Blackwell Introductions to Literature

This series sets out to provide concise and stimulating introductions to literary subjects. It offers books on major authors (from John Milton to James Joyce), as well as key periods and movements (from Old English literature to the contemporary). Coverage is also afforded to such specific topics as "Arthurian Romance." All are written by outstanding scholars as texts to inspire newcomers and others: non-specialists wishing to revisit a topic, or general readers. The prospective overall aim is to ground and prepare students and readers of whatever kind in their pursuit of wider reading.

Published

1. John Milton	*Roy Flannagan*
2. Chaucer and the Canterbury Tales	*John Hirsh*
3. Arthurian Romance	*Derek Pearsall*
4. James Joyce	*Michael Seidel*
5. Mark Twain	*Stephen Railton*
6. The Modern Novel	*Jesse Matz*
7. Old Norse–Icelandic Literature	*Heather O'Donoghue*
8. Old English Literature	*Daniel Donoghue*
9. Modernism	*David Ayers*
10. Latin American Fiction	*Philip Swanson*
11. Re-Scripting Walt Whitman	*Ed Folsom and Kenneth M. Price*
12. Renaissance and Reformations	*Michael Hattaway*
13. The Art of Twentieth-Century American Poetry	*Charles Altieri*

Forthcoming

American Drama 1945–2000	*David Krasner*
American Literature and Culture 1900–1960	*Gail McDonald*
Shakespeare's Sonnets	*Dympna Callaghan*
Middle English	*Thorlac Turville-Petre*

The Art of Twentieth-Century American Poetry

Modernism and After

Charles Altieri

Blackwell Publishing

BLACKWELL PUBLISHING
350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA
9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK
550 Swanston Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053, Australia

First published 2006 by Blackwell Publishing Ltd

1 2006

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Altieri, Charles, 1942–
The art of twentieth-century American poetry : modernism
and after / Charles Altieri.
p. cm.—(Blackwell introductions to literature)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN-13: 978-1-4051-2106-4 (hard cover : alk. paper)
ISBN-10: 1-4051-2106-8 (hard cover : alk. paper)
ISBN-13: 978-1-4051-2107-1 (pbk. : alk. paper)
ISBN-10: 1-4051-2107-6 (pbk. : alk. paper) 1. American poetry—
20th century—History and criticism. 2. Modernism (Literature)—
United States. I. Title. II. Series.
PS310.M57A577 2006
811'.509112—dc22
2005012328

A catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

Set in 10/13pt Meridien
by Graphicraft Limited, Hong Kong
Printed and bound in India
by Replika Press Pvt. Ltd, Kundli

The publisher's policy is to use permanent paper from mills that
operate a sustainable forestry policy, and which has been manufactured
from pulp processed using acid-free and elementary
chlorine-free practices. Furthermore, the publisher ensures that
the text paper and cover board used have met acceptable
environmental accreditation standards.

For further information on
Blackwell Publishing, visit our website:
www.blackwellpublishing.com

Contents

A final caveat. Because I have a large stake in the intellectual ferment to which modernist poetry was responding, I will spend considerable time outlining the concepts that seem to me crucial for understanding the writers' particular projects and for placing them in historical relation to one another. This attention to contexts will exact a considerable price. To engage contexts even on an introductory level I will have to ignore several quite substantial poetic careers. And even when I dwell on specific poems, I will have to ignore other important aspects of the poet's work. The best I can do to provide coverage of the field is to take a cue from those who do political surveys. I want to adapt the principle of "sampling." But my project will not involve taking the ideological pulse of a populace. Rather I shall propose certain works as significant for how they can quicken and hence modify aspects of such a pulse. Literary sampling involves two tasks. First, a critic must seek texts, usually but not always canonical ones, that best exemplify how authors typically stage their strengths, interests, commitments, and innovations. Second, the critic has to imagine not just how the texts matter for authors but how they can matter for readers. Sampling has to include demonstrating how readers might use poems to connect with what concerns them in their extra-literary experience. In effect, sampling tests conjunctions between literary ambitions and critical methods. But I hope readers will also be encouraged to engage the authors more fully so that my efforts at modeling become also measures of what is limited in the narrowly focused single perspective. An introductory book has to imagine its success as inseparable from its being superseded by the reader's developing ability to tell more complex stories.

Chapter 2

The New Realism in Modernist Poetry: Pound and Williams

Nine out of every ten Americans have sold their souls for a quotation. They have wrapped themselves about a formula of words instead of about their own centers.
Ezra Pound, "Patria Mia"[1]

Valid scientific thought consists in following as closely as may be the actual and entangled lines of force as they pulse through things.
Ernest Fenollosa, "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry"[2]

Because the knife is polished they think it is sharp.
William Carlos Williams, The Embodiment of Knowledge[3]

I begin with what I am calling the "new realism" in order to track one of the major undervalued achievements by the first generation of modern American poets. This generation managed to establish significant ways of breaking from received ways of establishing "truth" by showing how poetry could be a substantial form of inquiry in its own right. But critics tend to emphasize the poets' formal innovations (as praise and, recently, as blame), without recognizing how concerns about content drive many of their innovations.[4] In fact those formal innovations were inspired largely by late nineteenth-century science's treatments of the relation between mind and body, spirit and matter. I think it fair to say that very little of this transcendental speculative science has lasted. Yet, thanks to the fine work several critics have done in tracing these scientific arguments,[5] we can see now that science at least had the effect of challenging rigid materialist causal models,

and so was quite influential in shaping the more fluid notions of matter and cause governing contemporary thinking. More important, we can begin to appreciate how the poets might have responded to the general intellectual ferment produced by those discoveries. Experiment was a general cultural ideal, not a mandarin excuse for evading historical struggles.

Obviously I cannot review all this work. But by concentrating on an ideal of a new realism I hope to bring out how the spirit of science generated both a sense of challenge and a sense of permission among modern poets. Given the fact that this book is a brief introduction, I can best honor that sense of challenge by going directly to examples of work that extend aspects of the new realism beyond science – in particular to the conceptual model provided by Henri Bergson's critiques of the Cartesian tradition and to the material model provided by Paul Cézanne's painting, with its own critiques of the habits of seeing characteristic of the old realism. Even with this narrowing of the field, we have to adjust for the fact that writers by and large do not read technical philosophy and do not look at paintings as art historians do. Therefore I shall focus only on how these ideas and these paintings sponsor new modes of self-consciousness about seeing and about sensing. This focus should suffice to show why the poets rejected representational models of writing and experimented with other, more direct means of bringing force and structure to what they could make seem immediate experience.

If one were limited to a single cultural avatar of the new realism, Henri Bergson would probably be the consensus choice. His ideas were widely disseminated in the United States and in Europe. T. S. Eliot went from Harvard University to Paris to hear the great man, and his translator in England was T. E. Hulme, someone close to the major modernist writers. Perhaps the most significant measure of his popularity was that Bertrand Russell thought it worth a small book to expose his errors. (Wyndham Lewis later wrote a much larger book with the same intent but not the same clarity.) Bergson matters for my purposes largely because he adapted the spirit of the new science into a critique of scientific method and so developed aspects of the new realism with which poets could immediately identify.[6] Bergson knew his science – his early work was steeped in academic traditions in psychology – yet he insisted that only philosophy could provide sufficient critical scope to set the appropriate agendas for research.

To keep the focus sharp I will concentrate in this chapter on how Ezra Pound's work in London from 1912 to 1919 manifests substantial parallels with these Bergsonian concerns. Then I will turn from the Pound–Bergson nexus to another match, between Paul Cézanne and William Carlos Williams, this time stressing how the new realism affected artists' rendering of the powers organized by various sensations. Although I shall concentrate on particular works by these figures, my ultimate goal in discussing both Pound and Williams is to represent shifts in how all the major modernists understood the relation between describing a world and realizing it through emphasis on the powers of the medium in which it is rendered.

I

Like the poets, Bergson is probably most lucid and most compelling when he is being negative and attacking the dominant intellectual tradition. For he realized that the new realism raised conceptual stakes that extended far beyond science: all the prevailing conceptual structures that put the old realism in place had to be questioned. And, more important, these conceptual structures had to be examined for the deep cultural problems that they may have caused. One could argue that cultural critiques like Nietzsche's become especially trenchant when one can see clearly how the old ontology's divisions between matter and spirit might have produced a pervasive nihilism.

As evidence for these generalizations, consider how the following two passages from Bergson take on the entire Cartesian tradition ultimately responsible for the idealization of representation as a vehicle for knowledge. My first passage shows that both realism and idealism, the basic traditions spawned by Enlightenment thought, share one overriding and problematic assumption:

> If we now look closely at the two doctrines, we shall discover in them a common postulate, which we may formulate thus: perception has a wholly speculative interest; it is pure knowledge. . . . The one doctrine starts from the order required by science, and sees in perception only a confused and provisional science. The other puts perception in the first place, erects it into an absolute, and then holds science to be a symbolic expression of the real. But, for both parties, to perceive means above all to know.[7]

Bergson does not deny that perception is connected to knowledge but there is an intermediate step that Cartesian thinking tends to ignore, with important consequences. While knowledge seems satisfied by static pictures, perception is a dramatic event charged by its relation to other events. Knowledge then may be a secondary development created by the conjunction of events.

Hence Bergson's second, more general, passage speculating on the cultural cost when this emphasis on knowledge gets divorced from purposive behavior:

> We feel a thousand different elements which dissolve into and permeate one another without any precise outlines . . . ; hence their originality. . . . A moment ago each of them was borrowing an indefinable color from its surroundings: now we have it colourless and ready to accept a name. The feeling itself is a being which lives and develops and is therefore constantly changing. . . . By separating these moments from each other, by spreading out time in space, we have caused this feeling to lose its life and its color. Hence we are now standing before our own shadow: we believe that we have analyzed our feeling, while we have really replaced it by a juxtaposition of lifeless states which can be translated into words, and each of which constitutes the common element, the impersonal residue, of the impressions felt in a given case by the whole of society.[8]

This is at core an echo of Romantic complaints about Enlightenment culture's abstracting of images from the feelings that accompany them. But Bergson actually has the goods, in the sense that he is articulate on the cause of this haunting sense of the self as only shadowy substance. For he can show how the old realism casts the subject as a speculative witness to its body rather than as an owner capable of establishing and adjusting purposive behavior. For the old realism, the body becomes a fact in space rather than a dynamic force in time. Perception isolated from feeling can stage knowledge, but it cannot establish contexts in which the knowledge matters for the person in a particular situation. And then language becomes trapped within this theater of dispossession because it has to be on that stage without a sense that the agent is expressing and realizing some purpose. No wonder that modern culture increasingly needs shock values to feel any sense of vitality at all. And no wonder that other people seem less agents connected to

our concerns than vague threats made up of bundles of perceptions with which we fear we are unfamiliar.

Bergson's positive vision can be presented as developing four basic ideas that provide grounds for a new realism. The first builds on the critique of representation that we have already considered: "The brain is an instrument of action, and not of representation" (MM 74). In the place of perception as a vehicle of timeless knowledge, Bergson treats perception as fundamentally an aspect of a process driven by the person's interests in modifying the past in relation to a possible future. That is, he puts perception primarily in time rather than leaving it isolated in space: "Images themselves cannot create images; but they indicate at each moment, like a compass that is being moved about, the position of a certain given image, my body, in relation to the surrounding images" (MM 22). This sense of the movement of the body as the "true and final explanation" of "perception as a whole" (MM 45) replaces isolated percepts by consciousness of entire attitudes (MM 100).

Second, the old realism treated sensation primarily as the body's means of registering perception. An idea is the structure representing what sensation makes possible. For Bergson there is no direct connection between sensation and perceptions or images. Perceptions are constructs that simplify sensation by giving complexly interrelated forces in time a practical role in space (MM 52). Therefore he formulates a distinction between intensive and extensive manifolds: intensive manifolds model sensations as "in one another"; extensive manifolds model perceptions "as alongside one another" (TFW 101). Extensive manifolds, then, are spatial figures where elements are distinct and assertions about causality plausible because effects and causes can be distinguished. Intensive manifolds are qualitative relations that have to be modeled in terms of the kinds of interconnection that develop over time. When Bergson turns to pain, for example, he provides a telling account of why that state is not a percept but an affect structured as an intensive manifold:

> We shall not compare a pain of increasing intensity to a note which grows louder and louder, but rather to a symphony in which an increasing number of instruments make themselves heard. Within the characteristic sensation which gives the tone to all the others, consciousness

> distinguishes a larger or smaller number of sensations arising at different points of the periphery . . . : the choir of these elementary psychic states voices the new demands of the organism when confronted by a new situation. In other words, we estimate the intensity of a pain by the larger or smaller part of the organism that takes interest in it. (TFW 35)

We cannot separate the pain from the agent's qualitative response to the intricacy of an overall situation.

Third, Bergson makes a strong case for the importance of intuition. He has to admit that empirical reason functions well when phenomena admit of treatment as extensive manifolds. For reason has the power to isolate independent elements and test the various ways in which they interact. But the situation with intensive manifolds is quite different. These resist reason because the elements are not independent but form wholes in which various forces at play interpenetrate one another. Such interpenetration is accessible only to a power of consciousness that can take in the whole all at once. In such cases the mind must trust to intuition:

> Recognize in pure perception a system of nascent acts which plunges roots deep into the real: at once perception is seen to be radically distinct from recollection; the reality of things is no more constructed or reconstructed, but touched, penetrated, lived, and the problem of issue between realism and idealism . . . is solved, or rather dissolved, by intuition. (MM 69)

Intuition is the means of grasping how one experiences duration.

Finally, Bergson elaborates two basic practical consequences of adapting a new realism. Like William James (and like T. S. Eliot in his dissertation on F. H. Bradley) the real then need not be something thinkers picture or represent but something produced by individuals and collectivities as we test for what we can trust in our actions: "We measure in practice the degree of reality by the degree of utility" (MM 66). The emphasis on activity then provides a not implausible way of thinking about human freedom, something which is unthinkable when empirical reason is the only faculty trusted for psychological inquiry. Empirical reason will always invade "the series of our psychic states" by introducing space into our perception of duration, and hence corrupting "at its very source our feeling or outer and inner change, of movement, and of freedom" (TFW 74). Building on this contrast,

Bergson locates freedom as "a relation of the concrete self to the act which it performs." This relation, he adds, "is indefinable just because we are free," since "we can analyze a thing, but not a process; we can break up extensity but not duration" (TFW 219). Freedom becomes in effect a condition of expression: that self can be considered free when its actions seem to flow from concrete purposive behavior that is impossible to treat as determined by external forces. This move proves very important for artists and writers because Bergson breaks entirely from the Kantian tradition: freedom becomes less a property of rational moral action than an attribute earned by qualities of expressive behavior.

II

Ezra Pound is not likely to have read these passages from Bergson. He knew how to talk about Bergson from his extensive social relations, but did not have the temperament to read much modern philosophy. For him the new realism was less a doctrine than an attitude, less a philosophical position than a range of working principles borrowed from various aspects of the Zeitgeist, to which he was extremely sensitive. Pound's thinking could easily resemble a powerful vacuum cleaner picking up everything in the air, then sifting it in accord with a sensibility very finely tuned to what seemed new and interesting opportunities for the arts. He combined those collecting instincts with the capacity to develop and promulgate individual points with striking clarity, even if there might not be a corresponding clarity in how his ideas fit together. This clarity in turn probably posed an intriguing challenge to his peers: if his discourse could not make them better poets, at least it might open them to become more willing to articulate what they cared about in poetry.

Ezra Pound was born in Hailey, Idaho, but moved to Pennsylvania when he was 2. He was educated at the University of Pennsylvania, where he established friendships with both H.D. and William Carlos Williams. After graduating with an MA in romance languages, with an emphasis on medieval Provence, he started teaching at Wabash College in Crawfordsville, Indiana. There American writing was blessed by what at the time seemed an unfortunate incident. When a young woman was discovered to have spent the night in his room, Pound

swore that he had taken her in because she was homeless, and that he had slept on the floor. He had, after all, studied a good deal of chivalric literature. But the college was unrelenting, so he went off to London in 1908 to make his career. And make his career he did, serving as W. B. Yeats' secretary for two years, becoming a mentor to T. S. Eliot, serving as editor or contributing editor for journals like the *Egoist* and the *Little Review*, and imposing his rude mark on the British establishment as the most American of the émigré writers.

From the start Pound transformed the decadent aesthete role fashionable at the time in London. He cultivated long hair and had one of the few earrings in a male ear in London. But he also pursued an exaggerated manliness in every way possible, finding that manliness even in romance traditions where William Morris had found only pale, suffering, ardent lovers. No wonder Pound's Provence combined the erotic, the violent, and an always almost ironic self-consciousness, given expression partly by a mastery of the full sonic register afforded by English.[9]

This is the earliest poem that Pound chose to collect in *Personae*:

I stood still and was a tree amid the wood,
Knowing the truth of things unseen before;
Of Daphne and the laurel bow
And that god feasting couple old
That grew elm-oak amid the wold.
'Twas not until the gods had been
Kindly entreated, and been brought within
Unto the hearth of their heart's home
That they might do this wonder thing;
Nathless I have been a tree amid the wood
And many a new thing understood
That was rank folly to my head before.[10]

There is already a hunger for experience, a delicate and fluid responsiveness to links between the order of sense and the order of imagination, a remarkably secure ability to suspend and alter his view of his own identity, and, above all, an amazing facility with sounds. The alliteration in the first line stages the three *d* sounds, two of them internally rhymed, balanced against the glorious play of different *os* in the third through fifth lines. Then there is the intricate sounding of all the vowels in the closing lines. This intricacy is needed to set off how

strange a state and a phrase "rank folly" is once one comes to feel that this judgment blocks wisdom at its very source.

Yet there was not much possibility for Pound making his mark in London by resurrecting medieval postures, however subtle and delicately precise. But there was another route. He had learned from Yeats the possibilities of stripping down poetic rhetoric so that the lyric might become spare and precise. Then two closely interrelated events in 1913 helped him formulate a conceptual background for those stylistic changes – a background that made it possible for him to articulate a version of the new realism. He was given the notebooks of Ernest Fenollosa, a Harvard-educated philosopher who had been teaching in Japan. Fenollosa's Emersonian roots led him to develop a theory of how a sense of nature as force and process made the Chinese written character a very different medium of expression from what was available for poetry in the West. And Pound began writing in defense of Imagist poetry by attaching it to the kind of realism that characterized modern science and the "advances" articulated by such prose writers as Gustave Flaubert and especially Henry James (on whose commitment to freedom he has still the best essay). These engagements taken together made Pound's thinking the fundamental pre-text for every American poet at the time who sought to display his or her distinction as a truly modernist writer adapting to a century where the old pieties and roles might be finally buried.

In both cases Pound seems an unlikely ally of Bergson because Pound seems committed to the power of language to create pictures or images of the real. But if we read him carefully we will see that as he worked on how language provided pictures of the world, he increasingly resisted any notion of the image as static or spatial or disembodied. Pound was committed to the author's picturing the world, with a full sense of the affective duration that makes for satisfaction in the act of picturing. With Fenollosa, he received his fundamental breakthrough. A radical pictorial language like the Chinese character afforded a world very different from the old realism's representations. The Chinese character did not encourage abstract dichotomies between the act of signification and the object signified. Instead ideogrammic writing included the energies implicating the perspective by which the mind engaged the image. Chinese does not convey just nouns, but always nouns in action: "Like nature, the Chinese words are alive and plastic, because *thing* and *action* are not formally separated" (CWC 145). Armed

with this support, Pound set about trying to figure out why English was so different in its treatment of the information from the senses. This resulted in a sharp critique of traditional logic and, more important, an affiliation with how modern science and, pre-eminently, modern fiction, seemed to be struggling against that logic.

He could forge this affiliation because he saw Fenollosa's notes not only articulating alternatives to Western poetry but also revealing profound symptoms that pervaded traditional Western habits of thinking. For example, Fenollosa argued that when confronted with the thought "the man runs," a Western logician makes two subjective equations, namely, the individual in question is contained under the class "man"; and the class man is contained under the class of "running things." But once these equations are in place, the logician has "no way of bringing together any two concepts which do not happen to stand one under the other and in the same pyramid. It is impossible to represent change in this system or any kind of growth" (CWC 151).

It is no accident, Fenollosa argued, that the concept of evolution came very late to Europe: "it could not make way until it was prepared to destroy the inveterate logic of classification." A new science could make progress in getting at the nature of things only if it refused to submit to the authority of classificatory logic. Then it might discover "how functions cohere in things" because it could express its results "in grouped sentences which embody no nouns or adjectives but verbs of special character." Correspondingly Chinese writing teaches us that poetry is richest when it "agrees with science, not with logic": "The moment we use the copula, the moment we express subjective inclusion, poetry evaporates. The more concretely we express the interactions of things, the better the poetry." "The true formula for thought is: the cherry tree is all that it does. Its correlated verbs *compose it.*"[11]

Pound was writing what he would call Imagist poems well before he encountered Fenollosa's notebooks. Yet I begin with Fenollosa because it can help us see how Pound was offered a perspective that required his rethinking what an image could do. Foremost in his mind was the need for poetry to avoid both sentimentality and rhetoric while coming to compete with the precision and elegance of prose writers like James and Flaubert. But now through Fenollosa he understood that a new poetry required more than stylistic innovation. It required challenging the cultural assumptions and the logic of inquiry

that Pound realized supported both sentimentality and rhetoric. So long as thing and action were kept distinct, poetry could be at best a supplement to other disciplines that provided names for those things. But if the image could display an inseparable fusion of thing and action, one could claim significant powers for poetry as a distinctive way of organizing experience. Poetry could articulate relational structures and, more important, relational activities pronouncedly too subtle for the classifying mind.

The first task of such a poetry was to defeat the blend of ornamental rhetoric and discursive argument that seemed the lot of a poetry banished by the old science from having any direct role in constituting any kind of knowledge. So there had to be new principles of craft. Pound offered three practical precepts: "direct treatment of the 'thing' whether subjective or objective"; the use of "absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation"; and composition "in the sequence of the musical phrase not in the sequence of the metronome." Then poetry might cultivate specific, evanescent moments, presenting "an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time."[12] Poetry could correlate sensation with intricacy of feeling rather than with perception.

I consider "Portrait d'un Femme" Pound's best Imagist poem because the details sustain a complex psychology while warding off any easy rhetorical judgment of the lady or heroic response on the part of the poet. All the words register aspects of the lady's presence; none are devoted to attitudinizing, moralizing, or seeking profundity on the part of the poet. But now I have to choose brief examples. This is "April":

> Three spirits came to me
> And drew me apart
> To where the olive boughs
> Lay stripped upon on the ground;
> Pale carnage beneath bright mist. (P 101)

The intellectual and emotional complex is constructed by having the speaker invited to what initially seems a significant adventure, only to be restricted to a series of evocative sensations. Then, after the picture develops, there is superimposed a different level of sensation, a strange conjunction of abstract detail (the carnage) with an atmospheric setting that absorbs the entire scene. The effect is of moving from time to

timelessness as the concrete situation generates a highly condensed figure at once characterizing the boughs and giving them the power to evoke a metaphoric equation.

It becomes impossible to tell where sensation ends and interpretation or intellection begins: everything becomes detail, yet the last line hovers over the poem in a way that almost subsumes the event into an idea of "pale carnage," building the slight details into something evoking recurrent devastation. (Pound probably settled on "carnage" because it echoes "pale" and sets the *a* sounds against the final *is*, but the word also marvelously pushes beyond the pastoral setting into a much bleaker domain.) But this turn to abstract diction is only momentary. All the connotations are reincorporated into the physical order by the figure of the mist, as if the scene could expand without losing its basis in complex sensation. In effect the poem constructs a plastic site building on these two orders of perception – the world of the mist and the strange material and abstract qualities of "carnage." Then the music of the poem expands the sensation in another direction by the extraordinarily luscious play of vowels and the intricate balancing of syntactic relations.

Now consider a quite different use of the image, here as the presentation of a psychological state that fuses a feeling for the powers of simile with intricate sensations, then places the whole in a deliciously ironic context:

> As a bathtub lined with white porcelain,
> When the hot water gives out or goes tepid,
> So is the slow cooling of our chivalrous passion,
> O my much praised but-not-altogether-satisfactory lady. (P 109)

And finally consider, "The Encounter," a self-consciously hip poem that goes perhaps as far as poetry can in cultivating what can be sensed but not subjected to moralizing discourse. The imagination of what this lady offers is inseparable from touch – text become texture:

> All the while they were talking the new morality
> Her eyes explored me.
> And when I arose to go
> Her fingers were like the tissue
> Of a Japanese paper napkin. (P 120)

These poems seem slight vehicles on which to make significant thematic claims. Yet they are slight vehicles that make a point of how their own slightness emerges – a promising beginning. The poems might even be said to question their culture's habits for making judgments about slightness. Maybe what has seemed weightiness depends primarily on rhetorical traditions that purchase an aura of profundity at the cost of precision and subtlety. Perhaps we need new models of judgment that rely more on intricate blends of sensations and a precise ear for nuance than they do on grand gestures asserting their own significance. That may be the only way to see how nouns and verbs combine to foster an intricate sense of process. And perhaps the blend of natural diction and a sense of playful contingency may give poetry the kind of substance that one can trust because it actually connects to how consciousness engages experience rather than merely classifying it.

Yet critics persist in treating these Imagist poems almost entirely as stylistic exercises, without concern for how they might pursue a distinctive model of what perception involves and why that might matter. So I want to bring these poems into the orbit of the conceptual concerns articulated in Fenollosa's essay. The task requires emphasizing not only the statement about "an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time" but also the following sentence: "I use the term 'complex' rather in the technical sense employed by the newer psychologists, such as Hart, though we might not agree absolutely in our expectations" (LE 4).

The best prose writers like Henry James had already made the necessary affiliation with the new sciences of the mind. But how could poetry make the shift away from conventional lyricism without becoming just decadent artifice? How could poetry share in the new realism without being subordinated to the prose efforts that were already quite sophisticated at adapting the new methods of inquiry?

More elementally how could poetry foreground criticism of the old realism without exposing its own slightness as a vehicle for engaging cultural life? How could poetry create significant opposition to Stendhal's defining a masterpiece as "a mirror dawdling down a lane"? And how could poetry provide a means of articulating widespread resentment of younger writers against a naturalism that represented the old realism at its most blunt? For there realism as a relation to detail gave way to realism as the insistence on general laws that governed

even the very minds that were calling for enlightenment.[13] Finally, how could poetry forge a relation to the new realism capable of exposing how Futurism, Pound's hated competitor for avant-garde status in London, was merely an "accelerated Impressionism" fascinated by the trappings of force but blind to how science was adapting to such force.

For the old realism a literary text proposing to offer significant knowledge had to present images that represented what an audience could agree were matters of fact. Then the text had to do the work of classification, or, more generally (since we are dealing with literature and not science), to establish categorical principles so that the individual event could be considered an instance of some generalization about nature or culture. The sharper the picture, the more it could represent what is shareable about minds, and the better it could illustrate the general principle. Even when they dealt with emotions, such texts had to appeal to powers of mind that were distinct from self-reference on the one hand and from any strong emotional responsiveness on the other. One could respond emotionally, but one had to know why this response had been elicited: ultimately one had to treat subjectivity in third-person terms. One had to make judgments about one's subjectivity in the same way that one made judgments about impersonal propositions. At the extreme, art could be realistic only if it could approximate a god-like indifference – not unlike the typical attitude a poet like Thomas Hardy mixes with an all too human sense of pathos.

III

I am oversimplifying a very complex set of values and a quite diversified literary tradition. My aim is not to account for the old realism but to characterize the dissatisfactions it elicited among the young modernists. If we return to Pound's "Pale carnage beneath bright mist" or the lady's fingers with the texture of a Japanese paper napkin, we will be struck by how final these images are! This poetry resists judgment in terms of general categories because the items are intensely sensual – not symbols carrying meaning so much as details bearing witness to some kind of force impossible to generalize about. Pound's Imagist poems are certainly not as rich culturally as Hardy's, but they offer something different, something new, something worth theorizing about. They offer the possibility of romance within secular society – without

transcendental sanctions. And they offer the stimulus for further theorizing about art that would eventually transform the Imagist mode into what Pound called the "ideogrammic method" of his *Cantos*.

The way to the *Cantos* begins with these efforts to establish what kind of "truth" poetry could present. How could poetry break from both the naming and the classifying functions of the old realism and at the same time carry more complex experiences than Imagist poetry might provide? Pound began the journey beyond Imagism by elaborating two somewhat different versions of how the new realism could redo the naming function – one with historical consciousness in mind and one driven by the model of the new fiction. Considering history as the backdrop, Pound imagined poetry pursuing "the method of Luminous Detail, a method most vigorously hostile to the prevailing mode of today – that is, the method of multitudinous detail, and to the method of yesterday, the method of sentiment and generalization" (Pound, SP 21). Notice here how swiftly and precisely Pound handles what he saw as the options possible within his own culture. Then, as he elaborates his case, he shows that one can present images capable of bypassing the powers of judgment required to establish and trust in categories and laws. Luminous details expand to representative generality while retaining the status of historical particulars because the case does not develop by slowly adding facts to establish generalizations. Rather these details evoke and reward the intuitions so important to Bergson. It becomes the task of the image to "give one a sudden insight" that carries within itself "intelligence of a period – a kind of intelligence not to be gathered from a great array of facts of the other sort." The luminous details "are swift and easy of transmission. They govern knowledge as a switchboard governs an electrical circuit" (Pound, SP 22–3). (I hope my argument helps show that Pound's use of science in this last simile was carefully chosen.)

Luminous details refer to a world made dynamic for intelligence. Pound's second foray into the question of how poetry might exemplify a new realism concentrates instead on how fiction writers construct psychological traits capable of such responsiveness:

> There is the clarity of the request: Send me four pounds of ten-penny nails. And there is the syntactical simplicity of the request: Buy me the kind of Rembrandt I like. This last . . . has as many meanings as the persons who might speak it. To a stranger it conveys nothing at all.

> It is the almost constant labor of the prose artist to translate the latter kind of clarity into the former. . . . The whole thing is an evolution. . . . Gradually you wish to communicate something less bare and ambiguous than ideas. You wish to communicate an idea and its modifications, an idea and a crowd of its effects, atmospheres, contradictions. You wish to question whether a certain formula works in every case, or in what per cent of cases, etc., etc., etc., you get the Henry James novel.
>
> (LE 50–1)

If poetry is to be at least as well written, and as unsentimental and free from rhetoric, as good modern prose, then it would have to learn to serve communicative functions that could be kept distinct from rhetorical ones.[14] Such communication would have to occur on two levels, each of which evades the classifying functions of the old science and the modes of interpretive judgment based on the old realism's filiations with that science. First there is the subtlety of the material, of how ideas in effect are permeated by possible atmospheres of effect and affect. The old realism sought to characterize enduring conditions that were emblems for social life. The new realism's concern for intricate relations among details made it immensely suspicious of binary oppositions that set the head against the heart, description against evaluation. More important, philosophers like Bergson and William James were showing that classification was bound to spatial models of how the world gave itself to experience. Classification simply could not characterize interactions among states or the transitions allowing new states to emerge. Classification could capture being but not becoming, structure but not event – detail but not what made detail luminous.

Then there was the writing itself. Intricate nuance without generalization meant that neither characters nor authors could rely on any form of abstract and depersonalized understanding. Characters had to become involved as embodied subjects. They had to experience the partiality and intensity of the personal investments that made such involvement possible, and made it dangerously vulnerable to deceit and disillusion. Alfred North Whitehead was later to characterize the old realism as a case of misplaced concreteness. Observers abstracted a sharp distinction between the subject offering descriptions and the static objects necessary for judging whether the descriptions were true. But in fact we never experience pure subjectivity or pure objectivity. Those are conditions out of time, out of becoming. What we experience is becoming something or other in relation to various kinds of

situations. In honoring this, the new realism recasts what had been the classical subject–object problem. Details are aspects of relationships, not independent observations that then get attached to interpretations by articulating the appropriate categories. Even the writers' labors of construction become inseparable from their powers of observation, part of recognizing what can stay vital and why it matters. That is why Pound never tires of distinguishing between an art that merely describes or represents and an art that makes something present and therefore vibrant, and therefore an intellectual and emotional complex (for example, LE 6).

Many modernists would go on to make similar distinctions between representation and presentation. But Pound is distinctive in his insistence that this demand on presentation holds no less for the scientist than for the poet, in both cases requiring concepts of will and witness that poets since the Renaissance have failed to acknowledge. So what begins as a defense of the new realism expands throughout Pound's career to become a justification for a radical individualism, in both poetry and science. Poetry differs from science in the specifics of its attention, but not in the sense that its work is testimony to the ways of the world. Poetry and science are both means of witnessing to what strikes consciousness as luminous. More precisely, both disciplines are not just modes of description but modes of presentation. And presentation cannot rely only on the mind's depersonalized observational powers. Pound is as insistent as Nietzsche that thinking is intimately involved with willing, description with desire. Observation is inseparable from testimony and testimony inseparable from evidence at every moment that there is an individual will at work.

No longer is the central concern the Enlightenment's primary question, "How do you know?" Rather the emphasis shifts to a concern for what conditions make it possible to show what is vibrant about a situation. Then one can also indicate how one takes responsibility for these acts of witnessing. There become infinite paths for valuing facts and for valuing what individuals do in exhibiting how those values might be established: "The serious artist is scientific in that he *presents the image of his desire, of his hate, . . .* precisely as the image of his own desire. . . . The more precise his record, the more lasting and unassailable the work of art" (LE 46).[15] Analogously, we do not have to treat the music of poetry as an ornament or an aspect simply of its beauty. Capturing how a sense of music informs the desire may be the

fullest way of rendering the relation between an "I" and the Rembrandt the person desires.

The Imagist poems we have already considered also afford good examples of Pound's sense of subject and object merging as intellect and emotion form an intricate complex in a moment of time. Try to separate the irony from the pathos from the admiration from the disappointment in the intricate attitude assumed by the single sentence comprising "The Bath Tub." The speaker's admiration that the passion cools so slowly seems inseparable from resentment and disappointment that the lady allows the passion to cool at all. Here irony is not intellectual, not a matter of appearing to say one thing while meaning another. Irony is attitudinal, a matter of disposing the will by adjusting the tone in which someone is regarded. And the willing is specific to the poem – not an expression of character traits so much as an adjustment to what language allows in the situation.

"April," on the other hand, stages the will as recognizing and affirming how the luminous detail opens a space for myth and romance within what remains faithful to observational criteria. Lines 2–4 present a very simple scene of destruction, and even the first line's reference to three spirits seems at first a periphrastic way of referring to people. The last line changes all that, mining every resource given by the rest of the poem in order to charge the empirical scene with mystery without calling on any faith beyond what the luminous detail can inspire. Just the sound patterns of this last line, "Pale carnage beneath bright mist," suggest activity more careful and more powerful than such scenes typically inspire. Two adjective–noun combinations are intricately balanced around a spatial preposition. Each combination becomes memorable because of assonance – of *a* sounds in the first, sharp *i* sounds in the second. Then we realize that the preposition alliterates with "bright," and so rebalances the line to compensate for the extra syllable in the first adjective–noun combination.

This rebalancing is not just ornamental. These sound effects call our attention to how the last line transforms the poem from recording something seen to exclaiming something felt. That process of transformation then makes visible something approaching a permanent condition of becoming that hovers within the world observed. The last line sets in conjunction three domains of force – the stable abstraction of the noun "carnage," the strange materiality of that noun because it seems inappropriate for the otherwise descriptive and Anglo-Saxon

diction, and the generalized moody specificity of the slight contradiction between brightness and mist.

IV

Yet Pound was not satisfied. He had managed to develop a poetics that could merge real and romance states, but his theorizing had not dealt sufficiently with how poetry might have distinctive ways of realizing those states. The theory of Imagism turned out to be most applicable to the prosaic aspects of poetry. He could explain how images rendered complex sensations, but he had yet to face the active role demanded by form when sensations become so fluid and evanescent. So in order to explain how poetry as centaur could "move and leap" in distinctive ways, Pound turned to the visual arts. There he found young British artists embracing the slogans of Vorticist theory, and there he found what might be a better emblem than Imagism for the cultural work poetry could do. Vorticism preserves most of what Pound had valued in the image, but now the image becomes only an aspect of a more comprehensive mode of synthetic activity. Writing in 1915, Pound altered the definition from two years earlier to cast the image itself as "a vortex or cluster of fused ideas . . . endowed with energy" (Pound, SP 375). The image had been a means of rendering luminous detail; the vortex is a means of attributing luminosity to the forces of becoming achieved by the aesthetic object as a whole. The vortex could foreground complex internal relationships only implicit in Imagism's version of the poem as an emotional and intellectual complex: "In a poem of this sort one is trying to record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective" (Pound, SP 89). This is no longer simply a matter of emotion and intellect being united in a timeless moment; it is now a matter of entire worlds fusing and taking on levels of possible meaning.

Unfortunately how a vortex works is not as easy to explain as how an image works.[16] Now I can provide only a very brief sketch of Pound's basic attempt at explanation by relying on his marvelous memoir *Gaudier-Brzeska*, written in 1916 in honor of the Vorticist sculptor who died early in World War I. Pound recognizes that Vorticism first took hold as a movement in sculpture. But, rather

than apologizing for extending its principles to poetry, he revels in the fact that turning to sculpture requires shifting from what can be known through the image to what has to be experienced in terms of the poem's presentation of constructive energies. How the work is constructed becomes inseparable from how it can communicate.[17] More important, Pound manages to develop an account of poetry that does not simply equate form with beauty or allow the energies of art works to collapse into the vague impressions where beauty had come to reside. Form depends on the structuring of the object, and so directly tests the power of will to establish alternatives to received ideals of beauty. This awareness in the work of its own constructive power begins as a celebration of the senses, but the very idea of celebrating the senses proves inseparable from the pleasure of extending our understanding of what sense can do.

Therefore Pound emphasizes the Vorticists' commitment to the art object's expressive use of masses in relation to one another. These objects could put such expressive power to mimetic or descriptive uses. But even when the work orients us to objects in the external world, it should do so by activating the audience's sense of surfaces in tension, where edges are made to function as dynamic interventions in the composed space. Then the work would surpass the "mimicry of external life. It is energy cut into stone, making the stone expressive in its fit and particular manner" (GB 110), while preserving a sense of the implacable and unswerving in the stone.[18] Gaudier-Brzeska's marble *Cat* presents a sleeping cat with sharply etched bas-relief leg-bones and thigh muscles, pronounced facial bones, and a tail that could sweep at any moment. Everything seems coiled energy even as the cat gathers itself in compact rest. His *Red Stone Dancer*, on the other hand, is an almost abstract isolated dancer whose body forms an elaborate vortex anchored by brilliantly staged crouching legs, with each edge of the legs forming a slightly different plane directing the force. In contrast to the open base with its dynamized negative spaces, her upper body forms an intricate knot or vortex of folded forces where breast, looped arms, long dynamic fingers, and abstracted wrists all sustain one another by the tension created among the planes.

These examples do not lack for luminous detail. But the details are now elements within a pronouncedly intense overall object earning its free-standing status by its capacity to balance material forces in tension. The work lives as a formal structure making clear possible relations

among forces within experience. And the formal intensity points to the synthetic constructive work of the artist that in turn challenges the audience to try out its capacity to achieve an analogous state of will. In other words, the emphasis on creativity allows Pound to claim, "Will and consciousness are our VORTEX" (GB 24).[19] Vorticist work requires not only a new realism but a new psychology and a new sense of art as ethical force. In a world increasingly marked by anxiety and restlessness, the art bears witness to a cold contemplative sense of conviction in its own power, a conviction ultimately justified by the work (not by one's discourse about sincere intentions within the work).

That sense of witness in turn brings out a new dimension of Pound's individualism. Art ultimately becomes a challenge measuring the cleanness, the lack of crippling self-doubt, still possible for a mind that itself can hold masses in taut relations. Hence Pound's paean to Jacob Epstein: "The test of a man is not the phrases of his critics; the test lies in the work, in its 'certititude.' What answer is to be made to the 'Flenites'? With what sophistry will you be able to escape their assertion?" (GB 102). Epstein's "Flenites" is not an idea to be argued about but an event demonstrating that this particular matters enough to provide a challenge threatening any lazy compromise with the powers that be.

Pound's basic example from his own poetry in *Gaudier-Brzeska* will appear almost as slight as his Imagist poems. But this time the slightness is not the point. The point is the bareness capable of allowing the force of the vortex to pervade every single element: the risk of apparent slightness becomes a measure of the quality of the poem's intricate certitude. Pound tells the story of how during the period of a year he compressed "In a Station of the Metro" from a thirty-line poem "of second intensity" to this "hokku-like sentence":

> The apparition of these faces in the crowd:
> Petals on a wet, black bough. (GB 89; P 119)

Rather than project a clear interpretive stance by which an audience can directly grasp what a speaker thinks of the subway car's arrival, Pound intensifies the pull of competing sensations as if they presented masses in intricate relation to one another. The result is a whirling set of energies that can be given stillness, but only as forces creating relations between subject and object much more subtle and mobile than ideas can establish.

Just introducing "apparition" preceded by the definite article is strange and compelling. The opening phrase becomes so much more than an initial descriptive element setting the scene. "The apparition" seems asserted as a confident description, so that expression threatens to alter the basic meaning of "apparition," namely that it is indefinite and fleeting. Now the apparition seems definite. Indeed it seems full and hefty because the Latinate word strikes out almost on its own, as if even an apparition has to be appreciated as a material substance. Moreover the implicit mind within the poem is not bothered by the apparition at all: it seems comfortable not only giving it definiteness but extending that definiteness to "these" and "the," two assertive indices of immediate presence. We enter a world with a strange ontology because what is descriptive and what illusory become inextricably joined within a process requiring the readers to adapt to the force of sensations as they form momentary conjunctions.

This hypothesis about the poem's ontology is strengthened by the fact that there is no dramatic speaker for the poem. Consciousness does not point toward a person but toward the effort to hold these various semantic pulls together. Everything depends on the interactions among a range of intricate tensions between natural and mechanical objects, between the definite modifiers of the first line and the indefinite one of the second, between faces and objects, and, most important, between intense realism and the bizarre multisyllabic call in "apparitions" to have that realism undo itself by forcing on us a simultaneously present glimpse of mythic forces.

Pound does not want to deny the elemental principles of realism. He wants only to suggest how a full realism, rather than a reductive empiricism, might engage the possibility that "apparition" can play a significant role in our functioning vocabulary for characterizing the impact of this underground crowd scene. Were this poem to call attention to the speaker's position, it would have to give the speaker a social identity or at least a way of composing a self-image. And that would mean making some kind of judgment whether or not this speaker can believe in the presence of apparitions. The poem then would risk being driven to Hardy's suspiciousness of all traces of romance. But by presenting the poem as simply writerly energies trying to be adequate to the event qualities of a given moment, Pound can let the very word "apparition" carry a much more intense and mysterious set of organizing energies than the attribution of character might provide.

"Apparition" functions as a fulcrum organizing sculptural relations among volumes and weights while refusing to let any lesser realism impose itself. Almost singlehandedly, this definite expression doubles the scene so that it ultimately carries a substantial sense of mythic presence. The faces are apparitions because they participate in an ancient ritual descent to the domain of Persephone. Technology enters an odd alliance with mythology. For how but in mythic terms are we to take in this strange ability to enter underground worlds and be transported as fluid crowds? Yet we also have to let the realism redefine the roles this mythic sense can play in our lives. Rather than relegate the world to our standard terms for self and for value, we are encouraged to let ourselves enter those hallucinatory spaces that art can treat as extensions of the senses. But it is the poet's language, not his character or his "vision," that becomes the test of what is possible. We are not told that energies rush beyond what description can handle; rather we encounter language bearing witness to how expanded fields of sensation can introduce new possibilities for being alive as humans.

I have to conclude my discussion of Pound by leaving him at the brink of greatness. After his essay on Vorticism Pound began to take for granted the new realism and to test himself by trying out various extensions of it – into the realm of cultural differences in his book *Cathay*, into the powers translation might give to establish how poets from the past could provide lasting witnesses to enduring energies derived from their encounters with historical situations (especially in his *Homage to Sextus Propertius*), and, finally, in the *Cantos*' efforts to deepen the world of "apparitions" into a permanent world of visionary possibility in tension with the domain of practical experience. For these projects there are very good scholarly guides. I can hope only to add to those a sense of how fully that work fulfills dialectical possibilities immanent in his initial efforts to equate modernism with the imperative to make it new. So I close this discussion by invoking a prose statement by Pound that clearly extends both the ideal of luminous detail and the notion of planes in relation to the project of the *Cantos*:[20]

> WE appear to have lost the radiant world where one thought cuts through another with clean edge, a world of moving energies . . . , magnetisms that take form, that are seen, or that border the visible, the matter of Dante's *Paradiso*, the glass under water, the form that seems a

> form seen in a mirror, these realities perceptible to sense . . . Not the pagan worship of strength, nor the Greek perception of visual non-animate plastic . . . but "this harmony in the sentience" or harmony of the sentient, where the thought has its demarcation, the substance its *virtu*, where stupid men have not reduced all "energy" to unbounded undistinguished abstraction. (LE 154)

V

Neither Bergson nor Pound were to be the most important revolutionary force in establishing for the arts the promise of the new realism. That honor goes to the Impressionist painters, who initiated an enormously complex historical adventure in reinterpreting the force of sensations and their possible impact on modern understandings of the psyche. And Post-Impressionist painting began a major shift in artists' understanding of the will to form that was to blossom in Vorticism and related ideals of expressive abstraction. It is this work that established

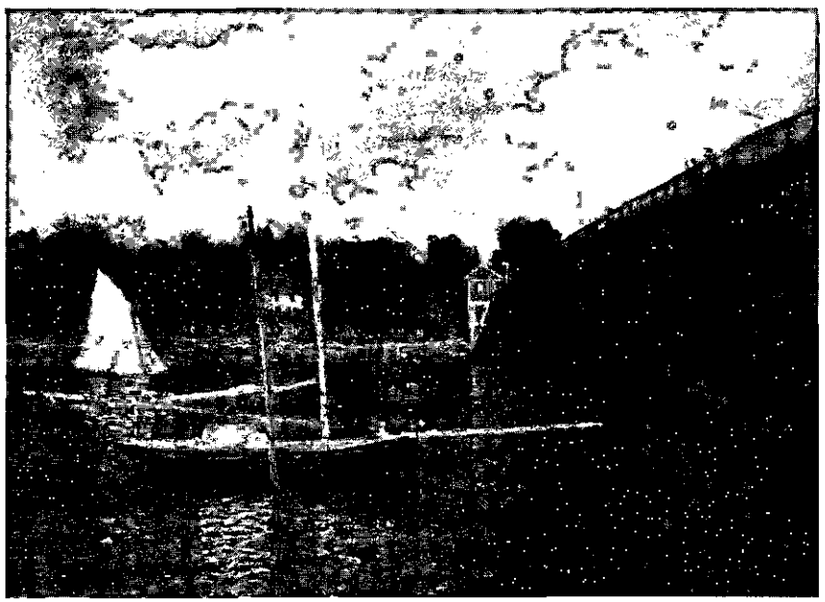

Fig. 1. Claude Monet, *The Bridge at Argenteuil*, 1874, National Gallery of Art, Washington; collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon

Fig. 2. Paul Cézanne, *Still Life with Drapery*, 1899. Hermitage, St. Petersburg / www.bridgeman.co.uk

the range of concrete effects the new realism could generate, and it is this work that constituted an immense provocation to the writers. It seemed that the painters had the most secure grasp on what it meant to be modern so the writers were eager to earn that honor for their own work. Yet they realized that simply copying the painters would only insure that being treated as merely imitators. The writers had to find new ways of making it new.

Here I will present the challenges and possibilities the new paintings posed for the poets by concentrating on two paintings. The first, Claude Monet's *Bridge at Argenteuil* (1874), demonstrates what we might consider the initial onslaught on conventional representation (figure 1). The second, Paul Cézanne's *Still Life with Drapery* (1899) explores the values involved when these concerns can become the stuff of philosophical reflection (figure 2). Cézanne's career made it apparent that what was emerging as a new realism also demanded that even visual art had to make efforts toward a new psychology. How the world appeared to the senses had to become inextricably linked to artists'

feelings for how their own compositional energies manifested powers fundamental to any comprehensive account of human agency.

Many features of Monet's paintings are so familiar that my remarks need only function as a reminder. Yet I think we still underestimate the eventual difference it made culturally when, after centuries of studio painting, talented artists began to work on site. Materially, painters could actually engage particular visual events, and look at their own looking second by second. They could discover that shadows had color of their own, and that color in the wild revealed itself as consisting of infinite gradations of hue rather than sharp distinctions in substance. And this prepared the way for two major shifts in value. Painting could suggest that appearance was not the pale shadow of real substance or ideal forms; how the world emerged in sight was a sufficient topic for art. Second, such a sense of discovery suggested by contrast that the very space of the studio was mired in dead conventions. Previous painters seemed blind, so caught up with drama, psychology, and tradition that they did not really look at the life of the eye among things. These painters did not see that tracing differences among various settings might be more important than pursuing the concepts that would provide stability in relation to those differences.

The Bridge at Argenteuil pulses with Monet's sense of the capacities of his new realism. Because its color is almost infinitely fine in its gradations, the painting seems to capture the shimmering effect of reflected light on a summer day. And the tonal shifts make it possible to replace Constable's heavy, imposing clouds with whispy fluid ones. (There emerges a virtual symphony in white because this lightness allows rhymes between the sails and the clouds, with contrasts to the heavier whites of the houses.) This sense of freedom is also echoed in the way that the perspective organizing the painting seems contingent rather than studied. It is as if the open air situation encouraged painting from any perspective, affording the eye immediate interest in a scene. Such interest could organize attention in more fluid ways than studio painting, since that painting seemed locked into elaborate structural planning tested by preliminary sketches.

Monet's canvas makes a dramatic show of resisting this structural planning in the service of immediacy. Notice how there seems a governing form in the painting made up of the parallelogram outlined by the two masts on one side and the bridge on the other. But the spirit of sensory event seems to overwhelm that temptation to provide

traditional structure. On the viewer's left, the sails revel in their own freedom from such a logic. And on the right, there emerges a fascination with the details of light on and under the bridge, so that local detail seems at war with the demands of structure. Speaking formally, we might say that the relation between these edges, between the worlds of light pleasure and brooding shadow, simply overwhelms what provides the conventional center of the painting.

In other words, sensation and sensibility work to free themselves from conventional ideals about judgment and form. And they do so in the name of a realism requiring focus on sensations created by local details – as if to celebrate the discovery of how the eye sees when it is liberated from habit and conventional instruction. As in Monet's *Impression: Sunrise* (1873, Musée Marmottan, Paris), this life of the eye proves so intense that the world of human actions and emotional psychology is either ignored or relegated to almost indistinguishable bodies. For Monet it is as if dramatic psychology itself were so bound in conventional platitudes that it could not provide much guidance to the new realism. What occupies the stage now is sensation. One does not need to speculate about the emotions and thoughts characters within the work are experiencing because an audience can turn instead to the immediate and intense awareness of feelings composed within the eye's sense of release from constraints. So a new realism about the eye seems also to call for a new psychology about the "I" that will be responsive to this fluidity and density of experience.

VI

Paul Cézanne's letters are perhaps the fullest modern discursive engagements with what sensation can become in painting. He treats "the intensity that is unfolded before my senses" as a challenge requiring him in effect to forget everything but the skill it takes not to falsify or simplify that intensity. Rather than seeking truth in some idea, painting is governed by the imperative to exhaust itself in the impossible but glorious effort to realize those sensations on canvas:

> I am able to describe to you again, or rather too much I am afraid, the obstinacy with which I pursue the realization of that part of nature, which, coming into our line of vision, gives the picture. Now the theme

> to develop is that – whatever our temperament or power in the presence of nature may be – we must render the image of what we see, forgetting everything that existed before us. Which, I believe, must permit the artist to give his entire personality, whether great or small.[21]

The new realism must generate a new art of "realization."

What was an adventure of technique in Monet becomes the stuff of obsessive reflection in Cézanne. The painting is not planned; it comes as a gift to one who has prepared himself or herself to see in such a way as to get beyond habit. So for Cézanne seeing as a painter is so distinctive an event that it demands also that the painting include self-consciousness about such seeing. Consequently he begins to develop what would be fundamental aspects of a new vocabulary for the arts in general. Terms like "render" and "realize" would replace "imitate" and "interpret" for writers as diverse as Joseph Conrad and William Carlos Williams. And Cézanne would begin to fill out the demand already evident in Monet to develop a somewhat new psychology based on features immediate to perception.

Cézanne's peers acknowledged that Monet inaugurated a sense that for serious painting what happens to the eye seems more important than what has traditionally been the foregrounding of human emotions and judgments – think of how Caspar David Friedrich's landscapes almost always have an observer to focus the sublime emotions triggered by his scenes. Cézanne, however, took this innovation much further. The depopulated and de-psychologized canvas becomes a challenge to pursue an alternative presentation of how the mind actually worked in seeing. His focus is not on the visual detail or on the emotions of dramatic characters but on the artist's personality as it manipulates sensations. Yet this is no romantic fantasy of self-expression. What matters to Cézanne is not expressing the self but transcending the self by managing to absorb personality within the act of realizing what it can see.

My abstraction cries out for an example. I have chosen the still life *Still Life with Drapery* because Cézanne's differences from traditional painting are most pronounced in this genre. Three features best exemplify his version of the new realism. First, there is an amazing interplay between the overall plastic structural set of balances created by the curtains and tablecloths on the one hand and, on the other, the sense that each individual piece of fruit is a significant optical

event. Cézanne was convinced that modeling by light and shadow did not adequately capture how objects emerge for the eye: the traditional model of modeling was a clear instance of habit substituting for vision. Instead, "in an orange, an apple, a bowl, a head, there is a culminating point; and this point is always – in spite of the tremendous effect of light and shade and colorful sensations – the closest to our eye; the edges of the objects recede to a center on our horizon."[22] So each piece of fruit has a distinctive way of gathering the light. In effect each could be a human character because every fruit insistently occupies its own space and makes the painting slowly unfold in time. This is Monet's attention to event grown self-conscious within the painting, as if the fruit knew that, seen properly or "realized," it could make claims on our attention.

The second Cézannian way of articulating this new realism is to challenge our traditional expectations about those very boundaries of objects that the first innovation brings to our attention. The challenge is posed by the technique of *passage*, the willingness to acknowledge the two-dimensionality of the canvas by having certain objects compete for space rather than illusionistically establish a distinctive place behind or in front of the other object. Notice how the cloth on the viewer's left becomes the dish rather than covering it, and how several of the fruits are cut into by others so that they seem to be one complex painterly object. Cézanne experimented with *passage* because he thought individual mass was an intellectual construct not given by immediate vision. Immediate vision is not attentive to weight or "objectness"; it concentrates on surfaces and their interrelationships. Everything else is literature.[23]

Finally it is crucial to see what Cézanne made of Monet's insistence that the primacy of vision warranted different psychological emphases than traditional dramatic painting. Meyer Schapiro once noted how no one would desire to eat a Cézanne apple.[24] But he suggested a psychoanalytic explanation for that, rather than speculating on how Cézanne might have explained himself (if he had trusted language). Cézanne probably thought that the desire to eat an apple is simply the wrong instinct for painting to invoke. He is not illustrating cookbooks but realizing objects visually, so the appropriate appetites seeking satisfaction in painting are visual. And one can dramatize visual possibilities only if one also frustrates more typical associations that the culture has established for the stuff of still-life.

Refusing these typical associations also has a more important role to play because such frustrations highlight complex relations between art and life. Cézanne wants to suggest that art can replace satisfactions based on recognition and interpretation with other satisfactions more complexly weaving thinking and feeling into our sense of objects. Notice how the fruits on the table seem to possess the power to stare at us and to demand an adequate visual response to the art – not just to the image. It seems that without the art we could not know how we see, and we could not appreciate the affective investments our personalities can make in visual realization. The strange silence established by the absence of appetite poses a challenge to bring more to the art than one's sense of the material world. This is why Cézanne calls for bringing the whole personality into play. One can fill that silence by yielding one's will to the painting, as if in realizing objects the painting also realized something basic to one's need to see how the world and the artwork can enter such cooperation. Cézanne inaugurates one of the basic gambles of modernism – that art could become not merely an accompaniment to the world but the realization of how mind and world become one dynamic field. He seeks modes of appearance capable of providing a sense of intimate dwelling for psyches that would otherwise be forced into ironic relations to their materials.

VII

Like Pound, and like Cézanne, William Carlos Williams began his career pursuing a strange, exotic beauty, and paying the price for it in a profound dissatisfaction with life outside art. For early Pound the imagination lived in the site of medieval romance; for early Cézanne it sought lurid romance along the lines of Flaubert's *Temptation of Saint Anthony*; and for early Williams the appropriate site was Keatsian romance, the domain where one could pursue a life of sensations rather than thoughts.

The story is often told, best by Williams himself, of his subsequent struggle against Keatsian ideals of beauty.[25] The problem turned out to be simple, but also fundamental. In his eagerness to pursue "beauty" he was setting that ideal against all reflective thought, and this made it impossible to escape a much too passive set of attitudes longing for escape from the real. So he had to find a way in which beauty

in poetry offered its own positive form of thinking and engaging the world. He found that way by changing his fundamental attitude toward sensation, learning to treat it as an active mode of attention and apprehension rather than simply a passive register of experience: "The only human value of anything, writing included, is intense vision of the facts, add to that by saying the truth and action upon them."[26]

Such statements do not have the range or complexity of his friend Pound's fascination with the authority of science as the foundation for a new realism. But Williams did have an intensity of intellectual focus Pound lacked. So the realism he arrived at concentrated on two elemental properties which were to make his work exemplary for a later generation of American poets. He was a much keener critic of how the ego transformed fact into solipsistic illusion, and he was much more directly involved in finding ways that poetry might intensify the value of fact: "this is after all the substance, therefore the explanation of my poems and my life in which *there exists* (instead of *you exist*)."[27] Williams for the most part refused Pound's abstract discourse about form in order to emphasize how sensitivity to place and to common speech might be a sufficient source for the dynamizing of fact. And, not quite paradoxically, he was much more the propagandist for "the imagination" than Pound, and hence much more directly engaged in struggling to transform romantic values so that they might flow directly from grasping how "there exists." He wanted to combine romantic intensity with a sense of fact that could not be overwhelmed by the specific interests and projections of individual subjects.

Therefore his was also the more direct engagement with Cézanne:

> Today where everything is being brought into sight the realism of art has bewildered us, confused us, and forced us to reinvent in order to retain that which the older generation had without effort.
>
> Cézanne –
>
> The only realism in art is of the imagination. It is only thus that the work escapes plagiarism after nature and becomes a creation.[28]

Therefore I want to complete my story of new realisms available for modernism by briefly sketching how Williams worked his way out of romanticism by transforming into poetry painterly models for integrating the claims of imagination with the sense of fact.[29]

It would be an exaggeration to say that the new realism in French early modernist painting was a first step in teaching Williams how to

stress sensation as an active mode of taking up the real world in the constructive imagination. But it certainly reinforced his sense that the direction in which he was trying to work aligned him with the future rather than the past. As early as 1912, his essay "French Painting" tried to show how this line of painting did not entail formalism because it in no way sought to "escape representation." Rather this work was committed only to escaping "triteness, the stupidity of a loose verisimilitude" that made it want "to trace" scenes and thus to confuse paint values with natural objects" (EK 22). But even this sense of purpose was enough to establish a revolutionary attitude toward representation that could be "highly instructive to the writer – and has been to me" (EK 22) because it so clearly shifts the burden of writing from descriptive accuracy to evocative adequacy in bringing to facts an intensity that lives in its own right:

> Well, what does one see? to paint? [*sic*] Why the tree, of course, is the facile answer. . . . The tree as a tree does not exist literally, figuratively or any way you please . . . What does exist, and in heightened intensity for the artist, is the impression created by the shape and color of an object before him in his sensual being – his whole body (not his eyes) his body, his mind, his memory, his place: himself – that is what he sees. And in America – escape it he cannot – it is an American tree.
>
> (EK 24)

This jingoism may seem a large price to pay for a new realism. Yet it is not foolish to think that one cannot fully honor the life of the senses without establishing a distinctive sense of place. An American stimulated by Post-Impressionist painting has to realize that simply aping the "French manner is to put out his eye – then surely he has not seen the tree at all" (EK 25). By "Spring Strains" (1916) Williams' efforts to see such a tree in what he feels is an appropriately American mode of attention has enabled him to break entirely with his earlier Keatsian mode:[30]

> In a tissue-thin monotone of blue-grey buds
> crowded erect with desire against
> the sky –
> tense blue-grey twigs
> slenderly anchoring them down, drawing

> them in –
> two blue-grey birds chasing
> a third struggle in circles, angles,
> swift convergings to a point that bursts
> instantly!
>
> Vibrant bowing limbs
> pull downward, sucking in the sky
> that bulges from behind, plastering itself
> against them in packed rifts, rock blue
> and dirty orange!
>
> But –
> (hold hard, rigid jointed trees)
> the blinding and red-edged sun blur –
> creeping energy, concentrated
> counterforce – welds sky, buds, trees
> rivets them in one puckering hold!
>
> Sticks through! Pulls the whole
> counter-pulling mass upward, to the right,
> locks even the opaque, not yet defined
> ground in a terrific drag that is
> loosening the very tap roots!
>
> On a tissue-thin monotone of blue-grey buds
> Two blue-grey birds chasing a third,
> At full cry! Now they are
> flung outward and up – disappearing suddenly! (Williams, CP 97–8)

This poem does many things well, or at least earns notice in many ways. There is first the intense commitment to sheer dynamics. For Williams is characteristically more blunt than Pound in his evocation of parallels between art and science: "Art is the pure effect of the force upon which science depends for its reality" (Williams, CP 225). Yet the substance of the poem remains quite delicate, a tissue of subtle observations that ground the various present participles largely responsible for the sense of energy. And while this poem is clearly influenced by Pound's Vorticism, syntactic emphasis on masses in relation is significantly less important than Williams' sense of the relative weights afforded by his control of line-endings. This poem creates a powerful tension between the energies observed in space and the

work the line-endings do to embody modes of temporal suspense as we read. Notice especially how the fourth stanza holds off any substantial correlation of line and sense units until the very last line, so that this line has the effect of literally riveting the parts together for imaginative contemplation. All this emphasis on endings may then be the imagination's way of complementing natural energy with the play of human desire.

Finally there are intriguing uses of the tradition of pure lyric even as this tradition gets tied to the rendering of natural energies. Within this evocation of immediacy there emerges something like a refrain, as if the celebration of energy left to its own devices would restore aspects of song. It does not take a lyric "I" to satisfy the imagination. In fact the conclusion of this poem returns to perhaps the most classical lyrical motif, the lament for transience. All the energies gathered here turn out to disappear suddenly, perhaps because the demand for attention is so closely bound to a desperate awareness of time passing. We must attend with a Paterian sense of greed for the qualities of every moment because the scene will soon shift and make very different demands on the spirit. Yet the poem provides a significant modernist twist even to this aspect of traditional lyric because the negative conditions are not simply stages for the positive realizations; rather, the negatives are to be seen as exercising an equal energy. Hence what disappears is registered with the same participial form that bears the burden of representing the positive energies. The concluding contrast then may be less a source of lament than a Cézannian charging of negative space as also a quality made present for the imagination.

But even though this is a forceful poem, and in the conclusion an almost subtle one, it also is a somewhat embarrassing one. It is hard not to think the poem tries too hard, and impoverishes itself in the process. It almost seems Williams was playing an ironic tune on the title, or that the title was taking revenge on the poem (except that the next poem in the *Collected Poems* shares the same rush of adjectives and adverbs). Every detail strains to fill the scene, struggling for the same plane of intensity. Williams wants simple attention to suffice as a source of fully satisfying human energies without sufficiently honoring how those energies might require complications that put further demands on the resources of the maker. Ultimately "Spring Strains" offers a substantial imaginative picture of energy but it does not exhibit much imaginative energy about what the new realism might enable.

One could turn to slightly later poems on trees like "Willow Poem" and "Winter Trees" to see how Williams learns to extend his realism in order to elaborate complex states of consciousness.[31] But for brevity's sake I will immediately turn to Williams' fully developed realism in probably his best volume, *Spring and All*. There he manages to put the constructive imagination more fully into play without relying on a Vorticist language of formal relations.[32] He stresses the power of poetry to liberate from mere description, but he almost always insists that the feeling of freedom results from the sense of discovery the poem affords.

At first *Spring and All* presents a world in which no values seem to take hold. Even the chapter numbers are out of sequence and printed in various ways as the poet's prose fails to find any secure way to invest in what it is experiencing. Then in "Chapter XIX" (which is different from "Chapter 19" where the numbering actually begins) we find that spring is emerging, and with it the possibility that "the great copying which evolution has followed . . . is approaching the end." Now the poet can realize the evocative powers of poetry:

By the road to the contagious hospital
under the surge of the blue
mottled clouds driven from the

northeast – a cold wind. Beyond, the
waste of broad, muddy fields
brown with dried weeds, standing and fallen

patches of standing water
the scattering of tall trees

All along the road the reddish
purplish, forked, upstanding, twiggy
stuff of bushes and small trees
with dead, brown leaves under them
leafless vines –

Lifeless in appearance, sluggish
dazed spring approaches –

They enter the new world naked,
cold, uncertain of all

save that they enter. All about them
the cold familiar wind –

Now the grass, tomorrow
the stiff curl of wildcarrot leaf

One by one the objects are defined –
It quickens: clarity, outline of life
But now the stark dignity of
entrance – Still, the profound change

has come upon them: rooted, they
grip down and begin to awaken. (Williams, CP 183)

Immediately after this poem the volume announces that it has entered "Chapter 1," from which it never departs. So we have to ask why the poem has the power to invoke the possibility of perpetual beginning, even when many of the ensuing poems remain charged with anxiety. I think our answer has itself to begin with the possibility that this is a new kind of landscape poetry, a poetry that has found a way of liberating the imagination from the pain suggested by the contagious hospital because it now can fully attend to the energies present in the world of facts. The emphasis here is not on the subject's impressions of the meaning of spring but on the objectified force calling for response. The poem lacks the fine phrases of conventional pastoral, yet at the same time it is much too aware of its artifice to stand as description. But there is no promise of transcendence or self-discovery that might be capable of sustaining a romantic lyric. There is no self-consciousness apart from the awareness of how the making complements the incipient spring by turning observations into discoveries that project possible values. What matters is how "there" emerges and how the subject finds aligning with that a source of value capable of redirecting a life.

This alignment takes place primarily through two distinctive features of Williams' writing. The first is the remarkable control of lineation (the parallel to perspectival shifts in Cézanne). From the start this verse is not reporting on a scene but carving out the edges by which one takes in the energies produced by the conjunction of details. And the inventive pauses create a kind of suspense that would be appropriate for narrative, but is now adapted to poetry's commanding attention to how the natural scene discloses itself.

The second feature is the overt way the poem's content depends on how the syntax reinforces these disclosures (the parallel to formal activity and *passage* in Cézanne). For example, the first verb, "approaches," an innocuously abstract one, occurs in the fifteenth line – until that point there have been only adjectival phrases reinforcing the apparently timeless thereness of the late winter situation. That verb by itself does not generate any change in affect. But the repetition of "Now" forcefully introduces the sense of time, of event, into this hitherto purely spatial field of descriptions. Then the stage is set for the emergence of active verbs fleshing out the figures of birth potential in the situation. There is at first only the additional verb, "quicken." However, that is enough to charge nouns like "clarity," "outline," and "dignity" with assertiveness. And "still" seems a conjunction of several parts of speech as it beautifully spreads the "now" without cancelling the sense of event.

When the rush of verbs arrives, it does so in an ingenious way. The poem switches to the passive voice, only then to take up that passivity into active verbs. Doing that enables "rooted" to be intensely dynamic, functioning as a hinge between passive and active. The subject is only the vague "they." But here the "they" enables spring to be completely distributed. All nouns seem to share in the energy, without distracting us with a now irrelevant particularity of person or place. The scene remains general, but it is no longer bare, even linguistically. There is an intriguing redundancy in the expression "begin to awaken," as if now the verbs cannot wait to appear. The effect is to suggest a capacity for poetry to serve as witness to the life force without the turmoil of "Spring Strains." Simply rendering the verbs that dynamize the scene suffices to do the work that romance once performed.

This new world of beginnings is not confined to landscape. *Spring and All* offers social poems where the speaking voice must make adjustments more complex than those in "The Young Housewife," and there are several strange poems that I can only suggest comprise an effort by Williams to accommodate the Dada sensibility brought to New York by European expatriates.[33] Here I have space only to dwell on one other poem, so I cannot not choose the "The Rose is Obsolete," because this is the probably Williams' most ambitious foray into constructivist modernism – the domain where the activity of making must bear the fundamental burden for attributing meaning to the details. In pure constructivist modernism artists do not directly link

signs to the world as constituting illusory pictures or scenes. Rather they concentrate on how the composing activity emphasizes qualities of the signs as signs; then the work has to make those qualities the locus of our connections to the world. We do not take the apple as edible but emphasize what can be done to appreciate how formal measures make the apple appear as a distinctive force in the world.[34] Or, as Williams puts it, constructive modernism tries to have "words freed by the affirmation affirm reality by their flight" (Williams, CP 235).[35] Therefore I want to study this poem as an example of Williams at his most ambitious, most painterly, and, it turns out, most responsive to a dilemma basic to his culture.

Recall that a major aspect of the despair in the confused prose chapters was the issue of plagiarism, which for Williams was a state of cultural life shaped by quotation rather than engaged by the quest for the actual forces driving our efforts at expression. As the volume approaches "The Rose is Obsolete," the motif of plagiarism returns. Williams invokes visual work by Juan Gris[36] as an example of the challenge posed to poets that they also pursue the modern trend "to separate things of the imagination from life" so that they can take on a force all their own (Williams, CP 192–4). After the poem he returns to the contrast to resemblance by citing Cézanne, then focusing on Gris:

> A CREATIVE FORCE IS SHOWN AT WORK MAKING OBJECTS WHICH ALONE COMPLETE SCIENCE AND ALLOW INTELLIGENCE TO SURVIVE – his picture lives anew. It lives as pictures only can; by their power TO ESCAPE ILLUSION and stand between man and nature as saints once stood between man and the sky. . . .
>
> (Williams, CP 199)

So the poem itself has a lot to live up to if it is to make such prose plausible. This is its opening movement:

> 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 . . .
>
> Somewhere the sense
> makes copper roses
> steel roses – (Williams, CP 195)

The rose is obsolete because it has become an instance of plagiarism, of a "crude symbolism" that "associates emotions with natural phenomena such as anger with lightning, flowers with love" (Williams, CP 188). Such work takes traditional sentiments for the reality that seeks expression – and thereby falsifies experience, making nihilism a reasonable despairing response. But modern art provides another path: by distortion or by "the break-up of beautiful words" (Williams, SE 75), the artist says "No" to the prevailing ideological structures, setting against them apparently illegible objects. If we learn to appreciate the differences such art establishes, however, we see the possibility that the world can be remade in the imagination by testing alternative ways of conceiving values. Perhaps the destruction of belief in love as a comfortable joyous site might make us pay more attention to what loving actually feels like. And perhaps then art can play a significant role in shaping such feelings because the medium itself can produce strange but appropriate sensations, helping us realize affective states that we typically suppress. Perhaps love is closer to how the mind engages art than it is to the roles desire plays in nature. Because refiguring the real is what art does, making copper and steel roses may align us with a vision of love capable of surviving in the modern world:

> The rose carried weight of love
> but love is at an end – of roses
>
> It is at the edge of the
> petal that love waits
>
> Crisp, worked to defeat
> laboredness – fragile
> plucked, moist, half-raised
> cold, precise, touching (Williams, CP 195)

Love is at an end of roses in two senses. The rose can no longer provide a fresh expression of what love involves. But the ends of roses might be quite a different matter, so long as the ends are edges crafted by the imagination. For then the object can recall to us everything that feeling on the edge involves, especially the longing for and appreciation of qualities of contact. The poem seems eager to take up that possibility – too eager. Its exuberant list of qualities threatens to naturalize the whole process again and subsume what makes art different into another version of sentimentality. It seems the poem has to enforce a sharp distinction between our eagerness to thematize and a willingness to let the objects speak. So it inserts a question which is set off by itself, then it changes gears, refusing to dwell in the tendency to celebrate adjectives that offer only abstract promises of renewal.

To escape this dilemma the imagination has first to dwell on what is absent rather than on what words can easily make present, and then it must return to the particulars of the art object:

> What
>
> The place between the petal's
> Edge and the
>
> From the petal's edge a line starts
> that being of steel
> infinitely fine, infinitely
> rigid penetrates
> the Milky Way
> without contact – lifting
> from it – neither hanging
> nor pushing
>
> The fragility of the flower
> unbruised
> penetrates space (Williams, CP 195–6)

The best way to answer the question "what" is to look carefully at the collage by Gris. Then both the mode of attention and the details provide fresh metaphors for what the rose has symbolized. Or, better, in the place of the content of art as the metaphor, the figure for love lies in how the properties of the artwork realize themselves for an audience.

A plausible figure for love emerges if we forgo our desire for symbolic meaning and focus instead on what is projected by our effort to put the collage together. The details of that work, and the spaces or edges between details, are the only domain in which the fragility of the flower can re-emerge, now inseparable from what seems an exaggeratedly masculine capacity to penetrate space. Love makes itself visible finally in the object's mode of appearing. For only there can we locate the oxymoronic union of fragility and strength that recuperates in the domain of affect what the rose has been in the domain of meaning.

Williams is rarely this constructivist, but we have seen that even poems directly invoking natural scenes like "By the Road to the Contagious Hospital" manifest a constructivist interest in foregrounding the expressive use of syntax and lineation. As he was to put it in 1944, a sense of active nature depends ultimately on the poet's compositional activity:

> When a man makes a poem, makes it, mind you, he takes words as he finds them interrelated about him and composes them – without distortion which would mar their exact significances – into an intense expression of his perceptions and ardors that they might constitute a revelation in the speech that he uses. It is not what he says that counts as a work of art; it's what he makes with such intensity of perception that it lives with an intrinsic movement of its own to verify its authenticity. (Williams, SE 257)

We will see how that sense of the "real" provides a benchmark for poetry throughout the twentieth century.

"The Fate of the Imaginary in Modern American Poetry," *American Literary History*, 17 (2005): 70–94.

8 T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*, New York: Harcourt Brace, 1950, p. 7.

2 The New Realism in Modernist Poetry: Pound and Williams

1 In *Selected Prose, 1909–1965: Ezra Pound*, ed. William Cookson, New York: New Directions, 1973, p. 102. (Hereafter Pound, SP.)

2 Ernest Fenollosa, "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry," in Karl Shapiro (ed.), *Prose Keys to Modern Poetry*, New York: Harper & Row, 1962, p. 142. (Hereafter CWC.)

3 William Carlos Williams, *The Embodiment of Knowledge*, ed. Ron Loewinsohn, New York: New Directions, 1974, p. 27. (Hereafter EK.)

4 I have to include my *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989) as one of the works that emphasized modernist formal innovation without a sufficient sense of how those innovations were motivated by writers' efforts to engage what they saw as a new realism.

5 I have already cited Ian Bell because his concerns closely intersect with mine. Other important works on modernist writing and contemporary science include Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880–1918* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003); Lisa Steinman, *Made in America: Science, Technology, and American Modernist Poets* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), and Daniel Albright, *Quantum Poetics: Yeats, Pound, Eliot and the Science of Modernism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

6 See Bell, *Critic as Scientist*, pp. 95–103, who is quite critical of Bergson for his suspicious attitude toward science as a necessarily spatializing discourse.

7 Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. N. M. Paul and W. S. Palmer, Cambridge: Zone Books, 1990, p. 28. (Hereafter MM.)

8 Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, trans. F. L. Pogson, Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2001, pp. 132–3. (Hereafter TFW.)

9 Pound's essays on Arnaut Daniel and on Calvacanti in *Literary Essays* show how thoroughly his playing the role of scholar in verse forms enabled him to create new ideals of rhythm. There is probably still no better attack on the limitations of iambic pentameter, in contrast to song cadence, as a model for verse in English.

10 Ezra Pound, *Personae: Collected Shorter Poems of Ezra Pound*, London: Faber & Faber, 1952, p. 17. (Hereafter P.)

11 All the citations in this paragraph are from CWC 151. Pound edited the essay but said he only reshaped a few sentences.

12 Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot, London: Faber & Faber, 1960, p. 4. (Hereafter LE.)

13 The best critical account I know of the power and the limitations of realism as a mode of representation is offered by Philip Weinstein, *Unknowing: The Work of Modernist Fiction*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, chs. 2 and 3.

14 As we shall see, ultimately Pound thought poetry must be held to a higher standard: "Poetry is a centaur. The thinking, word arranging, clarifying faculty must move and leap with the energizing, sentient musical faculties. . . . I dare say there are very good marksmen who just can't shoot from a horse. . . . As the man, as his mind, becomes a heavier and heavier machine, a constantly more complicated structure, it requires a constantly greater voltage of emotional energy to set it in harmonious motion" (LE 52). The luminous details in poetry must not only be precise, they must also be rendered so as to elicit and reward a dynamic sense of movement. In such movement the image fully becomes an intellectual and emotional complex because it dramatically exists both in the space of description and in the time of musical structure.

15 Pound often insists on the parallels between art and science because the task of both is to give true reports of how things are (LE 41–3). This epistemic standard runs the risk of a dangerously authoritarian framework, since such a claim about art seems to assume that the observer is in a position to know enough about a constant human nature to distinguish accurate from inaccurate art. The knowledge claim seems inseparable from his eventual fascination with fascist power. But at least until the 1930s Pound fused this realism with individualism by insisting that the artist reports directly on "his nature," the "nature of his ideal of the perfect," and of the force with which he believes good and evil exist (LE 43; see also Pound, SP 200). The truth in art is not determined by principle or representation but by the energy that one feels embedded in the particular act of witnessing.

16 In fact Vorticist theory was for the most part much more clear on what the artists opposed than on what they were trying to do. In particular the Vorticists were most upset by a quality they called "the caressable," because that indicated the artists' interest in charming their audience by providing delightful representations that might serve as "substitutes" for honored persons or dramatic scenes (Ezra Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir*, New York: New Directions, 1970, p. 97; hereafter GB).

17 Pound offers a terrific way of imagining this permanence of form in mathematical rather than transcendental terms by elaborating four kinds

of "intensities" of mathematical expression: the arithmetical, the algebraic, the geometrical, and that of analytical geometry (GB 90–2). See also Pound, SP 377 for Pound's insistence that Vorticism applies to all the arts because "The 'organizing' of the creative-inventive faculty is the thing that matters."

18 Pound has a lovely description of specific forms doing concrete work within Vorticist art in GB 137–8.

19 Developing this new psychology in turn made it possible for Pound to place his poetic theory in relation to the two dominant art movements of the previous epoch. He could show how his poetic might borrow the Impressionist "method of presentation," stressing the artist's hand and the fragmentary nature of the psyche without succumbing to Futurism's tendency to be merely an "accelerated Impressionism." The Vorticists need not succumb because they also incorporated what was most productive in symbolist art – the feeling that art is not just a matter of receving sensations but "as directing a certain fluid force against circumstance" (GB 89). Such resistance to mere circumstance could establish the relation among images as "permanent metaphor," even for one denied the belief in a permanent transcendental world (GB 82–5). The reference established by any one image is less important than the way the images function in tandem as assorted pigments in the service of a complex composition (GB 86).

20 I cannot resist pointing out that my discussion of Canto 2 in *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American poetry* elaborates how motifs of sensation and witnessing function in this new poetic economy.

21 Herschel Chipp (ed.), *Theories of Modern Art*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968, p. 22.

22 Ibid., p. 20.

23 I want again to invoke my *Painterly Abstraction*, where I elaborate this point about mass to argue that many of Cézanne's landscapes painted in the 1890s deny the force of gravity. Gravity is an inference not given in the immediate act of looking. This denial in turn links to a fourth feature in this still-life that would prove central in the transition from the new realism to Cubism. Notice how this painting requires us to recognize at least two perspectives, one from above that yields all the information about the fruit in the dishes, and one below that minimally captures the seductive curves and shadows created by the tablecloths. Scholars now see this as evidence of Cézanne's awareness that ideas and memories can complicate vision. At times we do not see isolated objects only from one perspective but we think visually so that the object takes on memories affording different perspectives all synthesized and struggling for domination in the moment realized.

24 Meyer Schapiro, "The Apples of Cézanne: An Essay on the Meaning of Still-Life," in Schapiro, *Modern Art: 19th and 20th Centuries: Selected Papers*, New York: George Braziller, 1979, p. 25.

25 See, e.g., Williams' concise statement in EK 162–3.

26 William Carlos Williams, *Selected Essays of William Carlos Williams*, New York: Random House, 1954, p. 71. (Hereafter Williams, SE).

27 William Carlos Williams, *Imaginations: Five Experimental Prose Pieces*, ed. Webster Schott. New York: New Directions, 1970, p. 302.

28 William Carlos Williams, *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams*, vol. 1, ed. A. Walton Litz and Christopher MacGowan, New York: New Directions, 1991, p. 198. (Hereafter Williams, CP.)

29 This accomplishment is especially important now, "after" deconstruction, since that movement emphasized the importance of putting the rhetorical and the descriptive in conflict with each other.

30 The editors of his *Collected Poems* note that Williams said he was recalling an experience in Germany in 1909, but the context of his work and his commitment to the American scene suggest that we treat this tree as repatriated.

31 In my *Particulars of Rapture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), pp. 232–6, I show how "To a Young Housewife," another Williams poem contemporaneous with "Spring Strains," develops in a somewhat different way a realism clearly honoring the complexities of human consciousness. This poem does not so much portray energies within a scene as it makes present a demand for processing the intricacies of a situation:

> At ten A.M. the young housewife
> moves about in negligee behind
> the wooden walls of her husband's house.
> I pass solitary in my car.
>
> Then again she comes to the curb
> to call the ice-man, fish-man, and stands
> shy, uncorseted, tucking in
> stray ends of hair, and I compare her
> to a fallen leaf.
>
> The noiseless wheels of my car
> rush with a crackling sound over
> dried leaves as I bow and pass smiling. (CP57)

Rather than dramatic confrontation the poem stresses quiet tonal adjustment to the limitations of both the speaker's and the housewife's situations. So the rueful smile acknowledging time and distance is all the evaluation the speaker can honestly muster.

32 I have learned in conversation with Brian Glaser to make this distinction between *Spring and All* and Williams' earlier modernist but not yet fully constructivist poems.

33 I refer to six poems (8, 10, 13, 17, 24, and 25) which seem to cultivate a kind of contingency for their own sake. These poems can be seen as an important aspect of continuous beginning because such work will not be trapped by the high seriousness surrounding ideas of poetry or the typical intentions of poets. The poems simply find their own way, refusing to honor any expectations about coherence or thematic import.

34 When sensation replaces pictorial representation as the basis of the real, there becomes a problem in determining the boundaries of objects. There is no longer a distinctive *eidos* for a substance. Artists and writers handle this issue by stressing how the nature of a medium need not be simply a lens with which to see the world. It can be a stimulus for recombining sensations to create objects distinctive to a medium or mode of imagination capable of resisting habit. Think of Pound's "apparition" and "carnage."

35 Actually the last poem in *Spring and All* is a better example of Williams' emphasis on liberating words from the real in order to "affirm reality by their flight." But I have written on that poem in *Painterly Abstraction*. Moreover, the poem I have chosen here brings us closer to what Williams learns about that freedom specifically from the visual arts.

36 In *The Visual Text of William Carlos Williams* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), Henry Sayre denies that Williams is referring to the Gris collage *Roses* because Sayre could find no reproduction printed before 1930 (pp. 41–2). But Williams could have had the collage described to him by people returning from Europe. The timing works for that collage to be the reference, so while we cannot be sure, we cannot confidently deny the possibility.

3 The Doctrine of Impersonality and Modernism's War on Rhetoric: Eliot, Loy, and Moore

1 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, New York: Vintage, 1989, sect. 261.

2 Mina Loy, *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, ed. Roger L. Conover, New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1996, p. 151. (Hereafter LLB.)

3 Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971, p. 136; see also pp. 130–41.

4 Eliot, *Inventions of the March Hare*, p. 17.

5 T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot*, New York: Harcourt Brace, 1969, p. 17. (Hereafter Eliot, CP.)

6 T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*, New York: Harcourt Brace, 1950, p. 9. (Hereafter Eliot, SE.)

7 Maud Ellmann, *The Poetics of Impersonality: T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), offers a good example of this line of criticism.

8 Most current Eliot criticism would not accept this claim because of his decidedly reactionary political stance. But Lacan himself was quite politically conservative, sharing with Eliot the conviction that liberalism depended on the positive assertions of mainstream nineteenth-century philosophy that had led modern culture horribly astray.

9 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, sect. 5.

10 William Butler Yeats, *Essays and Introductions*, New York: Collier Books, 1961, pp. 350–1. This is a good place to make the crucial distinction between the imaginary as a problematic way of reinforcing unstable subjective projects and the ideal of imagination as a modernist principle of value asked to do the work writers and poets felt could no longer be performed by reason. Yeats is almost explicit on the contrast, since imagination is defined as that which allows the self to escape from itself into the presence of beauty. Then, from I. A. Richards' *Coleridge on Imagination* (1936) to Northrop Frye's work on the Bible, the concept of imagination can be said to have dominated critics' assertions about how literary texts fostered values. Imagination provided modes of synthesis and intricate hypothetical experience which could be employed to establish what the critics called "non-discursive knowledge," capable of competing with the kinds of knowledge established by science. Analogously, imagination took on moral force because it could exemplify virtue compatible with complex experience, help establish sympathy, and bring to reflection the comprehensive forms of desire fundamental to cultural life. Correlatively, American poetry from the 1940s to the 1960s everywhere idealized the concept of imagination. Stressing imagination sanitized the imaginary and put all the emphasis on how poetry might be a mode of responding to the world rather than of absorbing the world into the self.

Important as this concept is, however, I fear we pay a substantial price if we simply stop with the contrast between imagination and the imaginary. Imagination wins too easily, and too easily becomes subsumed within both moral and epistemic frameworks that reintroduce imaginary structures while proclaiming their difference from them. By making the male imagination a mode of knowing that could compete with science, the New Criticism arrogated to itself the authority of those who assert their access to knowledge, without even providing a disciplinary basis