are invited to work out how the language of the poem can connect to the world and to other people. Imagination can be reaffirmed continually for its potential agency as an instrument for engaging historical conditions is a shareable way (in alignment with Stevens), despite the fact that history is a terrifying antagonist. Now enjambment occurs not just between

lines but between entire poems. All expression seems incomplete and continually under construction—as if the poem's thinking had to affirm its acceptance of the lack of stability common to contemporary social conditions and to Ashbery's poetics. O'Brien's stress on how making here might correlate with fluidity becomes a means of intensifying the readers' own senses of helping historical continuity emerge, despite all the history that absorbs the present into mere repetition.

The capacity of enjambment to force a sense of the demands of the present also provides an ideal correlate for O'Brien's ways of posing abstract concreteness as a force capable of partially resisting the power of things. The diction specifies the role of abstraction as a possible concreteness within the poem's thinking as it produces an actual world. Enjambment deployed by O'Brien builds a different complementary mode of concreteness—a concreteness of resolved momentary absences rather than of strange metaphoric additions to the physical world. Take the case of what in the first sonnet seems to emerge as a constant refrain stating there must be other things to think about that are capable of either relieving or facing the pressure of the actual present.

Here the enjambments work first to intensify the force of "surely," and then to complicate the role of the rain. Does the rain actually stop the protests or provide an alternative to their becoming actual and inescapable demands on the mind? Enjambment literalizes the space of "nowhere" because it demands absence as the condition of the reader making present a specific set of meanings. But with this literalizing, each ending of a sonnet turns "nowhere" into a means of engaging how history now manifests itself. Sonnet discourse may typically involve traditions of rhetorically eloquent speech acts narcissistically absorbed with their own powers of statement. But enjambment provides a means of constant challenge to this narcissism because it produces constant transitions that keep the presence of thinking alive in the poem and in the world. Sonnet couplets give way to the coupling among sonnets.

X

My book has emphasized the importance of the ways that Modernist Constructivist art calls attention to how making produces sensuous forms that embody subjectivity rather than mime objectivity loosely modeled on empirical modes of inquiry.

The cases of Ashbery and O'Brien show us how different the contemporary situation is, despite the continued emphasis on the kinds of presence afforded by

foregrounding the decisions that produce visibility for purposive making. These poets want to establish making as action directly engaging self-consciousness in relation to movements of the mind rather than an action elicited by sensual details. For Ashbery and O'Brien, the modernist emphasis on structure brings poetry too close to other modes of "having" basic to capitalist society. They want to open "having" to the not-having fundamental to producing change. So from Ashbery on, there emerge strategies in American poetry that illustrate how the tradition of emphasizing the powers of making can turn to a pursuit of inner sensuousness in which the feelings of agency prove inseparable from the manifest capacity to attune thinking to flux and to uncertainty. Here the sensuous dimension of writing becomes inseparable from the readers' participation in the twists and adjustments that thinking continually makes in the present of the text. Now the inner life and the sensuousness presence of the self in acts of constant revision and reattachment are possibly even more intertwined than when tautness of structure was needed to demonstrate mastery. Ideas of intimacy have replaced projections of mastery as the arts still try to figure out how their activity can demonstrate powers that are capable of intense resistance to what things want to run.

For a final example, let us return for a moment to O'Brien's work on the sonnet. He seems convinced that the sonnet form can thrive again if it proves willing to shift from the stability of rhyme and eloquent argument to the kind of instability that can encourage efforts at cooperation among different experiences of grappling with the relation between thinking and experiencing. Thinking has to shift from being sustained by argument to an intense experience of form that explores self-reflexive positionings toward the force of events. This testing suggests that learning to take up complex and inclusive positions in relation to the complexity of experience may be a more vital means of engaging the world than any act that focuses on interpretations that can brag of having the truth.

O'Brien's concern for assessing the value and cost of the "Occupy" demonstrations at Berkeley affords a strong contrast to our desires for interpretation that sanctions stable evaluations. Here there is probably no single adequate assessment. Are the protests useful? Can persons with certain shared beliefs avoid them even if they are not useful? Can there be another concrete modeling of what our historical situation has become that would not involve fantasy-ridden falls into easy partisanship? How fully can these reflective processes be partitioned from other aspects of common life? Can there be a version of "we" that is not run by this problem? And then can "we" redefine the "town" as a less alien entity that would not produce the fears of paralysis basic to contemporary life?

O'Brien's solution, at least for the intensities of a short lyric, is to have each poem completed by another, in a steady chain of mutual interconnection. Each poem is part of a process, part of a bid to occupy the commons, while also expressing an individual's particular thinking on a specific feature of the issues. And each poem will have to face the fact that it is both erased by its successor and an influence on the shape of that erasure. Accepting the powers to produce such conditions as features of imaginative labor just may be the beginning of a workable relation between poetics and politics.

EPILOGUE

Why This Emphasis on Self-Consciousness Might Matter for Contemporary Thinking about the Mind

More delicate than the historians'
are the map-makers' colors.

—Elizabeth Bishop, "The Map"

Looking back, I ask what have I been trying to accomplish and why I think what I might accomplish is worth four years of obsessive work. I tell myself that I have been pursuing two basic goals. First, I simply want to pay homage by appreciating as articulately as I can the literary and visual works to which I have devoted much of my life. I know better now why such art has sustained me and why this goal of articulate appreciation has a claim to significant consequences. Appreciation does take careful close reading. But that mode of reading need not be based on aestheticist or formalist values. The goal of appreciation for me demands close reading in order to enter as intimately as possible the kinds of struggles in which writers engage in order to be able to tell themselves that their labors have the potential to exercise various kinds of social connection. The writers and artists I have dealt with all want to give pleasure, but their pursuit of pleasure proves inseparable from elaborating modes of feeling and thinking that they think are capable of becoming significant for other lives.

My critical ambitions must be tested. There is the constant question of whether I have done justice to the imaginative objects the writers and painters have produced. And there is the question of whether that effort to do justice is itself capable of actually engaging fully the large issues that the writers take up. Can my version of what I call "dense close reading" state clearly why it mattered to Modernist

Constructivist artists and writers to combat materialism by cultivating an inner sensuousness based on how the art implicates self-conscious participation in its processes of decision-making?[1] And, almost equally important, can these interpretive acts contribute to getting a hearing for the possible power of these artworks as complex acts of consciousness that can provide a challenge to those philosophers and critics whose methods are shaped by materialist ideals? It might be the case that the denser the close reading, the sharper the challenge to neuroscience and philosophy extending its claims. Can these disciplines pay significant attention to these complex modes of participation in intricate states of mind that are typically not the object of scientific investigation? So it is time to extend my argument beyond New Materialism to the much more potent analytic materialism that governs most philosophical thinking about discoveries in neuroscience.

I have complete faith in naturalism. I do not have complete faith in the continuation of enlightenment materialist versions of naturalism that are suspicious of virtually all claims humanists make about consciousness. And self-consciousness plays virtually no role in their discourse. I will try to show that the phenomenological awareness necessary to understand how we are called to participate in Constructivist Modernist poetry (and, indeed, in the experience of virtually any text that makes it into our teaching canons) requires modes of attention that simply do not fit within any philosophical analysis I know, even those by philosophers critical of mainstream materialist analyses.

More particularly, I want to address dramatically rather than discursively what David Chalmers calls "the hard case" for those interested in explaining how consciousness works. I think Chalmers is brilliant in showing how an extensive variety of materialist positions all founder on the issue of qualia or the phenomenal nature of the experiences that consciousness undergoes.[2] But I suspect that his account of the phenomenal is somewhat thin. So I develop two versions of hard cases that as yet seem to have had no relevance for theorists about consciousness yet seem warranted by what constructivist art asks of its audiences. And in the process I can show how this art resists the modes of reading adapted by the literary versions of cognitive studies I know. Basic to this book has been the conviction that the mind has many more functions than the processing of information for practical reasons: I have tried to foreground various ways the authorial mind takes delight in its own affective engagements and makes that delight itself something that opens us to the appeal, and the responsibilities, of satisfying social relations.[3]

The first such hard case involves an exemplary problem in the work of a literary critic, Omri Moses, who adapts Andy Clark's arguments about extended

cognition to Eliot's *The Waste Land* and to W. C. Williams's "The Right of Way."[4] That such cognition takes place in many ways I happily concede. But in art, it is difficult to imagine conveying information as the goal, even when the modes of gathering information seem novel, because there are far more economical and more determinate ways of achieving that goal. Caring about art is better realized when we focus not on information conveyed but on attitudes toward information embedded in displays of how we can negotiate experience.

And to deal with what is displayed requires analyses of what artists are doing, as well as what they want audiences to do. Such doings seek focused concentration rather than the economic structures that make possible extended cognition. Taking up Moses's arguments engages us in the necessity of concentrating on how the poets deploy the display of intricate states of self-consciousness.

The second hard case has a quite different focus. Here I directly address an argument of Chalmers's that tries to show how the topic of self-consciousness might plausibly become an object of theoretical attention. Chalmers sees that there must be different levels of phenomenal awareness: we might call one level scenic awareness and another some kind of synthetic or subsumptive activity. If we are to talk about powers of mind, we have to analyze not only states of specific phenomenal attention but also states in which we put phenomenal moments together as something like judgments. Because it is so difficult to talk about synthesis, Chalmers focuses on model building rather than on analyzing complex concrete cases such as might be presented by works of art. But I want to develop a particularly challenging concrete instance presented by the final stanza of John Ashbery's "As We Know." I argue that this poem invites us to engage quite simple linguistic expressions that ultimately take on substantial psychological complexity. As we read, our minds must hold on to this forceful simplicity while also recognizing the leaps self-consciousness must make if we are to participate in the force of what is actually getting accomplished in the saying.

I

As I approach these test cases, I will be working in the spirit of Alva Noë's *Strange Tools: Art and Human Nature* because this book offers a powerful and immensely readable critique of the entire enterprise of neuroscientific aesthetics. I clearly need the expert support. Yet I also employ Noë because I hope his arguments give a significant role to my own concentrating on the close reading of poems and my arguments about self-consciousness. For these arguments try to

specify, in ways Noë does not, the actual workings of what in the phenomenological experience of many literary texts provides textures and levels of implication that resist any current materialist picture of how minds work. Noë concentrates on how the arts parallel philosophy in their commitment to "method and result" being "one": "A philosophical piece of writing *is* the philosophy, not a report of it." Eventually philosophy makes "your not knowing . . . infused with understanding").[5] But I have emphasized as a challenge to cognitivist claims something more difficult to reconcile with traditional philosophical concerns—namely the commitments of modernist poets to display intricate states of mind that seem to resist any kind of explanation. These poets invite careful description so that we can identify with the work that texts do as sensuous artifacts displaying complex states of mind rather than characterizing the work in more general conceptual terms.

Noë's basic critique of most neuroscience focuses on its tendency to work within materialist versions of a Cartesian model of separations between a governing mind and a passive nature. This is his basic counter argument:

> Objects are not triggers for internal events in the nervous system; they are opportunities or affordances for our ongoing transactions with them. The world shows up, in experience, not like a picture in the head. It shows up, rather, as the playing field or arena for our activity. . . . Not activity inside our head, but activity in the world around us. Our concern is with the active life of the whole, embodied, environmentally and socially situated animal. (p. 124)

And this passage defines his hope that art can address the blindness resulting from this perspective, a hope with which I completely identify:

> If I am right, far from its being the case that we can explain art from the standpoint of neuroscience, it may be that the order of explanation goes in the other direction. That is, it may be that a better understanding of art will allow us to forge the resources to articulate a more plausible conception of our ourselves, one suitable, finally, for laying the ground for a better neuroscience. (p. 125)

In this regard, art for Noë is "not a phenomenon at all, like digestion, that stands in need of explanation. It is itself a mode of explanation" (p. 125).

I do not understand how art is itself a mode of explanation. But I think I do not need clarity on this point, because Noë is so good at explaining why art is not a topic amenable to scientific explanation: that is for me the basic philosophical relevance of his arguments. First, he makes the case that while there are neural

correlates for everything, it is by no means clear that these correlates have anything of interest to say about our experience of art (p. 130). Art is not something that necessarily interests us directly. In many cases we have to learn to be moved (p. 130). And we can be moved in a variety of ways that are impossible to predict from the neural correlates oriented to perception. In fact, learning to be moved often puts artworks within conversations comparing works with others so that reflection can intensify specific shades and contours of feeling. In this regard, it makes sense to consider aesthetic responses as "themselves the questions art throws up for us, not something we can take for granted in making sense of art itself" (p. 132). In my terms, art is a continual provocation to reflect on how consciousness is being deployed in modes of attentive engagement with the world.

Noë's most compelling claim for me is his trenchant worry that neuroscientific approaches to art are likely not to explain the experience but to explain it away. As I will argue in a few moments, art thrives on the experience of resisting scientific explanation. First, the failure to explain works fully calls attention to the difficulty of accounting scientifically for the sense of "participation" (p. 133) in the kinds of action presenting the flexibility and depth of appreciation that artworks can provoke. Encountering art cannot be based on the assumption that aesthetic experience can be analyzed in the same ways that we engage the physical world, at least not if one wants any sense of why audiences might care for the particular moves enabling the work to have power over our attention. Rather, such analysis involves seeing how objects of the senses, including the dynamic working of the specific art medium, continually get transformed imaginatively as we learn better how to be moved by the work. Second, Western culture's framing of aesthetic experience builds in a self-reflexive dimension of judgment because, as Noë theorizes (relying on Kant), there is a huge difference between just liking works of art and liking them "in the universal voice" (p. 132). In the latter case, our learning to be moved gets deployed in the delightful process of taking responsibility for efforts to persuade others that this object can be a source of universal approval.

Finally, art bears its historicity on its sleeve, so that the actions displayed prove inseparable from two mysterious but inescapable forces—the shaping force of intentionality that is inseparable from awareness of the material object, and the relation of that intentionality both to understandings of the historical contexts of events and of the layers of meaningfulness produced by how the particular object addresses art historical contexts. That all this can be packed into the simplest concrete gestures foregrounded by the medium holds out enormous potential for recognizing what minds have done, as well as what minds can do.

II

Two reasons drive my interest in Moses's recent essay, "Poetry and the Environmentally Extended Mind" in *New Literary History*. First, Moses makes a superb case against most cognitive studies of literature because their fealty to traditions that concentrate on what a work "means" tames and distorts poetry's experimental impulses. One way to expose the limitation of these cognitive models is to show how they confine their interpretive attention to a central processing brain managing to make coherence out of diverse acts of attention. This narrowness of focus results in such work rarely revealing "anything surprising or distinctive about individual texts as objects of interpretation." The interpretive claims of cognitivist literary theory typically focus on the poem's "effects on our nervous system and the phenomenology of reading" (p. 310). Everything seems organized around what brains can do in order to interpret conditions where cognition can take place. In contrast, Moses emphasizes how the concrete texts of modern poems manage to construct experiences based on distributing affective intelligence over fields of relations constituting complex environments. He accomplishes this by carefully assimilating to the study of poetry how Clark explores the limitations of a central processing model where the brain is responsible for all cognition. Clark argues instead that we are always entering into agent-world circuits where the brain lays off its computational burden on environmental and instrumental factors.[6] Imagine tools like calculators as built aspects of the environment by which the brain is relieved of its directorial responsibilities. For Clark, such tools and related environmental factors enter processes of "continuous reciprocal causation" (*EM* 24). Embodied animate beings are "empowered to use active sensing and perceptual coupling in ways that simplify neural problem solving by making the most of environmental opportunities and information freely available in the optic array" (*EM* 17). Take the case of a "dancer, whose bodily orientation is continually affecting and being affected by her neural states, and whose movements are also influenced by those of her partner, to whom she is continually responding" (*EM* 24). Causality is not a one-way street. And responsiveness need not be mediated by a structuring brain, because the environmental reciprocity is immediately sufficient to govern continually self-modifying actions.

Second, Moses puts Clark to work brilliantly in relation to the two poems he studies. Moses's central effort is to release our attention from the cognitivist obsession with meaning in order to dwell on the intelligent and forceful ways that these poems play with relations between language and perception. One can

use Clark's models of extended cognition to illustrate a poem's fascination with how the body and the physical environment "support and structure thought and action" (PEEM 309). Poems can take on the tasks of embodying or displaying "the social and environmental conditions that shape our concrete experiences" (PEEM 309).[7] Think of how useful Clark would be in valuing how landscape and mind interpenetrate in section XII of "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven." But I will argue that while the situations in poems might effectively dramatize "continuous reciprocal causation," it is difficult to characterize the making in such limiting terms. For Moses, everything valuable about the work depends upon how information is rendered in distinctive ways. But he never asks what goals the poet might have in arranging the information in a given way. The poet becomes another experimental scientist—not the craftsperson who seeks to elicit audience participation in a distinctive attitude toward all this reciprocal causation. For the modernists, as for most poets, the authorial role involves establishing a purposiveness that occupies a different plane of experience from the processing of information of any kind. Moses does want to honor the poet as maker of these relational fields, but he also wants to dramatize how the poems offer distinctive experiences of cognitive processes. I want to show how he cannot have it both ways and produce a comprehensive account of why the poem presents experience in the ways that it does.[8]

The best Moses can do is to treat the synthetic authorial labor in the modernist poems he discusses as a dramatizing of cognitive adjustment to environments. This assumption entails claiming that each of the images and figures establish "a rough parallel with the speaker's state of mind": "They are all snarled in movement, gestures caught in medias res" (PEEM 320). The gestures demonstrate a new commitment to "movement itself and the checks and freedoms it imposes on minds in particular environments" (PEEM 320). Thus, for Moses, the poetry is all in how the speakers become caught up in the work of extended cognition as the poem interacts with an environment.

I disagree with this position by showing that the speaker is a character dependent on a maker or a making. That making typically wants to exhibit its power to have audiences understand and appreciate the work they are doing to make present various intensities that challenge the sufficiency of cognition as the central feature of experience. Then I can assert positively that this contrast in directions of consciousness need not trap us in claims about meaning or fidelities to outmoded figures of central processing. Using Hegel as I have helps support claims that much of the best work in modern poetry refuses to present poems as dramatic acts of

knowing, because their focus is on how minds can engage a world in situations where knowledge is not our primary concern. Instead, the poems dramatize efforts to make self-consciousness adequate to what is going on in the sensuous world—not to know that world but to take responsibility for how the self can inhabit as fully as possible what it discovers by its imaginative labors. The reader then is invited to participate in how that authorial self-consciousness is deployed. There is less problem-solving than there is the elaboration of problems for the resonances they afford.

III

My argument will be carried out almost entirely as commentary on how Moses develops his two main examples, T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and William Carlos Williams's "The Right of Way."[9] Moses first calls up Eliot's claim that the poet has "not a personality to express but a particular medium" (PEEM 313), because for him this statement so clearly illustrates how modern poets were seeking to escape the idea of creative genius. The genius deploys a central brain to produce a coherent overall meaning integrating an intensely self-referential text. But Eliot's insistence on poetry as medium acknowledges its relationship to surrounding existential forces:

> Distributed cognition and modernist accounts of mind share a common view of mental activity as an act of remediation rather than whole-cloth representation. . . . Eliot's hive mind . . . relies on the distributed features of the literary landscape to create new poems." (PEEM 313)

Think of how the landscape seems to be speaking in *The Waste Land*. But I wonder if it is accurate to say that the distributed sensibility in that poem is serving the interests of distributed cognition in displaying how modes of consciousness in speaking can be effectively rendered. Eliot's poem certainly embodies a profound distrust of the executive mind, because fragments keep entering that seem discontinuous with any coherent executive program. But is this negative observation sufficient warrant for Moses's positive claim? These fragments seem to lack the practical power of cognitions. Eliot's handling of these fragments seems to treat the characterizations of situations in the poem as lacking in any kind of spiritual satisfaction or capacity to direct desire. Rather than solve problems, Eliot's fragments pick at cultural and psychological scabs.

In my view, the miracle of *The Waste Land* is how magisterially the mind can

rule over its own dissolution. The poem has an overwhelming central intelligence, felt everywhere as the lament for its own impotence to produce value that might accompany knowledge. Eliot's poem is probably the modernist poem least likely to be satisfied by attention to environment as any kind of plenitude of knowings. The reader almost has to feel constantly that the details are inadequate to the ground of desperation pervading all the play with environments. The poem stages basic affects involved in the capacity of fragmentation to frustrate desires for seeing life steadily and seeing it whole. *The Waste Land* may "succeed in exhibiting the distributed nature of mind work" (p. 314), built on principles of juxtaposition. But this success coexists with a profound lack of satisfaction in claims about cognition that is at every moment a reminder of the absolute constructedness of the poem: the pain of play is the point of the display. The contemporary poet Forrest Gander beautifully defines this aspect of Eliot's heritage:

> For a loss that every other loss fits inside
> Picking at a mole until it bleeds
> As the day heaves forward on faked determinations
> If it's not all juxtaposition, she asked, what is the binding agent?[10]

Moses seems on much more accommodating grounds when he turns to Williams as an example of the riches that attention to extended cognition can bring to literary criticism. After all, Williams is responsible for the statement "no ideas but in things"—on the face of it a claim for the priority of environment over central processing, because it grants the mind "the status of a medium" that breaks down "barriers between brain and world" (PEEM 316). Moses opposes any thematic claims to cognition, but he stresses how "The Right of Way" exhibits the cognitive powers available in our negotiations with our environments (PEEM 316). Here we see clearly Williams's concern for "how minds rely on objects and things as well as on other minds to share the burdens of their computational loads" (PEEM 316):

> In passing with my mind
> on nothing in the world
>
> but the right of way
> I enjoy on the road by
>
> virtue of the law—
> I saw

an elderly man who
smiled and looked away

to the north past a house—
a woman in blue

who was laughing and
leaning forward to look up

into the man's half
averted face

and a boy of eight who was
looking at the middle of

the man's belly
at a watchchain—

The supreme importance
of this nameless spectacle

sped me by them
without a word—

Why bother where I went?
for I went spinning on the

four wheels of my car
along the wet road until

I saw a girl with one leg
Over the rail of a balcony[11]

Moses's reading of the poem is stunning. He is exactly right about how the poem resists any invitation to provide a deep symbolic interpretation. And he accompanies this treatment with a superb analysis of how displacement in the poem serves as a striking enactment of the satisfactions involved in limiting one's claims to particular contexts. This is the core of his analysis:

> My sense is that he [Williams] wants us to think with things, not hover intellectually above them, and hence to allow the situation as it stands to shape the ordinary ways we encounter and process images, including the strategies we use to shut down rare or unusual interpretive possibilities. (p. 318)

The drama of the poem consists in "an encounter with images taken from ordinary life that are incomplete and, yet, demand a response" (p. 319). Because the poem limits the level of information, readers have to "turn to the environment as a parameter that narrows the range of outcomes required to deal successfully with the situation" (p. 319). The information "about how to interpret the poem is neither in us nor in the world—but rather in the interactive procedures that define the mind's engagement with an environment" (p. 319).

This is a superb reading of the driver's situation. But it is not so convincing as an account of the authorial act. If one stresses the acts of awareness represented dramatically by the poem, one has virtually to ignore the pronounced compositional hand that seems not at all content to render sets of cognitions. That hand becomes the center of a quite complex act of consciousness in which the audience is invited to participate. This driving is pictured, not enacted. Yet that picturing is an element within an elaborate enactment reflecting concretely on how relations with environments are altered for the worse when the observer is driving a car. The poem is concerned primarily with characterizing a world in which traditional acts of interpretation cannot be performed without diminishing the sense of discomfort fundamental to the state of feeling the poem embodies. The realization of this distance from other people and even from ourselves requires an act of reflection on the handling of information that the information in itself cannot directly elicit or shape.

My case is clearest in lines from the last five stanzas, utterly ignored by Moses because they do not render perceptions or join in a rush of cognitions pushing toward a "fast, parallel search for a coherent response" (p. 318). These lines in fact offer a general integrative statement proposed by the poem. They turn from enacting cognitions to a quasi-conceptual reflection on how the perceptual activities in the poem have to be regarded:

> The supreme importance
> of this nameless spectacle
>
> sped me by them
> without a word—
>
> Why bother where I went?
> for I went spinning on the
>
> four wheels of my car
> along the wet road until

I saw a girl with one leg
Over the rail of a balcony.

I love the tonal intricacy that occurs when the poem tries to account for its own involvement in new experiences of cognition. How are we to read this assertion of "supreme importance"? And how are we to correlate it with not bothering where he is going until he sees the girl with one leg over the rail of the balcony? I cannot see any way to read this as attaching to the cognitions the poem offers. I think the poem can end with the girl because the speaker has found an external image that captures his own internal unease with the world seen from the perspective afforded by driving a car. Such a qualification virtually demands that we see this poem not as staging cognition but as self-reflexively trying to locate a value for this entire exercise. The complexity of self-reflection here cannot be addressed by concentrating only on the environment. Being aware of the perspective involved in driving the car demands a distance from what he passes. Yet the vision of the girl establishes a frustration with that distance and a desire to know more about what he cannot become familiar with.

Clark offers a rich and complex materialism that embeds mind complexly in the world. But I doubt he can handle within this theory the position of a maker who does not seek cognition but comprehension or at least empathy with a complex human attitude. If we attend to the constructive process that calls attention to itself in "The Right of Way," we see not an engagement with an environment so much as a critical presentation of what is involved in new ways of moving through that environment. The lines I have just cited articulate the difficulties and the pleasures of trying to engage the resonances possible in deliberately exploring what dispensations modernity might involve for the mind. There we find not acts of cognition but concerns with what cognition might become under changing material circumstances and the writer's efforts to make sense of them. The poem does not so much offer relief from the interpreting mind as demonstrate the pains of having to recognize that these fragments are rapidly becoming all that our new mobility might afford.

But there are consolations—mainly in how poetry itself is not yet reduced to fragments, because it can display the possibility of engaging the confusion on the dramatic level by stressing the pleasures of intelligent artifice, especially in the work accomplished by the insistent enjambment. Self-consciousness has to recognize historical change. But it need not submit to total confusion, because it can produce a level of pleasure and tonal intricacy that gestures toward what the driver might be able to articulate if he could take the time to recollect what has

been happening. For example, enjambment turns out to offer a poetic device that overtly interprets and partially reknits the fragmentation that the poem narrates, and so calls attention to how the mind can structure what it confronts. This poem comes to emotional terms with the effects of spinning, since those effects seem the conditions by which this modern poem can grasp its own possible significance.

IV

Both Clark and Chalmers admit the importance of self-consciousness, but they do not spend much time directly addressing the topic. They certainly do not worry about dialectical intricacies figured in the model of working to stabilize the relation of Hegel's 'I' = 'I.' That model provides a movement in which subjective demands on self-consciousness have always to adjust to complex historical and natural conditions that seem beyond the initial ken of the subject's interpretations of what solicits its expressive activity. So it may be the case that we need examples from the arts in order to convince theorists of two aspects of self-consciousness—its concrete complexities and its capacities to give pleasures and satisfactions that may be as important for understanding the human mind as is an understanding of cognitive processes.[12] So in what follows, we will not be concerned with cognition and we will not pursue concrete criticisms of cognitive theorists. I want to end this book on constructivism by being constructive. I will outline how Chalmers handles what I still want to call self-consciousness, then hope to push his case a little further by showing what it takes to process close reading of the last stanza of John Ashbery's "As We Know."

Virtually no one denies that there is a kind of self-consciousness that is conatively aware of one's position in the physical world. Chalmers wants to do a good deal more by invoking what he calls "subsumptive" phenomenal states. Chapter 14 of *The Character of Consciousness*, written with Tim Bayne, provides Chalmers's basic discussion of how we can think of consciousness as unified by integrating aspects of phenomenal experience into a "single encompassing state of consciousness" (*CC* 497). Chalmers and Bayne are quite clear on the main issue. Experiences in mind seem to be distinct from each other. Yet they also "seem to be unified, by being aspects of a single encompassing state of consciousness" (*CC* 497). How do we understand this unity, and what uses can be made of this understanding?

After exploring briefly the limitations of several possible accounts of this unity, our authors settle on the idea of "subsumptive unity," because it is feasible to imagine different phenomenal states unified by a single state of consciousness.

For example, "it seems plausible that all of my visual experiences are subsumed by a single encompassing state of consciousness corresponding to my visual field" (*CC* 501). More generally, "it does not seem unreasonable to suppose that there is a single state of consciousness that subsumes all of my experiences" (*CC* 501). This total state can be considered "the subject's conscious field" (*CC* 501), which is a "conscious state in its own right" (*CC* 502). This state is not just a condition that can be accessed so that one can state the causal role it plays within the cognitive system. We cannot just make inferences about subsumption. We have to experience it in phenomenal terms by recognizing what it is like to be in that state.

I think this contrast between access to consciousness and the phenomenal awareness of what it is like to be in a given state is strikingly similar to the difference between reporting on a work of art and seeing oneself as participating in it. Just think of Chalmers's basic example:

> When I am conscious of a red square, I can report the presence of red and the presence of a square, but I can also experience the presence of a red square. Similarly, the presence of a red square can be used in guiding my reasoning and my behavior. . . . I can jointly report or reason about an emotion and a sound (*CC* 505, 507)

This is very good as far as it goes. But I have to ask if this is all there is to say about subsumption. Chalmers talks about the joint reporting of diverse states. But he does not speculate on how the mind might dwell on the emotion and the sound interacting in a process that refines each element and establishes a relational dynamic. That interaction can even require dwelling on possible intentions for establishing that dynamic in a particular manner, the awareness of which would lead back to further reflection on how the interaction of diverse phenomena provides a distinctive single state in its own right. So once these possibilities arise, it is difficult to be content with Chalmers and Bayne's emphasis on subsumption as conjunction among phenomenal qualities rather than some kind of synthesis. Perhaps the fuller syntheses are established by the aesthetic imagination, or, as Evan Klavon put it in conversation, by the mind on art. This fullness would derive from the conjunction of two possible states. One is a sense that the emotion and the music invite us to reflect on how they might be intimately or even causally connected. The other is a mode of self-awareness of what happens phenomenally when we try to participate in how and why someone might have made this connection in order to produce in us a distinctive mode of self-awareness.

Let us expand our authors' example of the red square in order to test how

these more elaborate states of consciousness and self-consciousness might arise. But now, rather than link emotion to sound, let us link it to how the color can coexist with states of feeling by turning to the red square in Malevich's *Black Square and Red Square*. Then we would take our phenomenal field to consist of a larger black square parallel to the structure of a canvas above a smaller red one that is, tilted at about 30 degrees. We would also have to add that we know this to be the work of a highly regarded artist who has written several books on art as the enactment of "nonbeing."

Under these new conditions, the phenomenal unity Chalmers argues for seems woefully inadequate to characterize what happens to many viewers familiar with constructivist traditions. What unity there is has to take place in terms of how the self-consciousness of audience members stages what they think and what they feel as they participate in what the painting is doing. The closing two pages of my second chapter on this painting provide examples of how this thinking and this feeling might interpenetrate each other.

V

Now let us try to ask what a poem can invite as imaginative participatory states that approximate what Malevich accomplishes. I turn to the fourth and final stanza of John Ashbery's "As We Know." Rather than relations among colors and shapes, the poem concentrates on building into concrete speech acts a self-aware intensity based on its capacities for handling complex intricacies of feeling and of thinking:

> The light that was shadowed then
> Was seen to be our lives,
> Everything about us that love might wish to examine,
> Then put away for a certain length of time, until
> The whole is to be reviewed, and we turned
> Toward each other, to each other.
> The way we had come was all we could see
> And it crept up on us, embarrassed
> That there is so much to tell now, really now. (*ACP* 661)[13]

In one respect, this poem shares with the contemporary sciences a deep suspicion of any belief in the inner life. There is only a set of ordinary expressions

characterizing how two people might review a love affair. But the review leads to a strikingly elemental judgment acutely different in function from the descriptions preceding it. It seems that the poem tries to enact and to embody crucial differences between what can be known in propositional form and what can be displayed or performed by language aware of its own powers. The key here is to notice how the contrast between "now" and "really now" fleshes out latent emotional resources that can be tapped by the grammatical richness evoked in the poem.

Here inner sensuousness does not emerge from anything elaborately expressive of an inner life that the individual agents might perform. What counts as spirit exists simply in the choice of linguistic elements and the concentration needed to appreciate their complexity. The central figure in this stanza is the movement from "now," a descriptive term, to the exclamation "really now," which offers a different, much richer sense of time and of what the pronoun "we" can evoke. Before this stanza, time had been staged in the poem only as the enemy of any possible bliss involving the sense of home as a place "to get to, one of these days." But "really now" is an expression of discovery, an act of affirmation, and a promise of further intimacy to come. There are not many moments in life that earn the expression "really now." And there is no visible ground for the change of expression, so we have to infer the speaker's and the audience's discovery of various factors that can ground this use of the adverbial intensifier.

Realizing the force of this alternative vision of time considerably alters the sense of the title. Initially the title refers to typical statements of boredom referring to what is all too common knowledge. But "really now" can refer to the moment when knowing dawns on the lovers. Then what is known cannot be reduced to the result of a cognitive judgment. The pronoun "we" expands into an affirmation of the difference between chronological time, and the kairotic time that can be willed because of the sense of discovery that accompanies it. It is not important what details allow for that new sense of reality, so long as the agents feel the difference from the kind of time that simply passes. What is important is that the lovers become exemplary readers of their own expression. Then they also become capable of affirming, with the audience, the possibility of a charged sense of the present tense in which "telling" can replace "reviewing." That telling now constitutes an awareness of plentitude beyond any language focused on cognition. And "we" encompasses the transformation of the lovers into a full awareness of what they mean to each other. Their "really now" allows the audience to speculate on the kind and quality of self-consciousness the speaker wants the couple to share because of recognizing the difference between the two versions of "now." Perhaps that recognition even

allows the audience to participate in that "we," thus constituting their mutual recognition as an ideal for all of us of fully willing the unions that we have formed.

If that "really now" could be represented in terms of images, we would be in the domain of Chalmers and Bayne's subsumptive unity. But the sensuousness here is entirely based on this second sense of time, whose reality exists only in self-consciousness.

NOTES

Introduction

1. On the most elemental level I can take my definition from Robert Hass, *A Little Book on Form*: "Like most constructivist work, I find the aesthetic pleasure here is like the pleasure of watching someone build something rather than the pleasure of having someone tell you something. Though one might well say that they have something to tell the reader or listener about the sheer plenitude of both language and the world it names" (p. 379).

2. See my *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry*.

3. In so updating Hegel and trying to avoid his ontology, I feel I am working in collusion with at least Robert Brandom and Robert Pippin. Pippin will be cited often in this study because he addresses the arts. For Brandom, see his remarkable *A Spirit of Trust*.

4. Chalmers, *The Character of Consciousness*, 5. I was also struck by the powerful critique of standard materialist accounts of self-consciousness in Terence Deacon's use of the concept of "ententionality" in the second chapter of his *Incomplete Nature*. I am sorry that I do not sufficiently understand his effort to develop a new comprehensive materialism to address it here.

5. The best literary engagement I know with issues involving science now seeking images of how brains operate is Nikki Skillman, *The Lyric in the Age of the Brain*. Skillman offers a sensitive and beautifully written account of the struggles of poets like Jorie Graham, John Ashbery, Robert Creeley, Robert Lowell, A. R. Ammons, and James Merrill to accommodate themselves to how much of their intimate lives did not come under their own control. But she does not worry about how art might resist the behaviorist leanings of so much of brain science. I take on Skillman's reading of Ashbery in chapter 6.

6. By "concrete" I mean that there are elements of the work that are treated as actual objects in the world—literally as compositions elaborating uses for the resources basic to a given art, and imaginatively as the development of situations we explore as if they presented specific conditions eliciting feeling and thinking. By "sensuous" I point to a level of material detail—actual and imagined—that cannot be engaged if we insist on dealing only with concepts provided by the understanding.

7. They perform this competency by offering accounts of their experiences that other audiences with demonstrated proficiency will take seriously, even if they do not agree with the characterization of the work.

8. In all these arguments I have to recognize the fact that there are no determining facts of the matter. Audiences construct the centrality of the aspects of art that they describe. So most arguments in the arts contest how we most fully address the kinds of presence that the works make possible. This book is intended to display (not to "prove") models for how certain concerns make possible modes of appreciation.

9. Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, "The New Modernist Studies," 737–48.

10. Craig Dworkin, *Dictionary Poetics*.

11. I cite Alex Danchev, *George Braque: A Life*, 86. Danchev also talks about Braque's desire to bring things within reach (pp. 74–80).

12. For a second visual example we can turn to how Picasso in his portrait of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler (Chicago Art Institute, 1910) manifestly refuses the entire history of patronage for portraiture because it produces fawning idealizations of the physical details of a face in a flattering setting. In this work Picasso invites the viewer to identify not with an image of social authority but with a very different kind of idealization based in how the painting is constructed. Notice how the face in the portrait sustains the most intense and intricate relations among small cubes. And that interplay seems to create a light that then is picked up in the hands. It is as if to appreciate Kahnweiler one had to feel a distinctive kind of concentrated intelligence that carries over into those hands. The dealer may have to identify with the artists' hands in order to recognize, as Kahnweiler did, the kinds of force carried by the paintings he promoted.

13. Williams, *The Collected Poems*, 1:195–96.

14. I have elaborated Nelson Goodman's work on the concept of example and I hope extended its significance for art criticism in much of my recent work, especially in my *Reckoning with the Imagination*, chap. 5. My basic claim is that there is a huge distinction we have to make between something being an example of some category and being an example as an instance that can function to articulate a class of states. The character Hamlet is an *example of* many Renaissance traits or even psychological conditions. But he serves the function of *example as* when we identify with traits that he possesses and try to find their concreteness echoed in our own lives. Hamlet then is both an example of Renaissance melancholy and exemplifies one manner by which an audience can identify with the activities that are generated by this melancholy but are not reducible to it. It is not just because he is melancholic that he is affected so intensely by his encountering the skull of Yorick.

15. I have to apologize for expanding the term "constructivism" and thus in part displacing the term from its original reference solely to these artists. I see no other way of grounding the story I want to tell except by elaborating constructivist dimensions of art that we typically do not characterize as constructivist. And I have the support of my opening quotation from Robert Hass.

16. In my epilogue I have an elaborate footnote skeptical of these efforts.

17. I am grateful that I feel no obligation to discriminate among the many versions of

materialism that analytic philosophers propose for experiences beyond the arts, ranging from physicalism to eliminative materialism.

18. The concept of "differentiation" is Karen Barad's preferred way of showing how quantum physics calls for new models for interpreting the world. See her *Meeting the Universe Halfway*. Probably the best use of this new science for reading literature occurs in the analyses of romantic poetry (with excursions into Hardy and Frost) by Marjorie Levinson, *Thinking through Poetry*.

19. For Alaimo's use of "affordances," see her *Bodily Natures*. One way to support my case here is to simply cite the ambitions Karen Barad poses for her version of an empiricism based on Niels Bohr's writings about quantum physics:

> I call my proposed ontoepistemological framework "agential realism." . . . Importantly, agential realism rejects the notion of a correspondence relation between words and things and offers in its stead a causal explanation of how discursive practices are related to material phenomena. It does so by shifting the focus from the nature of representations (scientific and other) to the nature of discursive practices, leaving in its wake the entire irrelevant debate between traditional forms of realism and social constructivism. (Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, 44–45)

I am not arguing that Barad will be proven wrong in the long run. But her case remains now constitutively vague because of the level of generalization and the failure to engage full traditional accounts of the capacities of human agents to think beyond the practices they inherit. The best criticism I know of New Materialism's claims as philosophy is by Andrew Cole. See his "The Call of Things," 106–18. See also the lively Marxist critique of New Materialisms by Daniel Keil, "The Ontological Prison: New Materialisms and their Dead Ends, *Contradictions: A Journal for Critical Thought* 1, no. 2 (2017): 41–59.

20. Obviously I will have to give extensive citations for these claims later in this book. But for those impatient to set the stage, numerous examples can be found in the materials collected in *Art in Theory 1900–2000*, edited by Harrison, Wood, and Gaiger. I will cite this book in my text and notes as *ATM*.

21. I will not in fact worry much about criticizing these approaches to modernism, even though I inveigh against the values shaping contemporary criticism. The variations of what appalls me are so in control that to combat what I consider specific errors would take considerably more time than I have left on this planet.

22. I am aware that Hegel uses "picture-thinking" as a critique of certain kinds of religious ideologies. But the phrase is too evocative to have its context so limited.

23. Hegel, *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, 1:36; see also 1:35, 38. Hereafter I will abbreviate references to both volumes of this book as *LFA* and place them in the main text and notes.

24. Knox usually translates this phrase as "inwardness of self-consciousness." It is a little

early in this book to give an elaborate citation from Hegel, but I want the reader to see the phrase at work and so understand why I choose "inner sensuousness" as my translation:

> Now if in this way what was implicit at the previous stage, the unity of divine and human nature, is raised from an *immediate* to a *known* unity, the true element for the realization of this content is no longer the sensuous immediate existence of the spiritual in the bodily form of man, but instead the *inwardness of self-consciousness*. . . . The new content, thus won, is on this account not tied to sensuous presentation, as if that corresponded to it, but is freed from this immediate existence which must be set down as negative, overcome, and reflected into the spiritual unity. In this way romantic art is the self-transcendence of art but within its own sphere and in the form of art itself. (*LFA* 1:80)

I will cite part of the same passage again in chapter 1 as I try to clarify Hegel's three spiritual stages through which art develops.

25. Karen Barad makes the same kind of disclaimer concerning her use of the writings of Niels Bohr.

26. I can think of no other theorist of fine art as alert as Hegel is to how the stress on self-consciousness allows a significant language for the powers made available by the kinds of reflection involved in the appreciation of works of art as art. See for example *LFA* 2:972–77.

27. This sense of spirit defined in terms of self-consciousness is at the core of Charles Taylor's elaborate and engaging treatment of the concept of expression in his *Hegel*. Because the concept is so central here, I want my readers to have one of Hegel's precise formulations:

> Things in nature are only *immediate* and *single*, while man as spirit *duplicates* himself, in that 1) he *is* as things in nature are, but 2) he is just as much for himself; he sees himself, represents himself to himself, thinks, and only on the basis of this active placing himself before himself is he spirit. (*LFA* 1:31)

28. I have to distinguish popular ideas of the individual subject in romanticism from the work done by recent scholarship demonstrating that we need much finer instruments for discussing how subjectivity is constituted in romantic art. See, for example, Henderson, *Romantic Identities*, and Khalip, *Anonymous Life*. See also a fascinating study of differences in how intellectual culture comes to understand the idea of "interiority" in Lerro, "Some Dark Interiority," 28–50.

29. In elaborating these claims I will be resisting the tendency of critics like Ellman, *The Poetics of Impersonality*, to see impersonality as a sign of defensiveness unwilling to risk personal honesty. In my view, contemporary emphases on impersonality as self-protectiveness simply refuse to attend to the possibility that impersonality can offer ways of treating subjectivity that stress the inadequacy of the personal while also defining modes of self-consciousness that in fact often liberate us from ourselves.

30. Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (hereafter *PS*), p. 489, para. 803. See also in *PS*, pp. 408–9, para. 671, and pp. 490–91, paras. 804–5. And in *LFA*, see 1:92–93 and in vol. 2 all of sec. 3 of pt. 3.

31. *PS*, the chapter on "Observing Reason" and, leading up to it, pp. 131–210.

32. I cannot resist pointing out that here the family becomes a superb exemplar of a collective subjectivity, as subject and as sensuous object. No wonder Hegel celebrates a distinctive model of sensuousness:

> We may, therefore, in short, adhere to the view that at this third stage the subject matter of art is *free concrete spirituality*. . . . In conformity with this subject matter, art cannot work for sensuous intuition. Instead it must, on the one hand, work for the inwardness which coalesces with its object simply as if with itself, for subjective inner depth, for reflective emotion, for feeling which, as spiritual, strives for freedom in itself and seeks and finds its reconciliation only in the inner spirit. (*LFA* 1:80–81)

I doubt one could find a better rendering of how the equation 'I' = 'I' generates the dynamic by which art must go to inner sensuousness and so also transform "the shapes of the external world":

> For this external medium has its essence and meaning, no longer as in classical art, in itself and its own sphere, but in the heart which finds its manifestation in itself instead of in the external world and its form of reality. . . . Because of this higher perfection, it [romantic art] is not susceptible of an adequate union with the external, since in its true reality and manifestation it can seek and achieve only within itself. (*LFA* 1:81)

33. The problem of responding to Hegel's claim that "art, considered in its highest vocation, is and remains for us a thing of the past" (*LFA* 1:11) creates a substantial amount of ingenuity even in scholars who do not claim the license I do. Scholars like Danto, *After the End of Art*, and Donougho, "Art and History," 179–243, stress Hegel's consistency in these lectures with the account of the Absolute in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, emphasizing how philosophy eventually displaces art as the central working out of how spirit operates in order to fulfill itself. Only philosophy can correlate universals with particular concepts that replace the sensuous world central to art. But others like Rutter, *Hegel on the Modern Arts*, show how Hegel in his late lectures tried to find a place for a modern art as the celebration of spirit embodied in the quotidian world, even though art has ceded to philosophy as the dominant embodiment of spirit. Pippin, in *After the Beautiful*, offers a quite different account of the relation of philosophy to modern art, stressing how the art of figures like Manet forges an alliance with critical philosophy's insistence on elaborating basic problems about appearance and reality fundamental to modern life. My emphasis, partially inspired by Pippin's earlier essay "What Was Abstract Art?," 1–24, will be on how Constructivist Modernism rivals philosophy rather than cooperates with it because

philosophy had turned out to be a cultural practice very different from Hegel's expectations. Modern art is not at all satisfied by rapprochement with the quotidian, nor with philosophical critique, precisely because it is so intent on developing secular forms of the life of spirit that Hegel projected.

34. For those who like Hegelese: "Therefore on the whole the principle of subjectivity necessarily implies on the one hand the sacrifice of the naïve unity of the spirit and its body and also the positing of the body more or less as negative in order to lift the inner life out of externality, and on the other hand the grant of free play to the details of the variety, disunion, and movement of spirit and sense alike" (*LFA* 2:794).

35. See, for example, Jacques Rancière. *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*.

36. I want in a footnote to indicate the scope of O'Brien's kind of critique. Many of the most talented poets who came to prominence after 1960 were suspicious of such easy transcendence. One model for such suspicion comes from the New York school, which ranges from James Schuyler's careful attention to states that allow casual and reduced moments of social epiphany, to James Merrill's elaborate insistence on poetry as first of all rhetorical social theater on which emotional significance may be carefully constructed. (I consider strict adherence to the poetics of the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E school an inversion of this play on rhetorical social theater.) A second mode of contemporary resistance is anchored in an increasingly active ideal of a political poetry that insists on our looking at why we seek transcendence at all when there is so much to reform in the political order. Then there are those poets who emphasize the virtues of the sheer activity of writing and the modes of reflection that it can embody. I think of Lisa Robertson's musical celebrations of states of being "here," or of hearing what is in fact "here" on the one hand, and on the other, the sense of quotation and echoes that writing sustains in the work of poets like Aaron Kunin and Jane Gregory. One might say that after Ashbery, many poets shift from emphases on vision to figures of sounding what in situations must go unseen even though the situation itself has palpable substance for self-consciousness. Their basic vehicle for lyric effects is not the image but the motions of the sentence. Poetry must encourage our recognizing tonal and grammatical aspects of experience that might be capable of extending language's ability to address the social implications of the voices we encounter. Hearing entails "hereing" and so demands self-consciousness, even as it often places us in complex enigmatic situations that cannot be resolved by the resources poets devote to their presentations. What is necessarily absent from the senses becomes itself a desirable locus of potential presence.

Chapter One

1. From the start I have had to clarify how I will be using the term "modernism," since any critic now faces two very large problems. As I said in my introduction's discussion of Mao and Walkowitz's "New Modernist Studies," I have to agree that it is possible to call every

artist in every locale a modernist if he or she presents work as engaging the social orders that various cultures treat as conditions of modernity. But this defines the writers' projects in terms shaped more by historical circumstances than by commitments to produce large-scale cultural change by aesthetic means. So I cannot see what we gain by relegating what was a self-consciously modernist intervention in the history of the arts to reminders that lots of people engaged modernity in various ways. If we insist on multiple modernisms based on historical context, we find ourselves in a situation wherein having too many modernisms probably entails having no vital modernism at all. And that pluralism certainly deprives us of the excitement about new artistic modes that in Europe, as well as North and South America, arguably transformed visions of what art might accomplish for its culture.

The second problem is that there were probably too many modernisms even within the cult of High Modernism. Every critic seems to have a particular definition of what matters in modernist experimental efforts to reject the prevailing empiricist attitudes. So I propose to deal with this proliferation of modernisms not by summarizing many of the positions but by abstracting those differences into two fundamental stances. Many critical stances measure the value of this art by how sharply it captures fundamental problems underlying the social orders we call modernity. Others, including this author, focus instead on how art may modify individual lives by inviting audiences to recognize and honor certain powers of imagination that pursue alternatives to how the individual psyche is likely to internalize the priorities set by modern capitalism. One might cite Fredric Jameson as a prime example of having the first kind of critical attitude, but I prefer the more concrete account of art's engagement with social problems developed over several books by T. J. Clark (and Hegelianized by Robert Pippin, who will be the object of another footnote). This is Clark's basic account of what was to comprise High Modernism. See his *The Painting of Modern Life*, 10:

> Something decisive happened in the history of art around Manet which set painting and the other arts upon a new course. Perhaps the change can be described as a kind of skepticism, or at least unsureness, as to the nature of representation. . . . This shift of attention led, on the one hand, to their putting stress on the material means by which illusions and likenesses were made . . . ; on the other, to a new set of proposals as to the form representation should take, insofar as it is still possible at all without bad faith.

Having it both ways seems to be Manet's and Cézanne's basic ways of grappling with their confusions about their roles as artists and representatives of their culture. Had I the space, I would argue that Manet seen from a modernist perspective troubles representation but does not go nearly far enough in providing alternatives to the traditions that formed him. Cézanne is almost the opposite: he was seminal formally for exploring structures much more complex than Greenberg's flatness, but his unchallengeable commitment to the real-as-nature dates him as protomodernist.

The critical works of Hugh Kenner and Clement Greenberg might be a cranky and highly selective versions of what I want to call the effort to develop exemplary qualities of selected distinctive modernist orientations in the arts. Both critics are very shrewd in their preferences for exemplary readings rather than grand social generalizations, as, indeed, were the best modernist critics of an earlier generation, like R. P. Blackmur. So I think there is room for my own idealizing various general features of modernist poetry and painting. I will equate modernism in this book with the poetry and the painting that took on the burden of the ambition for radical transformation in art practices as the means for combating the confusions Clark clearly establishes. My mantra here will be Ezra Pound's commitment to a kind of making things new not by changing what audiences could see but by giving them new eyes to see with. See Pound, "Vorticism," 202.

The modernist art that meets this criterion can be characterized in general by three traits. (1) This art manifestly resists enlightenment models of the canons of practical understanding that governed straightforward realistic commitments in art. (2) This resistance shapes an experimental spirit committed to developing relationships like juxtaposition and montage, which were capable of challenging and estranging audiences because such structures are difficult to process by the practical understanding. (3) Because artifice is so patently driving modernist art and poetry, audiences have to participate imaginatively in the authorial processes responsible for these foregrounded elements. This last emphasis on the maker's role in producing the work invites an audience not to settle for picturing an imagined world modified by feeling for scenes and dramatic actions but instead to focus directly on the activity in the work as orienting consciousness toward how experience might be rendered and made dynamic in accord with a specific will. Because these features of modernist art were so closely allied to constructivist principles, I will feel free to use either term to characterize particular works.

2. I will not distinguish sufficiently among the currently proliferating versions of materialism, because for my purposes they all share what I call an ontology based on the primacy of the senses. I want instead to explore how art exemplifies reflection on how we deploy the senses as self-reflexive modes of empowerment.

3. For these contemporary philosophers, introducing the modifier "self" to "consciousness" only adds to the sense that such language seems at best a pathetic evasion humanists need to continue propagating delusionary fantasies about human powers. Antonio Dimasio's *Self Comes to Mind* is perhaps the most interesting case of a philosopher in the sciences dealing with self-consciousness, because his use of Spinoza makes it very difficult to avoid analyzing how such consciousness operates. So he continually approaches and evades self-consciousness as a dimension of expressive activity. For example, on p. 248 he has trouble dealing with how we learn by making errors because he is torn between an empiricist account and one that stresses modifications in conditions of self-awareness that are fundamental to dialectics.

4. Were I to try to define "self-consciousness" in a way appropriate for what I am arguing about Hegel, I would first distinguish the object of analysis from consciousness bound to describing the states of a particular person at particular moments of space-time. This kind of self-awareness obviously has to be part of the story. But that rendering relies on limited understandings of both "self" and "consciousness," because it stops with momentary states of the person rather than dwelling on the powers revealed by the efforts to elaborate those moments into dialectical modes of self-knowledge. So we do better if we stress the second part of the term, with "self" riding along to point out which particular being or agent is the vehicle by which the powers of consciousness seem to be realized. Self-consciousness is the felt sense of an individual's ability to participate in interpretive and expressive activities in such a way that the activity takes on an interest of its own as one's own, beyond any direct instrumental concerns. In this regard, self-consciousness becomes a matter of relating phenomena to each other in ways that suggest that attending to one's place in the relational field may be more interesting and more beneficial to the agent than direct action. The closest that contemporary cognitivist thinking comes to concerns for distinctive features of self-consciousness may be David Chalmers's chapter "What Is the Unity of Consciousness?" (with Tim Bayne) in his *The Character of Consciousness*. Chalmers and Bayne point out how, if we are to characterize the "subsumptive unity of consciousness," we need to combine "access consciousness," that explains how we use information, with "phenomenal consciousness" that is responsible for our awareness of how "there is something it is like to be in that state" (pp. 502–3). Self-reference has to serve practical purposes and stage how the mind produces distinctive experiences of itself at work. But the kinds of experiences that they examine do not engage much that I will argue is characteristic of aesthetic appreciation. In fact, there is a discussion of the example of red squares (e.g., p. 505) that becomes almost comic if one thinks of what Kazimir Malevich does with the tilt of red square in his *Black Square and Red Square*. I will return to this after note 41, which I discuss in chapter 2.

5. I have to say from the start that all of the major impressionist painters are far more interesting and unique than one can see if one relies on the languages established for their work as a group. Those languages proved convenient for the modernists because then they could align impressionism with a form of empiricist realism. I think of Degas as especially suffering from my generalizations, because he seems committed to inner lives. Degas might be a good example of how Benjamin Rutter, in *Hegel on the Modern Arts*, sees a modern realism compatible with Hegelian values.

6. I make this case about Cézanne's landscapes in my *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry*.

7. Not surprisingly, the status of the agency by which Picasso "liberates" and redefines objectivity has been much discussed by critics with more knowledge and skill in talking about art than I possess. But I think my interest in constructivist strategies across poetry

and painting provides a somewhat different perspective worth considering. I will be critical of those commentators who attend to the constructivist dimensions of cubism by trying to ground subjectivity in the formation of linguistic analogues within the painting, since that model tends to abstract from what the painting is actually performing.

Leo Steinberg in Rubin, Varnedoe, and Zelevansky's *Picasso and Braque* sets the stage for the task I face by stressing how Picasso produces what he calls the "unlocation of space" in his cubist work, culminating in the collages (p. 117). He points out that in early cubist experiments, objects have contexts but even the contexts do not specify particular spaces. But I want to push the question: What are the forces that replace space as providing the framework for understanding location? Everyone agrees that the new sense of force depends on foregrounding the activity of painting. Critics do not agree on what that activity involves. In the 1990s, when structuralism still reigned, there was heavy emphasis on what Steinberg called "the movement from visual analogue to a pure sign situation" (p. 118). Perhaps the strongest version of that view is Yves Alain Bois's claim that the absolute specificity of cubism begins only in the fall of 1912 when, as Picasso asserted in the 1930s, he preferred the papiers collés because they broke entirely from "the condition of possibility of illusionism." The new synthetic cubism could rely on the "constitution of a code which does not take into consideration the material reality of signs but conceives them as transparent images referring to a reality taken for granted, taken as a given" (Bois, "The Semiology of Cubism," 170–71). Later, in his reworking this essay for his book *Painting as Model*, Bois outlines how Picasso, through his early interest in Grebo masks, "became aware . . . of the differential nature of the sign, of its value: the value of the plastic sign/eye as a mark on an unmarked ground, within a system that regulates its use" (p. 89). So Bois argues that there is a direct line from the Grebo masks to Picasso's turn to papiers collés in 1912: "Picasso realized for the first time that a sign, because it has a value, can be entirely virtual, or nonsubstantial." Here we have returned to what Kahnweiler called "'transparency,' which is rather an acceptance of absence, of emptiness, as a positive term" (p. 90).

One would be hard pressed to disagree that Picasso's collages have a major investment in differences between signs and images. But I think that even in the collages the image prevails as a painterly recasting of signs. In fact, several of the collages treat language as a purely painterly background. One might even say that Picasso was probably closer to cognitive linguistics than he was structural linguistics, since he seems during most of the cubist years at least to have emphasized the activity of exploring what signs can do rather than turning to signs as elements operating within systems of differences. Picasso chooses the differences that matter for his canvases. And in the earlier Cézannian work and protocubism, the conditions of activity are clearly not systematic in any way at all but rather dramatize a range of feelings for what the objects can be as they are made to enter the pliable reality provided by the canvas. Picasso does rely on sign systems, but he

embeds his decision-making in his working out of how marks and signs might gain desired effects in the psyche.

Bois brings up a significant problem for my perspective when he cites interviews Picasso gave Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler in 1933 and 1935, in which Picasso dismisses Analytic Cubism and recognizes Synthetic Cubism and collage as "more intellectual means of expression." Analytic Cubism is dismissed because cubism's defining superimposed planes and multiple viewpoints are "still a means of replacing" perspective and so still tied down to and simply offering another substitute for the traditional means of representation. Picasso's critique of Analytic Cubism declares, "There is no Cubism in all that. Everything disgusts me, my own things first of all," because, as Bois explains, "under a veil of apparent modernity, the same old mimetic structure is at work" ("The Semiology of Cubism," 170–71). In other words, Picasso condemns his old self for the same compromises with representation that he saw Cézanne making. But it is hard to believe that Picasso in the thirties is capturing the feelings and ambitions of his paintings from 1907 to 1912, in which he evidently saw himself struggling against what he later sees as limiting him. And the terms of the struggle were not to absorb experience into systems of signs but to find ways of bringing the world into activities that recast what we might experience as a new sense of objectness as achieved by the processes of making.

8. The tendency to dismiss these still lifes as curiosities goes back at least to Alfred H. Barr Jr.'s claim, "In *Bowls and A Jug* of mid-1908 the pendulum swings to a powerful, sculpturesque rendering of forms in relief, simply and soberly painted in reddish brown. . . . But by winter of 1908–09 the artist had resumed his progress toward Cubism." See Barr, *Picasso*, 65.

9. I depend for this observation on a dissertation by Edward Alexander at UC Berkeley, "Making Simplicity," which shows how Picasso learned from his interest in African art to conceive painting as a vocation with social implications.

10. *Carafe and Three Bowls* (The State Hermitage Museum), from the same time frame, offers an even more intricate structural alternative to geometry.

11. I also bring up *The Reservoir at Horta de Ebro* in order to quarrel with Clark's *Farewell to an Idea*. I have learned far more from Clark on modernist topics than I have learned from any other critic. But I cannot accept his insistence on Picasso as materialist during his cubist years, where just Braque's very different theoretical praise of the constructive mind would give one some pause. Then there is the problem of explaining in materialist terms how the synthesis of shapes takes on power.

12. T. J. Clark puts the cubist project this way: in Picasso's art "the object world will offer itself in the form of juxtaposition rather than silhouette" (*Farewell to an Idea*, 205). And then the image will not be of an instant but might show the object in its true solidity, which is not that of a stage setting.

13. I think this is true of what Clark describes as two contradictory phases of Picasso's

cubism—one from 1907 to 1910 honoring sculptural forms, and a later one that relies on constant metaphoricity. But there remains for me always a need to establish a rationale for these enterprises. That rationale is likely to be the pursuit of a distinctive relation between works and possible powers conferred on audiences.

14. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, 197–204.

15. This crossing of matter and mind is even more elaborately realized in collages like *Guitar, Sheet Music, and Wine Glass* (1912, McNay Art Museum), because the addition of various material textures demands intense self-reflective work not only to put the image together but to hear the music binding those material relations.

16. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, 212–23.

17. Hegel is very good on the powers and limits of practical understanding so that he can also make clear what different kinds of engagements with the world are sponsored by works of art, especially by the kind of thinking most fully realized in poetry. At one pole, "the prosaic mind treats the vast field of actuality in accord with the restricted thinking of the Understanding and its categories, such as cause and effect, means and ends, i.e., in general with relations in the field of externality and finitude" (*LFA* 2:974–75). Such thinking "gets no farther than particular laws for phenomena" (*LFA* 2:975). At the other pole, "For a deeper mind, what is alive in the outside world is dead unless through it there shines something inner and rich in significance as its own proper soul" (*LFA* 2:975). Poetry combines the abstracting powers of "Reason" with a sense of how worldly particulars can be completely recast in accord with this inner life. The more capacious the power of prose understanding, the greater the challenge for poetry to bring out how imagination can participate in and transform what falls under that understanding (*LFA* 2:976–77).

18. The dynamics that art provokes as spiritual apprehension is perhaps clearest in Hegel's appreciation of Shakespeare: even when a single passion governs characters, the situation "does not devour their more far-reaching individuality" (*LFA* 2:1227). Instead, Shakespeare actually gives these characters "spirit and imagination, and . . . he makes them free artists of their own selves" (*LFA* 2:1227–28) by plunging "his figures who dwell in these extremes into their restrictedness" (*LFA* 2:1227) so that they "can contemplate and see themselves objectively like a work of art" (*LFA* 2:1228). By pursuing the expression of inward states, they force themselves to develop the capacity to face objectively what they have made manifest.

19. I cite Hegel on this topic in my introduction. For a comprehensive account of Hegel on expression, see Taylor, *Hegel*. Conversely for a reading of aspects of Hegel on art that virtually ignore the imperatives for individual expression, see Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*. Culler stresses brilliantly how Hegel on the nature of lyric helps explain the impersonal capacities of language to assert its own powers of statement, almost independent of any psychologized author. But Culler is not concerned with the different expressive pressures that might provide a sense of inward psychological struggle producing a particular version of impersonality.

20. Because poetry offers direct animation expressing the inner life within sensuous

forms, it "enjoys its periods of brilliance. . . at practically every period which is productive of art at all. For it embraces the entire spirit of mankind. . . . " (*LFA* 2:977). This universal "essence" may be the result of a constitutive difference between philosophy's thinking as "only a reconciliation between reality and truth within thinking itself" and poetic creation as "a reconciliation in the form of a real phenomenon itself, even if this form be presented only spiritually" (*LFA* 2:976). I take this claim to mean that poetry produces its own objectivity for states of spirit that recur over time, while philosophical thinking requires that any claim be adjusted to the history establishing spirit's place in the Absolute.

21. Obviously, critics who think Hegel has something enduring to say about art in general and romantic art in particular will have to try to adapt his talk of "Spirit" to secular modes of critical discourse. The most comprehensive efforts at accommodation occur in the work of Robert Pippin. I need to take on his argument because I disagree with his characterization of modernist art in the twentieth century and because I disagree with his valuing that art primarily in terms of what it affords as materials for philosophical inquiry into historical situations. I have no quarrel with Pippin's brilliant analysis of Manet's work. But it is a huge and problematic claim to argue that talk of romantic "inwardness" was a mistake on Hegel's part: "the conclusion that Geist does not require a material element to be fully realized . . . is not motivated by anything essential in Hegel's account and represents a misstep" (*After the* Beautiful, 22–23). Pippin argues that any useful critical perspective that can produce a culturally significant account of the arts has to rely on the union of the sensible and the intellectual provided by Hegel's remarks on the "inseparability of concept and intuition" (p. 65). We can see art accommodating itself to society by heightening "the interpretive and so philosophical dimension of understanding artworks" that allows "a distinctly act-centered sort of intelligibility (the artwork as interpretable act or gesture, not occasion for a purely aesthetic response" (p. 68). But Hegel's treatment of romantic art loses the world in its fascination of spirit's relation to itself.

It is only when art retains a worldly sensuousness that art commentary can elaborate analytic languages for how concepts weave into that sensuousness. And retaining this worldly sensuousness is especially important with the birth of modernist art, because that art has little in common with Hegel's romantic moment. For Pippin, the emergence of distinctively modernist arts undoes Hegel's neat progression from inner sensuousness of romantic art to spirit actually finding an adequate body for its energies when it turns from art entirely to the Absolute elaborated by philosophy. In Pippin's view, modernism does not seem to emphasize inner sensuousness but establishes a more contentious and anxiety-ridden relation to society. The modernists do not celebrate freedom from objects but rather stress being haunted by shifting notions of objectification. Correspondingly, modernist art requires critical modes that do not celebrate subjective freedom but clarify why this art presents a radical lack of stability for the subject in relation to society or even in relation to its own possible interests (p. 54). Pippin thinks that criticism in a Hegelian spirit requires a discursive basis for making sense of how art involves the life of the senses.

Yet it seems to me that Pippin's eagerness to ally with modernist critiques of the social

order becomes somewhat blind to modernism's critiques of the modes of philosophical understanding that sustain these critiques. Pippin wants to trust in art's potential cooperation with discursive conceptual work even though most modernist artists and writers rejected such cooperation, emphasizing instead modes of presentation that downplay any possibilities that concepts could grasp either the artist's sense of social crisis or their efforts to combat this crisis in their work. And while Pippin has very little in common with contemporary emphases on an ironic Hegel, such as the one offered by Katrina Pahl in *Tropes of Transport*, his constant commitment to historical contextualizing shares with these critics an inability (or unwillingness) to attend to what is most positive and respectful of the power of art in Hegel's *Lectures on Fine Art*.

In my view, Hegel's aesthetics certainly honor irony, but primarily in the service of working out how self-consciousness might provide significant positive satisfactions in the power of the works as acts of imagination, even while resisting the authority of concepts. So I think we best address modernism in art and in writing by aligning with its critiques of the understanding and by elaborating the modes of sensuousness that can be seen as directly rendering states of mind, apart from references to the social world. We can do this by developing two critical frameworks, which philosophy at present is not well suited to elaborate. We need to honor imaginatively how so many modernists were intensely critical of what Hegel would call the external sensuousness that prevailed in impressionist art. Analogously, we need a criticism that can explain why poets turned from lyrics offering direct public address to emphasizing the twists and turns of how grammar itself can afford an expressive medium. And, second, we need to take seriously Hegel's concern for the kinds of powers artworks can make possible for audiences, precisely because the aims of aesthetic experience are very different from those of any critical discipline. Here is one example: "For this external medium has its essence and meaning no longer, as in classical art, in itself and its own sphere, but in the heart which finds its manifestation in itself instead of in the external world and its form of reality" (*LFA* 1:81). In order to characterize what Hegel points to as central to aesthetic experience, we need to think about exemplification as art's basic means of connecting to the world. And we need even more a concern for phenomenology as our means for clarifying what aspects of the human psyche get elaborated and exemplified. It may be that only in accord with such principles that resist critique can we fully appreciate the many modernist projects of replacing nineteenth-century ironic treatments of self-consciousness with modes of art that celebrate the constructive powers of that faculty.

22. In my *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry*, I treated the basic similarities in modernist painting and modernist poetry in terms of basing the semantics of art on how the syntax of the works establish internal relations.

23. One could develop a Wittgensteinian version of my interest in restating Hegel's claims. The central point would be that our account of art is impoverished if it cannot

explain the kinds of language involving aesthetic judgment we seem invited to use for appreciating modernist painting and writing. If we make this move we are not claiming that we know what self-consciousness involves, but only that fleshing out certain linguistic practices is fundamental to the social worlds we inhabit.

24. This relocation of how the senses work returns us to a feature of Hegel's argument easily overlooked when we stress his affinities with the romantic spirit. For Hegel was very careful to rework Spinoza's concept of conatus in order to characterize how inner and outer senses become complementary aspects of human self-consciousness. Conative drives are bodily forces. But they also have the capacity to involve self-consciousness, since in humans these drives express themselves in the form of trying to give sensible accounts representing the agents' locations in time and in space, not as fixed positions but as active means of feeling, defining, and stabilizing our own sense of subjective desire. Conativity in humans produces a sense of the distinct agent as actively constituting a version of such locations in relation to specific kinds of cues.

25. See Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, sec. 57. Kant was not so good at determining how "purposiveness without purpose" might dictate conditions of response. He was too consumed by issues of judgment and cared little for how the mind might use that particularity. It fell to Hegel to put a full psychology to the modifications of response called for when we treat works of art as Kant described them.

26. The phenomenology I call for is not Husserl's quest for essences or even Merleau-Ponty's concern for harmonies between what scenes offer and minds realize. I desire a term for the simple commitment to establishing the details of experience with an eye toward how the experience has a claim on our attention for the qualities it exhibits. This kind of phenomenology is opposed primarily to what it would call explanation, where what matters in experiences are typical features that contribute to generalizations. My ideal of phenomenological method projects analyses that attend to how the experience might become exemplary in its particularity as a configuration of details.

Chapter Two

1. Since I have not cited this work but use an abbreviation for it throughout this text, I will cite it now: *Art in Theory 1815–1900*, edited by Harrison, Wood, and Gaiger. The abbreviation is *ATN*.

2. While what I am claiming to a dialectical argument would have been impossible for me without reading Hegel, it is not strictly speaking a Hegelian observation, because there is no dynamic force seeking full self-expression that underlies the changes I describe.

3. There are several other contemporary forms of materialism—from object-oriented ontology to thing theory to actor-network theory to renewals of Marxist theory—that pursue a materialism based on labor relations and economic structures. I argue in my epilogue for a

common core of explanatory claims in various materialisms but do not mention these other contemporary forms of materialism. And I do not consider cognitivist accounts of literary experience, because they are rarely insistent on their ontological commitments and pretty much irrelevant for the study of poetry due to their lack of attention to the work of making.

4. Freud, "Project for a Scientific Psychology," 355. I cite this because T. J. Clark uses it as an epigraph for his chapter on Cézanne in his *Farewell to an Idea*, 139. I am surprised that the greatest of modernist art critics wants to cast the old empiricist materialism as an interpretive background for modernism. Clark is also one of the few thinkers who tries overtly to reconcile the scientific strand of nineteenth-century materialism with the modes of materialism basic to Marxist analyses.

5. Chodat, *The Matter of High Words*, offers a very useful characterization of what empiricism had become by the mid-twentieth century, based primarily on how that empiricism elicited critical responses from a series of fiction writers. According to Chodat, empiricist analysis was instrumental in the development of two basic, widespread models for what responsible thinking can do and cannot do. First, empiricism encourages a nominalist reliance on experience rather than on any preexisting notion of rational foundations or teleological structures: "If bodily events precede concepts in the order of being, then concepts are necessarily reducible to such bodily events" (p. 13). This nominalist perspective is suspicious of all abstract terms and insists instead on what can be shown as "substantial, objective and universal" (p. 12).

Then the second model seems a necessary correlate to nominalism because it claims the capacity to interpret all phenomena that exhibit lawlike behavior as reducible to those bodily events. Empiricism insists on naturalist explanations of phenomena, and the desire for naturalist explanation seems typically to result in materialist modes of interpretation. Chodat points out that despite their considerable differences, both behaviorism and cognitivism—the two primary modes of inquiry into the nature of mental activity—"retain the same commitment to publically observable and verifiable data, the same refusal of mysterious-looking posits that can't be treated experimentally, and the same ideal of psychology as a natural science" (p. 49). It is also crucial to recognize that such versions of empiricist inquiry have to be fundamentally impersonal and value-free. The relevant values have to derive from the questioning process rather than from any action performed by the work being attended to.

6. Coole and Frost, *New Materialisms*, 9. Hereafter *NM* in the text and notes.

7. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 32.

8. See Coole and Frost, *New Materialisms*, 6–8; and Bennett, *Vital Matter*, xiv. For a more general critique of social constructivist critique, see Felski, *The Limits of Critique*.

9. The now-classic statement of the limitations of suspicious criticism is Felski, but Levinson, *Thinking through Poetry*, is more imaginative and more aware of how relations to science might alter the directions of literary criticism. Coole and Frost are also good on the shift to what I call "positive materialism"—see pp. 34–43.

10. Edwards's essay "The Materialism of Historical Materialism," 281–98, makes a powerful case that classical empiricism is incompatible with Marxist versions of materialism based on social relations rather than on the primacy of the senses.

11. See my note 19 on Alaimo's work in my introduction.

12. Because I stress here only those features of New Materialism that affect the forces we see at work in impressionist painting, I will not deal here with object-oriented ontology or thing theory or actor-network theory. I am relying here on two general critical articles I wrote about the New Materialisms—"Are We Being Materialist Yet?," 241–57; and "Are There States of Mind Which We Can Call 'Inner Sensuousness'?," 279–98. I also benefited from Cole's sharp criticisms of related ideas in object-oriented ontology: "Those Obscure Objects of Desire," 318–23; and "The Call of Things, 106–18. Finally, I want to cite a powerful general critique of vitalism as a model of the interpretation of art objects by Colebrook, "Vitalism and Theoria," 29–46.

13. Brown, *The Limits of Fabrication*, 60–67, 75–79.

14. The concept of a field also captures an important shift the New Materialists propose in our thinking about issues of causality central to the old materialisms. They propose a significant difference between the familiar idea of efficient causality and the possibilities involved in seeing how "emergent causality" may take hold. We know efficient causality from the practices of traditional empiricist versions of materialism. But emergent causality "is a mode in which new forces can trigger novel patterns of self-organization in a thing, species, system, or being, sometimes allowing something new to emerge from the swirl back and forth between them" (*NM* 179–80). As we will see, the concept of emergent causality is especially important in approaching art that tries to reject or conceal rhetorical organization. For then the force and value of the work has to reside in how the various interactions among particular sensations and visible actions by the artist coalesce into something that appears greater than the sum of the parts.

15. I love how the nineteenth century stressed the relationality of mind and nature by the term "temperament," a locution that merges mind and atmosphere and so is desperately needed in the twenty-first century.

16. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 23, 25.

17. Because issues of the status of human consciousness are at the core of my book, I cite one more bold and eloquent assertion of the negative case:

> Such theories thus introduce elements of creative contingency, meaning, difference, efficacy, and a limited freedom for improvisation or resistance into nature before cognition begins. . . . As a consequence the human species, and the qualities of self-reflection, self-awareness, and rationality traditionally used to distinguish mind from the rest of nature, may now seem little more than contingent and provisional forms or processes within a broader evolutionary or cosmic productivity (*NM* 20).

18. See Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

19. The essay by Rosi Braidotti in Coole and Frost's *New Materialisms* is striking both for its eloquent suggestiveness about "life" and for its inability to escape persistent problems that haunt so general a discourse. I am skeptical that so general a term as "life" can be concentrated into positive values, since life also warrants descriptions as "nasty, brutish, and short." And I wonder what chain of reasoning will support Braidotti's getting from "life" to Freudian sublimation.

20. It is surprising to me that *The Art of the Real*, edited by Rothman and Verstegen, says nothing about the possible links between impressionism and New Materialism. This book is eager to get directly to theory and to celebrate the materialism of a range of contemporary visual practices.

21. There is one important difference between the mental agency in impressionist art and in New Materialist thinking. For the impressionists time is largely a matter of the present tense of awareness—by the painter and by the audience. But probably thanks largely to the influence of Marx, New Materialist thinkers typically manage an exemplary blend in which the sense of the present bleeds into a concern for larger shaping environments.

22. See Rorty's essay "A Literary Postscript," 301–24, for a fascinating account of different preferred synonyms for persons under various cultural conditions.

23. Fried, *Manet's Modernism*, 22.

24. The godfather of these reconfigurings of subjectivity is Charles Baudelaire's version of the romantic cult of genius as an account of how subjects establish the natures that seem worth inhabiting: "The artist, the true artist, the true poet, should only paint in accordance with what he sees and with what he feels. He must be really faithful to his own nature . . . for then his productions would be lies in relation to himself and not realities" (*ATN* 490).

25. I think this emphasis on the satisfactions of completeness of vision was an important factor inspiring Pissarro's friend Cézanne to pursue his very different versions of completeness that then would sponsor what we saw in Picasso.

26. See Latour, *Reassembling the Social*.

27. For the details of this social situation, see Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*.

28. Jane Bennett makes very suggestive use of the concept of assemblage (see, e.g., *Vibrant Matter*, 23–25). In general I do not like to apply the concept to works of art, because it does not pick up the overall gathering power of authorial purposiveness: "assemblage" is typically opposed to the work of purposive making that I want everywhere to honor in this book. So here I use the concept of assemblage to refer only to relations among depicted details.

29. I borrow here from the editors' introduction to sec. 6 of *ATN*, 878–89.

30. For a good brief statement of symbolist transformations of the impressionist's living matter into versions of inner sensuousness, see Jean Moréas, "Symbolism—a Manifesto":

> The enemy of teaching, of declamation, of false sensibility, of objective description, Symbolist poetry seeks to clothe the idea with a sensible form which, nevertheless, would not be a goal in itself, but which, at the same time as expressing the idea, would remain

subject to it. The Idea, in its turn, must not be seen to be deprived of the sumptuous trappings of exterior analogues. (*ATN* 1015)

31. Bahr, *Expressionism*, 36. The next quotation is also from p. 36, and the next from p. 85.

32. Ibid., 45–46.

33. Ibid., 41. The next quotation is from pp. 41–42.

34. These last two quotations are from ibid., 87–88. Notice how these remarks on "inner perception" and "the unknown in us" echo Hegel's aesthetics.

35. Fry, *Vision and Design*, 18.

36. Ibid., 19

37. Klee, *On Modern Art*, 45.

38. I wish I had space to take up the way African sculpture came to exemplify for the modernists a full capacity to connect the ordering principle of the artist with the sense that the object rendered abstractly came to stand for its own reality. But I can only give a feel for this way of thinking by citing a climactic passage in Carl Einstein's "Negro Sculpture":

> We must ignore their objective "objective character," that is, we must ignore them as objects associated with a specific environment, and analyze them precisely as created forms. . . . The work does not signify or symbolize anything. The work simply is the God who thus preserves his own self-contained mythical reality, one which draws the worshippers into itself, transforms them likewise into something mythical, and cancels the limits of their human existence. (*ATM* 111, 115)

Einstein radicalizes three central doctrines of modernist theory—the sense that the work does not signify or symbolize, because what matters are the modes of force that it makes present and comes to exemplify; the sense that participation in the work affords entry to a mode of being distinct from empirical existence; and the sense that by these attributes the work functions as a kind of god that generates levels of force capable of transforming how one finds satisfaction in one's life. Participating in the force of the god is the ideal behind Malevich's principle of nonobjectivity.

39. Kazimir Malevich, *The World as Non-Objectivity*, 56. The next quotation is from pp. 56–57.

40. Hence, in cubism, "the attempt to disfigure the forms of reality and the breaking-up of objects represents the striving of the will towards the Independent life of the forms which it has created" (ibid., 33). But cubism is haunted by the presence of the logic of an objective reality even as it transfigures the claims of any kind of naturalism.

41. Ibid., 56–57.

42. I do think Clark should fear him more since Clark's analysis of his work in *Farewell to an Idea* refuses to take seriously Malevich's basic values.

43. I use this traditional title even though there was discovered another title on the back of the painting—*Painterly Realism of a Boy with a Knapsack—Color Masses in the*

Fourth Dimension. I think Malevich was joking, since there is such a gap between the title and the image. The figure can barely be made out as someone under a huge burden he is trying to carry, but the strain on representation would be the point. I can see no way that this title helps us understand anything except what the painting is not. The discussion is in my *Painterly Abstraction*, 214–21.

Chapter Three

1. Ezra Pound, "Vers Libre and Arnold Dolmetsch," in Pound, *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, 433–34. Further references to this collection will be included in my main text with the abbreviation *LE*.

2. See, for example, the scholarship of Lisa Florman, *Concerning the Spiritual and the Concrete in Kandinsky's Art*, especially pp. 5–11, 33–44.

3. Wright, "Clear Night," 643–44.

4. Mahon, *The New Yorker*, 49.

5. I offer what has become a standard complaint within more "experimental" or "innovative" aspects of contemporary writing. But I cannot concur that any kind of materiality that writing might provide will establish a richer vein of poetry. Producing that richer vein requires investigating how the mind can make visible its concrete powers for developing capacities of expressive activity.

6. Pound, *Des Imagistes*, 38. Hereafter *DI*.

7. This is a typical statement for Pound of 1912: Poetry's "force will lie in its truth, its interpretive power . . . ; I mean it will not try to seem forcible by rhetorical din and luxurious riot. . . . At least for myself, I want it so, austere, direct, free from emotional slither" (*LE* 12).

8. Sherry's summary in *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence* nicely catches the imaginative intensity and fluent abstraction of his argument. I cite passages insisting on two aspects of his claims about the decadence shaping Pound's imagist poetry—his de-eroticizing displacement of the actual and his commitment to evoking the past rather than facing the present:

> A present divested of actuality but not of intensity, this is the affective tense of a decadence that lives in the divestment of presence—in the temporal dimension of the secondary, in the insubstantial afterward of a now foregone original time. (p. 187)

> This is the decadence Pound extends in his own early practice, then, in the dominance he gives to the prosodies as well as the images of fall, of loss, of disembodiment: in the art of cadence . . . and in his address to the apostrophized other as the beloved, in that otherwise odd erotic of disembodiment, in a sort of apostrophilia. (p. 189)

Sherry makes Hugh Kenner's *The Pound Era* the prime concealer of Pound's relations to decadence. I imagine this essay as a clumsy version of how Kenner might have responded to Sherry's book.

9. See especially Pound's great essay on Cavalcanti, in which music is aligned with "the conception of the body as the perfect instrument of the increasing intelligence" idealized by "the radiant world" of the Greeks (*LE* 152–54).

10. One of the great mysteries in literary history for me is how the author of the appallingly flat endless ironies of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* could publish in the same year the draft of the first *Three Cantos*, with its incipient cultivation of assertively individualist values sustained by the work writing could accomplish.

11. Pound, *Personae*, 118. Further references will be indicated by *P*.

12. The phenomenon of virtual emergence is strongest in "Sub Mare" (p. 82).

13. Pound's fullest early statement of his sense of sound as expressive substance, along with this claims about individual power, is in the opening pages of the essay "Cavalcanti," (*LE* 149–55).

14. "The supreme test of a book is that we should feel some unusual intelligence working behind the words" (*LE* 420). See also Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska*, 78. This text will be hereafter abbreviated *GB* within the main text.

15. I elaborate a more capacious sense of art as valuation in my *Reckoning with the Imagination*, chap. 7.

16. Pound would call these dense relations the effects of "logopoeia," a concept he first developed in writing about Moore and Mina Loy. See Pound, "Marianne Moore and Mina Loy," 424–25.

17. Moore says as much, far better than I can, in the conclusion of "The Hero," in *The Complete Poems of Marianne Moore*, 9. Hereafter *PEM*.

> . . . He's not out
> seeing a sight but the rock
> crystal thing to see—the startling El Greco
> brimming with inner light—that
> covets nothing that it has let go. This then you may know
> as the hero.

18. Richard Wollheim, *Painting as an Art*, chap. 3.

19. Mark Noble's *American Poetic Materialism from Whitman to Stevens* shows how all materialisms founder on the problem that the subject who is deconstructed by the play of matter has to have the traditional powers of a subject in order to make coherent descriptions of this incoherence. Here Moore plays on what mind can do to specify the significance of matter.

20. In a talk at a very fine conference on lyric at Boston University, I began a paper on Moore by suggesting a dialectical approach to how the modernist lyric staged impersonality. Some critics had been complaining that Jonathan Culler's book on lyric overgeneralized his objections to the New Critical tendency to project existentially defined and limited characters as speakers. But I agree with Culler that for most of its history the lyric was less

a matter of a person speaking than a realization of how language might be formulated for an emotional state. So I argued that the insistence on character was a throwback to general realistic modes of writing in the nineteenth century. Explicit resistance by the modernists to this naturalizing dimension gave a new consciousness of the powers and stakes involved in what poets typically thought before the nineteenth century about the lyric as dramatizing speaking rather than particular speakers. Once the primacy of speaking over character has to be articulated as critique of realism, we are in a better position to realize how lyric has traditionally dramatized the literalness of speaking at a level that would be marred by imposing the particular trappings of given speakers.

21. Moore, *Selected Letters*, 192. I have to add here that I have written about these three poems in previous essays, but not the same way or supported by the same arguments. I seem to be obsessed with getting these poems right. See my *The Art of Twentieth Century Poetry*, 87–96, and "Marianne Moore and the Logic of Inner Sensuousness," 263–84.

22. Moore, *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, 35. Future references so this work will be abbreviated *MSP*.

23. I cite Moore's *Letters*, pp. 164 and 168.

24. Given the complexity of this task, I am especially grateful to several critics who have engaged this poem, especially Heuving, *Omissions Are Not Accidents*, and Merrin, "Re-Seeing the Sea."

25. I take this account from the web version of Langdon Hammer's lecture on "The Grave" for his course on modern American poetry, encountered in 2018, http://oyc.yale.edu/transcript/521/engl-310.

Chapter Four

1. F. P. Harton, *The Elements of the Spiritual* Life, 177. Cited in Eliot, *The Poems of T. S. Eliot*, 1:922. Hereafter, this work will be referred to as *PE*. The editors point out that Eliot marked the entire passage in which this statement occurs.

2. The editors Ricks's and McCue's notes to *Four Quartets* frequently point out how Eliot seems most concerned in these poems with the state of the language deployed, especially on p. 1022.

3. One might say that in becoming close to Kierkegaard, Eliot could shift his emphases from the severe historical and cultural constraints proposed as corollaries of his need for conversion in his *After Strange Gods*. "Little Gidding" in particular seems almost devoted to a different religion than the one governing Eliot's writing immediately after his conversion.

4. Here I will rely on what I treat in my *Reckoning with the Imagination* as a Wittgensteinian critique of the impulses to invoke materialism, because Wittgenstein makes crucial distinctions that cannot be formulated within the frameworks provided by any Western empiricism that I know. Wittgenstein's view is that we can only accept causal explanations

when there are clear paths by which those explanations overcome doubt. But there are many aspects of human experience in which doubt is not applicable. Instead of seeking accurate description of underlying forces, we have to be content with attuning ourselves to what people display. Analogously, the role of display explains why "seeing as" establishes quite different conditions of uptake from claims about direct seeing. When someone offers a statement that one can see *x* as *y*, we typically do not try to verify the assertion; we try to attune ourselves to how desire and affect get displayed. Finally, Wittgenstein was fascinated by aspects of subjective life that could not appear in any kind of objective formulation but had to be treated as efforts at attunement between agents. This is why he deeply suspected the authority of ethics—which can only judge agents by putting them into general categories.

I cite this reasoning here for two reasons. First, it demonstrates that one does not need to be an idealist in order to be dissatisfied with contemporary versions of materialism. One can be committed to naturalism without being committed to how we can specify the appropriate mechanisms by which we act. And, second, this Wittgensteinian analysis of the roles of display and of personal confession make clear why Eliot turned to drama as his vehicle for elaborating how Christianity reconfigures the capacity of imagination to inhabit public space.

5. Pound, "A Retrospect," in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, 4.

6. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *Selected Essays*, 9.

7. See *PE* 899 for Eliot's fascinating contrasts between contrasting levels of depression in *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets*.

8. Once Eliot turns from perspective, it is the poem itself that defines available versions of a real beyond the personal. *The Waste Land* sets the consciousness of the poem against the consciousness of living cultural agents. Eliot's conversion is largely a matter of aligning the consciousness of the poem as public statement with the consciousness of a living agent shaped by openness to grace (and, in *Murder in Cathedral*, to the logic of martyrdom).

9. Please notice the effect of the parentheses here as a means of taking the statement out of time into a domain of interaction between endings and beginnings. For how this passage echoed Dante for Eliot, see *PE* 1005.

10. One of the deep pleasures of working on *Four Quartets* is getting to reread Helen Gardner's great short book *The Art of T. S. Eliot*. I have to thank Gardner for stressing an Eliot whose basic concern is to write Christian sentences in a secular world in order to provide testimony to how those sentences provide concrete means for placing a person within a potential fullness of experience.

11. Perhaps we can align Wittgenstein with Hegel in elaborating three aspects of why the writers were so wary of materialist perspectives: (1) these perspectives seemed incapable of fully honoring how display differs from description; (2) "seeing as" differs from seeing what can be objectively described (or what Hegel called "picture-thinking"); and (3) relying on

moral generalization or explanation of morality ignores aspects of value that depend on how people act and offer self-expressions in relation to their commitments to other people.

12. The difference between community and society can seem to depend on sacrament, because community has bonds very different from those determining social relations. This difference clarifies one of the elements that can be said to reveal how Christ establishes an alternative logic by which to see the laws of nature. And it also clarifies why Eliot always had trouble thinking about society, because it seemed to him fundamentally a lack of community rather than affording possible virtues involving the negotiation of differences where there is little agreement. As W. H. Auden elegantly points out in *The Dyer's Hand*, society is simply a configuration of competing individual wills, while community involves an affirmation of shared beliefs and social bonds.

13. Eliot, *Collected Plays*, 33. Further references in the text will be cited as *Plays*.

14. Indeed, the difficulty of objectifying how grace stabilizes will is nowhere more evident than in the major weakness of Eliot's play, the impossibility of giving reasons why Thomas can successfully resist the fourth tempter. This power can only arise from grace, and although the presence of grace can be exemplified, the moment when it takes hold cannot be exhibited by secular means. All we can see is that the person has changed: we can see the effects of the grace but not of its working on the mind in the first place.

15. One might say that although several critics of the play deeply appreciate how Eliot builds community, they tend just to assert the importance of community rather than elaborating the logic by which one can clarify how there might be a human power to deny our impulses toward individual gratification. For stressing community, I want to cite especially Smith, *T. S. Eliot's Dramatic Theory and Practice*, and Malamud, *Where the Words are Valid*.

16. Stevens, *Collected Poetry and Prose*, 446. Hereafter *CPP* in this chapter.

17. It is true that the personal finds eccentricity diminished when it unites with the impersonal. But what the subject loses in its sense of difference from other people is for Eliot completely justified by what it gains in the depth of self-conscious awareness of its place in a redeemed world.

18. I think it matters that the line "With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling" does not appear at all in the first draft of the poem. See the reproduction of that draft in Gardner, *The Composition of the Four Quartets*, 232. This line seems the fruit of reflection on what the poem is trying to accomplish and how it can emphasize distinctive modes of self-awareness.

Chapter Five

1. Both citations are from Wallace Stevens, *Collected Poetry and Prose*, 747, 750. Again, I will abbreviate this work as *CPP* for references within the text and notes. And I take this occasion to apologize for the many ellipses in my quoting from the poems. Permission for lines from Stevens is painfully expensive.

2. As I have noted before, I take the idea of art as display from Wittgenstein and elaborate it in my book *Reckoning with the Imagination*.

3. I obviously must offer homage to J. L. Austin's arguments about performative uses of language in *How to Do Things with Words*. But since poetic speech acts do not rely on ordinary institutional uses, I think it is better here just to try to characterize the work of performative speech by concentrating on the working of particular poems. Such performances engage specific emotional atmospheres. These specific engagements cannot be treated primarily as institutionally sanctioned enactments of social practices, even though they do rely on general assumptions about reading poetry in order to invite audiences to participate in those particular states.

4. Lisa Goldfarb, in *The Figure Concealed*, does not use a Hegelian language and differs from my assessment of *Credences of Summer*. But her book is relevant here for working out three concrete points, which I think enrich the case for using Hegelian principles to read Stevens. Most important, she shows how Stevens develops significant parallels to Valéry's emphasis on the "poetic principle . . . to be found in the voice and its singular exceptional union, difficult to sustain, with thought itself" (p. 106). Voice is the sensuous musical feature that sustains this resonance of "spirit, that is to say of everything perceived and perceiving, sustaining and responding" (p. 107). Second, like Valéry, Stevens recognizes that a poetry of inner voice cannot claim to invite its readers to get engaged in dramatic representations. The poem must aim at an audience who participates self-consciously in the thinking by carrying the words within their own psyches (p. 110). Finally, she begins through Valéry to try to understand the place for Stevens of the concept of the unreal as the basis for a more general sense of generative opposites that I will take as basic to how "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven" stages habitation (e.g., p. 88). Two other fine recent essays offer versions of Stevensian self-consciousness that fit my Hegelian account, although they do not pursue that route. These are Vydrin, "Accessible Utopia"; and Miller, "A Postcard from the Volcano," 191–206, 207–26.

5. Stevens invokes my sense of the performative when "Of Modern Poetry" develops what is involved in poetry's being on stage.

6. It should be evident that Stevens's theorizing also manifests ambitions for poetry much like Eliot's, despite the quite different overall intellectual framework basic to Eliot's long poem. Eliot also had too much respect for philosophy as a discipline to hope that it could get beyond its professional boundaries in order to address common life with any degree of respect for what could not admit of conceptual analysis. And as Eliot got older, and probably looked back with dismay at *After Strange Gods*, he came increasingly to differentiate pronouncements about faith from enactments of the kinds of permissions that faith offered for a satisfying life.

7. This is perhaps the best reason why we will never appreciate Stevens fully if we try to take these ideas as sponsored by relatively systematic modes of philosophical inquiry—whether it be idealism or pragmatism or the materialism proposed by Mark Noble in

American Poetic Materialism from Whitman to Stevens, a book I very much admire. Noble is compelling on "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," especially in his summary remarks on pp. 179–81. But because of his emphasis on materialist themes, his reading of section XXVIII here is significantly and symptomatically bound to the "real," and completely insufficient on the "unreal." For example, he asserts that "If we are confident in the mind's presentation of this plate and that loaf of bread, then, we can derive confidence that a town represented on a postcard is no less real than one on a map—that Rome is still Rome after dark . . . " (p. 179). In contrast, I think Stevens thinks Rome after dark is a very different kind of reality, suffused by the unreal and demonstrating how imagination is a central feature of habitation. For more on this matter, see my "Review of Mark Noble," 237–41.

8. Stevens's tying "realization" to Cézanne is explicit in *CPP* 671–72. Other interesting uses of the term occur in *CPP* 386, 746, and 645, where the concept is linked to an ideal of "participation."

9. See especially *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, 677: "Eliot and I are dead opposites."

10. "A realization of the infinity of the world is equally a perception of philosophy and a typical metamorphosis of poetry" (*CPP* 856).

11. I refer again to Stevens in "Les Plus Belles Pages": "The interrelation between reality and imagination is the basis of the character of literature. The interrelation between reality and the emotions is the basis of the vitality of literature, between reality and thought the basis of its power" (*CPP* 867).

12. Section VIII is especially noteworthy in the context of the general argument of my chapter because it parallels Eliot's fascination with the relationships possible between the cry and the prayer, now rendered in a way that moves between deep personal unease and the recognition that such pain too must play a part in finding the sought-for expression:

> The cry that contains its converse in itself,
> In which looks and feelings mingle and are part
> As a quick answer modifies a question,
>
> Not wholly spoken in a conversation between
> Two bodies disembodied in their talk,
> Too fragile, too immediate for any speech. (*CPP* 401–2)

I think the cry contains its converse in itself because it also indicates the inexpressible presence of all this fragility. A quick answer modifies a question because the question appears as somehow attuned to the answering capacities of the respondent. Similarly, the difficulties of talk open into an awareness of how the two agents might be disposed toward speech. That disposition might even be visible in the process by which awareness of the "two bodies" generates a pun carried by "Too fragile, too immediate." One can hear the "too" as echoing a shared condition between the two modes of embodiment actually brought out by the difference between disembodied talk and what actual speech might accomplish.

13. I did not see in this reading that aspectual thinking is one of the ways in which Stevens comes to terms with an expanded sense of the demands of realization. These demands seem to me now what aspectual thinking serves, so it is the pressure for realization that is the most fundamental factor informing the efforts of self-consciousness to establish satisfying means of habitation that extend to acts of will.

14. I cannot resist commenting on the brilliant artfulness of this passage. First notice how smoothly the poet takes over from the quotation. This helps make the language after the first stanza approach very clean prose because the enjambments have the strange effect of isolating each line as sonic and grammatical substance even while giving an intense physicality to the work of pulling tight what can count as lyric thought. Notice too how the language changes to eloquent rhetoric about the evening star, as if the poem itself were searching for the possibleness of aligning inner life with the most intimate conditions of time and repetition. My discussion later of change and repetition will be based largely on this passage.

15. Possibleness as aspect of the real is developed by Terrence Deacon in *Incomplete Nature*.

16. I think it is no accident that these lines virtually describe Cézanne's *Pines and Rocks (Fontainebleau?)* that Stevens doubtless saw at MoMA. The work of the painter becomes a naturalized image, making the elements of the scene emerge and inviting us to see that farewells can become openness to transfiguration. On the aesthetic and art historical significance of this painting, see my *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry*.

17. These permissions echo the ending of "Of Modern Poetry" and perform the same function of both accepting and modifying necessity.

Chapter Six

1. Ashbery, *Selected Prose*, 294. Hereafter *SP*.

2. "The space of dreams—deep, shallow, open, bent, a point which has no physical dimensions or a universal breadth—is the space in which we now live." Ashbery, *Reported Sightings*, 12.

3. For Ashbery the alternative to a poetics of process is an appalling repetition of what is already known. The following passage in Ashbery's *Selected Prose* is from an introduction to a reading by Charles North:

> I would like to add that he is one of the most accessible—dread word—of contemporary poets. I don't mean this in the negative way critics of poetry use the word as a club to beat the poets they don't like; i.e., that modern poetry is out of touch with its audience, and nobody reads poetry anymore because poets for some reason refuse to be accessible. Alas, the world is full of poets who are accessible in that definition and yet nobody reads them either. Could it be because they insist on telling the reader something he or she already knows? (*SP* 267)

4. John Shoptaw, *On the Inside Looking Out*, and many others are probably right that what we might call "deviousness" derives ultimately from Ashbery growing up gay in a society where he could not identify with several aspects of its narratives of itself. But this origin does not entail that his actual art practice is primarily governed by gay double consciousness. Ashbery makes intricate varieties of double and triple consciousness possible states of mind for all of us.

5. Among the many fine critical treatments of Ashbery, I find two most useful—Andrew Dubois, *Ashbery's Forms of Attention*, for the states of mind Ashbery engages, and Nikki Skillman, *The Lyric in the Age of the Brain*, for her treatment of issues of brain science. The reader will hear much more about Skillman's book.

6. Here I have quoted from Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 21. Barthes also makes very useful comments on fascination in *Critical Essays*, especially xvi–xviii, 239–47, 258–79. Ashbery's version of an ideal of fascination provides an even more difficult challenge to the moralism of American literary criticism because he suggests that a powerful writing can be less interested in traditional aesthetic matters than in simply sheer absorption in the conditions of the telling. Fascination directs us to how the text plays with its audience by embedding various secrets, echoes, diversions, and intricate seductions. And fascination has the capacity to suspend the kinds of struggles among oppositions that have been the major reason why interpretation seems such a powerful practice in literary criticism. Interpretation invites us to trace how value emerges from description or how passivity finally yields to active commitment. But if the goal is fascination, what matters most in writing is the imaginative power to defer or deform oppositions, because such practices emphasize process rather than product and invention rather than construction. The worst thing writers can do in an Ashberyian regime is tell us what we already know (see *SP* 267), however much the text displays the force of structural intelligence.

7. I feel I have to ask why Skillman's perspective upset me so much. On the most general level, I think she allows her cultural model to overwhelm her imaginative identification with Ashbery's work. If he were to think constantly of the opposition between nature and soul or the idealization of mind, she would have a convincing case. But the evidence is just not there, at least before "Litany." Just think of Ashbery's critical prose, where he is constantly attending to the powers of imagination to explore sites that the rational mind cannot plumb. And notice in the long passage I quoted from Skillman the irony that her precise observation calls up this generalizing term "mindlessness," which seems not quite to account for the conditions it purports to describe. For Ashbery, there is more to mind than rationality, especially in the arts, which get to establish their own conditions for engaging kinds of information. In fact, "mind" is probably best viewed not as an entity, whose absence we can call mindlessness, but as a series of skills we deploy in various practices. Seen this way, there is much more to Ashbery's poetry than pathos—as Skillman's readings testify.

Sharp as she is, however, Skillman in my view simply does not challenge us sufficiently to find terms for valuing what Ashbery's inventiveness produces. I do not think emphasizing cultural contexts can perform this work without careful readings of what the poems ask

of their readers. Instead, she calls attention to only what supports her case, ignoring much that we still have to call mind. For example, she selects one moment from the meditative process in "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror," the moment when the material of Parmigianino's self-portrait suggests, "'Everything,' Parmigianino's eyes proclaim, 'is surface'" (Skillman 184).

> This flattening means that the demystified "mind" or "soul" or "spirit" is now fundamentally *like* the portrait—it may seem to possess an immaterial depth, but it is merely a sum of the parts that converge on single, material plane. The soul . . . In light of this biological contingency, everything becomes unstable, unhinged; the unity of this subject "englobed" in the mind and in the work of art alike proves to be a precariously fragile illusion . . . (Skillman 184)

But this "fragile illusion" has a mode of existence capable of eliciting a range of authorial choices. These choices sustain an intricate and many-faceted meditation on the mysteries and the limitations of a person's feelings of selfhood. Only mind could recuperate the force of Parmigianino's self-portrait as an image of vulnerability that manages to persist over time, because it mines a situation capable of fusing awareness of pathos with hope in the possible ramifications of delicate craft. The poem begins with the marvelous figure of "As Parmigianino did it," which fully deploys the duplicity of the grammar of "as" that establishes two kinds of equivalence. The primary equivalence is probably modal: the painting makes clear the power of the artifice by which Parmigianino made the choices resulting in this particular image. But we also cannot escape the temporal sense of "as," because it makes it possible to imagine sharing in a version of that constructive activity despite the passage of time. We see now Parmigianino working then, in his studio and in his time.

While the painting demands attention to how Parmigianino reconfigures mind as the fullness of gesture on a complex surface, the effect of the meditation it generates profoundly puts an active mind back within a fluid world that is the source of its distinctive energies. This is the poem's conclusion:

> . . . The hand holds no chalk
> And each part of the whole falls off
> And cannot know it knew, except
> Here and there, in cold pockets
> Of remembrance, whispers out of time. (*ACP* 487)

These enjambments are simply marvelous acts dramatizing the mind of a maker. The first three lines of this passage are rife with the pathos of insistent naturalization where mind had once prevailed. But then there is this "except," which finds successful communication with what seems all of Parmigianino's doubts and fears, thus enabling the contemporary poet to produce substantial links between past and present. With "Here and there" we find a compelling coldness that might be necessary for thinking about fluidity and the efforts of the hand to protect what is subject to time and to change. These whispers emerge "out of

time." More important, they also offer glimpses of a site outside of measurable time, where the respondent's active mind colludes with what the maker's imagination can achieve. Ashbery is materialist in his insistence that generalizations about mind have to be broken down into a range of such activities. But he also seems convinced that as we participate in these activities it seems necessary for ontology in art criticism to give way to phenomenology that can sustain what Stevens called "the intricate evasions of as," as shapes of mindfulness.)

8. Ashbery, *Collected Poems 1956–1987*, 491, abbreviated *ACP* in the previous note and hereafter.

9. This positioning probably involves an allusion to the situation posited for Zeus in the concluding line of Yeats's "Leda and the Swan," where "could" also takes on considerable philosophical resonance.

10. One aspect of Ashbery's brilliance as a critic is his recognition that in her poetry, Marianne Moore might have more in common with Stein than with Eliot or Pound because of her almost equating the real with the writing that establishes it. See his essays on Moore in *SP* 83–88.

11. "It is this continually renewed sense of discovering the strangeness, the unreality of our reality at the very moment of becoming conscious of it as reality, that is the great subject for Elizabeth Bishop" (*SP* 166).

12. Skillman takes this passage as a basic model of how Ashbery deploys "mindlessness." But this passage too is generated as a process of thinking that will be endlessly revised and modified as the poem weaves its invitations to sharing in what becomes present in the poem and through the poem.

13. O'Brien, "It Is Not a Question, Then" (on John Ashbery's "Clepsydra"), 134–38. Hereafter QT.

14. In another essay, which is probably the best short essay on Whitman ever written, "The Rhyme of the Left Margin," 93–98, O'Brien gives a characteristically distinctive account of what I have been gesturing toward in my arguments about the limitations of epiphanic poetry. Such poetry emphasizes how the right margin provides closure at the level of the line and of the work as a whole. In contrast, poetry emphasizing the left margin concentrates on how readers continually open possibilities of reflection within an overall concern for continuity.

15. Ibid., 93.

16. O'Brien, "Interview with Adam Fitzgerald," unpaginated. See also this statement from QT 137: "It therefore cannot ever be inaccurate, can't ever not be referring to its own coming into audibility and view. The poem's 'is' is not the 'is' of reference but that of reference's temporality, the taking up of material space rather than its immaterial description in extended figures, the truth of the moment of utterance rather than the thing said. We are tempted in such cases to see the poem as referring to itself rather than using itself to refer, to take the pyrrhic metaphors—waterclock, sky, telescope, morning, nightfall—and

refer them to the poem's pyrrhic habits of description. Syntax as syndrome, the running together of the referents of the signs so arranged, the arrangement of runnings-together."

17. O'Brien, "The Rhyme of the Left Margin," 93–94. The following passage provides an ambitious technical language for how we negotiate reference: "We can then think of reference as the site of both possession and dispossession, as the moment when the possibility of speech becomes nomination ('ex-possibilities'), nomination becomes possession ('present fact'), and possession property, a name that makes a claim. The swift dissolve of one figure into another, scape into paces, sustains the time of utterance but not its semantic predications, reducing 'that other world, / The round one of the telescope to a kind of very fine powder or dust / So small that space could not remember it.' The 'Is' of writing—a series of spatial dispossessions, an irresolvable syntax referring backwards and forwards through a present emphasis—is always 'Is changed'" (QT, 137).

18. O'Brien, *The Guns and Flags Project*, 47.

19. O'Brien, "The Rhyme of the Left Margin," 93.

20. O'Brien, "Interview with Adam Fitzgerald," first page.

21. Adam Fitzgerald speaks of O'Brien's "existentialism of enjambment," probably because enjambment is a great figure for states where clearly existence precedes essence. The statement occurs on the first page of the unpaginated interview with O'Brien.

22. This and the citation in the next paragraph are from ibid., sixth page.

23. O'Brien, *People on Sunday*, 103.

24. O'Brien, *Experience in Groups*, 30–31.

Epilogue

1. It might not be surprising that I am not an admirer of the new views of reading that propose to modify ideals of close reading, even though I doubt that the New Criticism affords the best realizations of these ideals. New models for engaging texts, like surface reading or affirmative reading, share my interest in how literary texts affect the mental states of audiences. But I think these models are far too permissive in their attributing importance to subjective states. Such attributions of the priority of subjective response simply do not pay sufficient attention to how texts embody intentions and engage historical situations. I hope this book shows how these shortcomings are especially costly in dealing with how Modernist Constructivist work seems to want to be read. Please see the theory of authorial intention I develop in "The Fallacy of 'Fallacy'" 175–93.

2. I find most interesting for my purposes Chalmers's arguments in chapters 1, 2, 8, 11, and 14 (this latter one with Tim Bayne) in *The Character of Consciousness* (hereafter *CC*). I am aware that Chalmers is a restless thinker continually modifying his positions, but for my purposes these are the clearest statements I know of his core arguments. These core arguments matter most to me because they emphasize "phenomenal experience" in such a

way as to bring out one basic problem in the emerging field of materialist aesthetics. And that field seems to me to need the challenges posed by my characterizations of making and transpersonality on which this book has been based.

Let me also summarize other reasons for distrusting this materialist reasoning, even though the same critiques may be derived from Chalmers's rejection of standard materialist arguments. There is a useful test case offered by the recent essays comprising *Aesthetics and the Sciences of Mind*, edited by Currie et al. These essays are intelligent and inventive about how the arts enhance perception and develop intense affective fields for the responder—both as engagement in the text and engagement in the appreciative process. My position is not easy to elaborate, because there are many reasons that the work will not follow what the psychology of the artist wanted to produce. Nonetheless, I argue in "The Fallacy of 'Fallacy'" that one can avoid these difficulties by being content to treat the relevant intention as simply the decision to sign a work or make it public. Then we have to treat the work as purposive, and we have to interpret the possible reasons why there are pronounced structural and semantic gestures. Not recognizing the force of these gestures is simply not responding to the potential fullness of the experience involved. So audiences should find it strange and troubling that the empiricist theorists in this collection simply do not worry about the shaping of art objects in ways that make demands on audiences.

Dominic McIver Lopes, in "Feckless Reason," perfectly captures the logic here when he contrasts "internalism" and "externalism" about aesthetic reasons. Internalism for Lopes refers to traditional ideals according to which full appreciation of a work depends on the audience pursuing reflective accounts of "what justifies their appreciating" (p. 33). Such ideals cannot be characterized in empirical terms and easily slip between fantasies of self-importance and the exercise of training that cannot in fact justify any particular application to a reading as more accurate or more passionate than its competitors. So he sides with externalism in order to stress the ways in which "empirical work . . . suggests that aesthetic and other forms of judgment proceed independently" of the reasoning process (p. 9, editors' introduction). But he does not see that his empiricism is logically constrained to externalism, because it does not distinguish among levels of competence in readers or whether they worry about being attuned to the writer's subjective investments in the manner by which a work engages a world. His ontology of what art is completely constrains his methodology. This ontology ignores the possibility that works of art are not best seen as objects determined by our own interests but as objects promising rewards for pursuing how communication takes place between author and reader. Artworks offer modes of structuring the world that promise alternatives to how our typical practical interests govern our modes of interpreting experience.

Let me risk overkill by citing briefly two further examples of how empiricist thinking forces highly oversimplified hypotheses about both aesthetic experience and aesthetic appreciation. Jesse Prinz, in "Seeing with Feeling," writes brilliantly of the affective dimension

of aesthetic experience, especially the general state of wonder that appreciation can sponsor. And he argues persuasively that perception in art is not systematically prior to evaluation. Rather "evaluative seeing is a manner of seeing rather than an effect of seeing" (p. 156). Evaluative seeing then becomes inseparable from wonder. But wonder, then, becomes virtually a universal feature of treating something as art. This ignores the probability that aesthetic appreciation involves a wonder that depends on judging how the work develops and interprets more particular affective qualities tied to concrete states of awareness. In my view, perception is not only modified by evaluative seeing but tightly bound to the processing of the work as work, that is, as a labor to establish distinctive textures of feeling involved in inexorably particular states that resist being subsumed into categories like wonder that connect action to generalized emotional states. In most art, shades of feeling are more important than the kinds of large emotions that elicit actions. It is true that the play *Hamlet* evokes wonder for many members of the audience. But that wonder is closely tied to specific features of the writing that produce constant engagement in particular affective states. In fact, the play suggests that the character Hamlet's capacity for wonder is insufficiently bound to the affective states of those around him. So that capacity for wonder makes him unfit for a world that accords with Claudius's brilliant practical understanding.

Finally, Noël Carroll takes on the ultimate empiricist question—How can the various difficulties in the production and consumption of high art be made consistent with evolutionary theory's expectations about fitness for survival? Carroll bravely focuses on the kind of emotional labor art performs for civilization. But he seems constrained to deal with very large public emotions that most ambitious artists have for at least two hundred years treated as antithetical to high art. It may be the case, increasingly likely, that high art is on the way to the junk heap of evolutionary misfits. But no one can know. And it is probable that different kinds of arts survive for different kinds of reasons very difficult to explain without distorting the phenomena under examination. It is likely that civilization needs modes of delight created by resistance to large public emotions as much as it needs these collective emotions. But in the service of big public ideas like evolution, Carroll seems so influenced by the possibility of extending science that he forgets to concern himself with what may be distinctive about a category of experience stressing the particular rather than the species. For support in my criticisms I will invoke later in this appendix chapter 10 of Alva Noë's *Strange Tools*. Then I can adapt for my purposes Noë's entire overall account of why what he calls materialist twists on a fundamentally Cartesian view of the mind's relation to the world simply cannot deal with how works of art seem to have designs on their readers, hearers, and viewers.

3. I think that cognitive models of reading literary texts simply mistake the primary force of most literary objects. Certainly there are cognitions that occur in reading. But do we read for cognition? What would we lose if criticism were suddenly to focus exclusively on how texts establish cognition from literary experience? My theoretical position is that

artworks offer displays of passionate engagements with pieces of the world. Display invites participation and involvement in both passion and reflection. And display connects to the world by virtue of providing examples of how these experiences might influence behaviors beyond the activity of reading. Most ambitious poetry seeks engagement in possible worlds, not the accuracy that can provide cognition in what we agree constitutes what makes cognition possible.

4. Moses, "Poetry and the Environmentally Extended Mind," pp. 309–35. Hereafter PEEM. Moses uses Clark's 1997 book *Being There*.

5. Noë, *Strange Tools*, 136–38. Further references to this work will be cited with page numbers within my main text.

6. Andy Clark, *Supersizing the Mind*, 31 Hereafter *EM*. This is a more capacious analysis than *Being There* provides.

7. I go on at length about making in art as producing displays in my *Reckoning with the Imagination*, especially in chapter 3.

8. In his essay cited in note 4, Moses treats the maker as primarily a teacher:

> Williams' poem sets out to teach us how to act in situations that simultaneously afford multiple possibilities of interpretation and do not oblige very specific or forceful kinds of action. . . . The chief form that action takes is the action of discovering patterns, creating salience among images, registering their sensory resonances with other memories or projected thoughts. (PEEM 320)

The odd feature here is that the model of poet as teacher would be appropriate for much of the history of the genre. But modern poetry is acutely aware of the dangers of equating poetry with teaching, because that binds it to rhetorical intentions and ultimately to the authority of the prevailing culture, which poets had become desperate to escape. Instead, modernists like Eliot and Williams typically cast the poem as performance rather than as lesson.

9. This title was given to the poem originally untitled in Williams's *Spring and All*, reprinted in *Imaginations*.

10. Gander, "What it Sounds Like," in his *Be With*, 27.

11. Williams, *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams*, 205–6.

12. I want to call attention to a fine essay that unpacks the nature of these complexities of self-consciousness by showing what continental phenomenology can contribute to analytic philosophy's discussions of the nature of consciousness: Zahavi, "Intentionality and Phenomenality," 63–92. Zahavi makes a very strong case for the inseparability of phenomena and intentionality in relation to how consciousness operates. And in the process he makes, to me, a stunning distinction about modes of self-consciousness: "There is a difference between asking about the property the object is experienced as having (what does the object feel like to the perceiver) and asking about the property of the experience of the object (what does the perceiving feel like to the perceiver). Both questions pertain

to the phenomenal dimension, but whereas the first question concerns a worldly property, the second concerns an experiential property" (p. 71). I simply want to elaborate how poetry provides vivid demonstrations of what this second concern might involve in our descriptions of self-consciousness.

13. Because I think this poem offers so striking an example of "inner sensuousness" without an ontology claiming an inner life, I rework a reading of this poem from my essay "How John Ashbery Modified Stevens' Uses of 'As.'"

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