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from Whitman to 9/11

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relation between poetry and politics in American political poetry. The research proceeds from the reading of works of different schools of poetry to analysis of their ideas about politics and views on the political role of a poet. Focusing on the differences between speech poetry and language poetry, this study brings to the fore the political potential that lies in their conceptualizations of language, and the hindrances these conceptualizations create for their efforts to fully engage in politics. Concerning the poetical language and its relation to politics, one essential question raised in this study is how poets move from questions of poetical method and creation to ideas on politics and their role as political poets. The analysis follows certain analogies or parallels: in language poetry, the idea about language as system and as web reflects the idea about politics as power relations and hegemonic structures; in speech poetry the idea of man as the center of poetry is mirrored in the idea of politics as an action within a republican framework. The political aspects of poets have quite often been left to the footnotes of the works of literary scholars, and in political science the role of poetry has mostly been no more than anecdotal. In this study, the focus is on poetry that simultaneously preserves the poetical quality but also addresses political questions. The poetical works taken into closer examination in this research are by Walt Whitman, Ezra Pound, Charles Olson and Charles Bernstein. The analysis is based both on their poetical works and their theoretical writings. For these writers, political poetry is not just a political rant set to meter, for the political aspects go beyond the surface and can be found, for example, at the linguistic level. Form and content go hand in hand, and the formal ideas of these poets can also be read in the light of their political ideas

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1   INTRODUCTION

"We are said to be dreamers, but in dreams, as W.B. Yeats has told us, begin responsibilities. The words are our responsibility, the government of words; the nearest, the most to be valued, since it is of all governments the archetype"

William Carlos Williams[1]

This research concentrates on American political poetry from Walt Whitman in the 1850's to present day poetry. It is not a comprehensive history of American political poetry, but follows some varying themes that define the attitudes and ways of dealing with politics in the works of the most influential poets and especially schools of poetry and their schoolmasters, if one may call them such. The focus here has not been used before. The political aspects of poets analysed here have quite often been left to the footnotes of the works of literary scholars, and in political science the role of poetry has mostly been no more than anecdotal.

This is also not an analysis of works usually labelled as political poetry, that is, poetry that serves only the political purposes and leaves aside the artistic values. My interest is in poetry that simultaneously preserves the poetical quality but also addresses political questions as well. Political poetry, as I see it, is not just a political rant set to meter, for the political aspects go beyond the surface and can be found, for example, at the linguistic level. Form and content go hand in hand, and formal ideas of poets can be seen also in the light of their political ideas. Therefore, poetical language is at the centre of the analysis.

The central questions of this doctoral thesis are how the poets themselves see their role in respect to politics, and whether their poetry is part of politics or political or whether it is outside the political sphere. Another central issue is what benefit the analysis of poetry and poetical works by themselves bring to the practise of politics and how poetry and its analysis can affect the world

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1   Quoted in Olson and Creeley 1987, 49.

outside. These questions will be analysed in the light of the works of four influential figures, four poets arguably part of the American canon: Walt Whitman, Ezra Pound, Charles Olson and Charles Bernstein. In connection to the 9/11 poetry and Charles Bernstein, there is also a reading of Amiri Baraka's controversial poem. The concentration is not only on their poetical works, but parallel to these is also a reading of their poetical manifestos. Manifestos, a "constitutive discourse of modernity" according to Janet Lyons[2], often make the point proper of their poetical efforts. This indeed is essential to their whole oeuvre at level of idea: to reconceptualise one's work from the very beginning of it, to create one's own "poetical machine" instead of any given form. Manifestos, I argue, often reveal the political crux of the poetical texts.

Criticism is an essential part of work of poets analysed here. As all of them, in their own ways, were after new forms and renewal of poetical language, dealing with their predecessors was a necessity. Writing critique was, especially for Pound, a way to evaluate one's own work in comparison with the earlier writers. Critique often works, as will be shown in the analysis, as an opening for new poetics through the gaps and weak spots the writer finds in the past writings. The failure of one author may thus be a victory for another.

The essence of this dissertation consists of reading of the major poetical works of Whitman, Pound, Olson and Bernstein. To filter from their works the essence of their ideas of political agency and more generally the poets' role in society, the reading of their works is not sufficient in itself. As poetry in their reading is essentially local and ephemeral, one must take the context into account. Also essential to their works are the ideas of intertextuality, locating and analysing the intertexts is thus necessary. Last but not least, their work was created in certain theoretical environments, political and philosophical theories both affecting their writings, so to understand them properly, putting them into the theoretical and political continuum is one of the tasks of an analyst. One may notice that poetical theoretical battles reflect the political battles behind them. To state that poetry is above politics or vice versa can indeed be seen also as a political statement; it is this intertwining these two arguments or lines of thought and their development in poetical theories and works that will form the core of this dissertation. Thus, the research moves between the ideas protruding from the poetical texts and from the field on which and to which they have been written.

I concentrate on the works of four poets I find as the most important figures of their own times in terms of creating new forms and putting forward arguments for renewal of poetical forms. One could of course argue that other poets could likewise be included, and that several schools or strands of poetics have not been analyzed here. Feminist poetry, for example, has its importance as a movement inside political poetry, but as it has not been based on poetical forms that would characterize them, their exclusion is therefore justified. Beat poetry is another major strand that is arguably strongly political, but in terms of forms and renewal, not so much of importance here.

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2   Lyons 1999, 34.

Walt Whitman, as an iconic figure of American poetry, does not need much justification, as even his adversaries, like Ezra Pound, found his influence was unsurpassable. Ezra Pound, as a founding figure of modernism and a poet whose work has been fiercely discussed for decades, is impossible to bypass. Charles Olson is another case. There are many contemporary writers who could be here instead of Olson, and even his originality has been questioned by scholars such as Marjorie Perloff. As I argue throughout this study, Olson's importance lies in his status between modernism and language-poetry, as a poet who introduced postmodernism to American poetry, and as a writer who in his criticism and essays collected the most important themes of post-WWII poetry. As an antithesis to Pound, Olson is also of importance. When coming to language poets, there are of course several figures on whom to concentrate. Charles Bernstein, as one of the most active writers and debaters in their group, is an obvious choice. He has been very active in debating their stance in respect to political nature of poetry, his work is fruitful source for this analysis.

One aspect that has minor effect on this study, but is still worth mentioning, is the development of new forms of publication. The poets analyzed here all started their careers long before the internet, but in today's poetical landscape the internet is arguably changing the reception and circulation of poetry. To date this change has been relatively little studied, but already a glance at internet resources on poetry reveals that even the classical works are now more easily available, and new poetry is created in unprecedented manner. The concluding chapter of this work will take a look at the new modes of writing based on new technological innovations. Change thus is not limited to publication forums, but also the modes of writing are affected.[3]

1.1 Short biographies

1.1.1 Walt Whitman

Born in 1819 on Long Island, Walt Whitman is arguably the most important poet of the United States still today. Whitman indeed was a poet of the USA, as the country and its people were his most important and in a sense also his only topic. There are few writers in the United States of whom such abundant biographies have been written as Whitman. Many of Whitman's biographies are hagiographies, some concentrate on the peculiarities of his nature and especially on his sexuality, but among them are studies on his political activities and ideas as well. Among them is Betsy Erkkila's presentation of Whitman's

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3   On the new technologies, see for example Schreibman and Siemens 2008. As is suitable for the topic, book is also online here:
http://www.digitalhumanities.org/companionDLS/

political life, *Whitman the Political Poet,* first published in 1989, which I will discuss in chapter on Whitman's poetry.[4]

The Long Island of Whitman's days was a rural area. Whitman started his writing career there as a journalist, first as a writer for the "Long Island Star" and then founding a newspaper the "Long-Islander" in 1838, when he was just 19 years old. Ten months later he sold his newspaper and joined the ranks of the "Long Island Democrat", writing journalistic articles but also short prose pieces. The most important part of his journalistic career was his editorship of the "Brooklyn Daily Eagle", where he wrote both journalism and prose. According to Reynolds, "[a] free-soil Democrat, he used the columns of the Daily Eagle to support the Wilmot Proviso, a proposal to prevent slavery from spreading to newly acquired western territories"[5].

Disappointed because of the lack of popularity of free-soilers[6], Whitman started writing bitter political poems. But his poetical break-through, *Leaves of Grass*, was already in the making during his years as a journalist. Published first in 1855, *Leaves of Grass* was a collection of years of work and study. Whitman had left school at the age of 11, but even Ralph Waldo Emerson admired the foregrounding Whitman had made for his poetry. Emerson was definitely the most important precedent for Whitman, and much of the ideas in his first collection come from Emerson.

Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* was not the success he had anticipated, and he thus soon created a new, longer edition. Through the years, *Leaves of Grass* grew incorporating most of Whitman's poems, and it could be said to be one single epic poem. The structure is organic, so adding new material was not very difficult. The most important turn for Whitman as a poet and as a person was the Civil War.

For Whitman the Civil War was what he needed. War achieved what he wanted to achieve through his poetry, and the inescapably the war was included in his book, as Whitman wrote in his poem "To thee old clause" that "my book and the war are one"[7]. In some parts of his poetry Whitman celebrates the war, welcomed it, even though he had direct experiences of the horrors of the war as he worked as a nurse for the wounded soldiers in Washington. After the war, political Whitman turned into a new humanistic Whitman, whose tones were thereafter more tranquil, whose ideas were more world-embracing.

Whitman spent his last years bed-ridden after several strokes. Nevertheless, he continued working all the same and, after his first stroke, published three new editions of *Leaves of Grass*. A few months before his death, Whitman received the copies of the last edition, which he mentioned in a letter

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4   Erkkila 1989. In this chapter I will use biography combining intellectual and personal histories of Whitman that was written by David S. Reynolds. References are to Reynolds unless otherwise noticed. See Reynolds 2005.
5   Reynolds 2005, 8.
6   A short lived political movement that opposed the expansion of slavery to into the new territories.
7   Whitman 2001, 4.

to R.M. Bucke in 1891 that "at last complete – after 33 y'rs of hackling at it, all times & moods of my life, fair weather and foul, all parts of the land, and peace & war, young & old"[8]. Whitman died in March 1892.

Whitman's legacy and importance has been debated since the publication of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*. In the 1950's Whitman was seen as too left-wing by supporters of McCarthy, but during the 1960's a Whitman renaissance was evident, to be shirked again in conservative 1980's. Recently even the right-wing seems to be able to add Whitman to its literary canon, and, as a non-politicized entity, he made his way to the White House even in the Bush era[9].

1.1.2   Ezra Pound

Ezra Pound was born in 1885 in Hailey, Idaho, but spent most of his life outside the United States. Despite that he wrote, like many expatriates, extensively about his home country, its politics and history

Ezra Pound's life could be divided into two phases: first the celebrated poetic genius and then political traitor with suspect ideas about poetics. Unlike with many other poets, in Pound's case the presentation of the gap between his personal life and opinions and his poetics seems to be immense. Very much has been written about his poetics, but his biographies seem to be less popular. The most comprehensive biography written about Pound so far is the three volume work by James J. Wilhelm. As a well documented and detailed biography, it explains the complexities of this peculiar poet, despite the fact that Wilhelm sets Pound into a framework of ancient tragedy.[10]

Pound's grandfather was Congressman Thaddeus C. Pound, who had been in the House of Representatives just before Ezra Pound was born, and who also created a career as a businessman. The importance of his grandfather may be seen in Pound's later writings, where he approvingly wrote about Thaddeus Pound's experiment with commodity money: "Sixty-three years ago when New York banks weren't helping Wisconsin, my grandfather issued his own money [--] The money was good. It worked. It was never repudiated. Men

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8   Quoted in Oliver 2006, 112.
9   In February 2003 Laura Bush, then First Lady, organized "Poetry and the American Voice" symposium in the White House. But symposium was cancelled after several prominent poets - including former U.S. poet laureates Rita Dove and Stanley Kunitz - declined her invitation. The White House feared the event would become less a literary event than a political forum because it seemed that poets wanted to discuss the ongoing war on terrorism. Some conservative observers claimed that the meeting was to be cultural, non-political and that poets politicized it. However, the idea of the symposium was to celebrate the poetry of Walt Whitman, Langston Hughes and Emily Dickinson, of whom at least the first two are political writers in all senses of word. After the cancellation, Laura Bush declared that "There is nothing political about American literature". See for example:
     http://www.thenation.com/archive/poetry-makes-nothing-happen-ask-laura-bush
10   Of the earlier works on Pound that are highly recommended, the following should be mentioned: Hugh Kenner's The Poetry of Ezra Pound (1950) and his later Pound Era (1970). Also Peter Ackroyd's Ezra Pound and his World (1980) is worth reading and more compact than biography by Wilhelm. In this chapter I follow Wilhelm's and Ackroyd's works, unless otherwise mentioned. See Wilhelm 1985; Wilhelm 1990; and Wilhelm 1994.

cut down trees and got fed."[11] Ideas on money were an essential part of Pound's poetry, and even in his first published poem, when he was 11-years old, he was supporting progressive politician, William Jennings Bryan, who advocated "free silver" policy and anti-trust legislation.

Pound got his early education at Quaker schools. As his family was relatively well-off, Pound had a chance to visit Europe a few times during his American years. After a few years of doctoral studies and sporadic visits to Europe, Pound abandoned his research project, as his research grant was also cancelled, and moved more or less permanently to Europe in 1908.

When arriving London in 1908, Pound soon found likeminded writers and joined the circle of young modernists. Perhaps the most influential friendship he made with T.S. Eliot, also an expatriate who spent most of his life in Europe. While in London, after being introduced to the local literary circles, Pound got his first collections of poems published in 1908, and in 1910 his first collection of criticism was published.

In 1912 Pound and another American, Hilda Doolittle, and later her husband Richard Aldington, started work on a project which later became named "imagism": a project aiming at the clarity of language and releasing it from the empty rhetoric, romanticism and abstraction. In his 1916 essay "A Retrospect" Pound described the task as follows: "1. Direct treatment of the "thing" whether subjective or objective. 2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation. 3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome." [12]

The years of WWI were filled with editing of several landmark novels and poetry, including works of James Joyce and T.S. Eliot. After the war, Pound wrote also one of his most important single poems outside his *Cantos*, autobiographical "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley". After having spent 12 years in London and few in Paris, Pound moved to Italy in 1924. In 1917 Pound had published three pieces called cantos, but in Italy he started to create a larger unity of them and he abandoned his early cantos.

The 120 Cantos that comprise the final edition include almost every aspect of language, and he used 15 different languages in his poems. Obsessed with history, Pound used historical sources occasionally almost verbatim. In Italy, Pound moved closer to Mussolini's circles, and, during the WWII, made propagandistic radio speeches against his country of origin. Pound was arrested in 1945 in Pisa, and faced trial for treason in the USA. For the next 13 years, Pound was in the St. Elizabeth mental institution in Washington D.C. but still continued writing cantos. In 1958 Pound was released, and returned to Italy where he spent the rest of his life, until his death in 1972. Pound's legacy, as one the most influential figures of high-modernity but also a political enfant terrible, is still being debated.

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11   Quoted in Surette 1999, 223.
12   Pound 1968, 3.

1.1.3   Charles Olson

So far there has been just one comprehensive biography of Charles Olson, *Charles Olson: The Allegory of Poet's Life* by Tom Clark. Despite its being criticized by Ralph Maud for its psychologizing tone, it serves well as an introduction to his poetry.[13] It is surprising that biographical studies of Olson are limited to this one, especially as Olson's poetry is very much self-centered, but perhaps the lack of biographies is due to exactly that; Olson wrote many autobiographical poems and prose chapters.

Olson was born in 1910 in Worchester, Massachusetts. His father was a Swedish immigrant, his mother was of Irish Catholic descent and Charles Olson was baptized as Catholic. Olson lived his early years in Massachusetts and his father worked as a mailman. Summers Olson spent at Gloucester, the scene of his later poems.

During his studies at Harvard, Olson became interested in Melville's ideas on democracy and expansionism. In 1936, he started PhD studies in Harvard's the American Civilization program. One of his supervisors was F.O. Matthiessen, who was about to publish his monumental *American Renaissance* that focused on democratic styles of American masters of literature. Olson got grant from Guggenheim foundation in 1939, to finish his book on Melville, and soon left his already trailing PhD studies. During his Harvard years, Olson had taken Fredrick Merk's courses on the westward movement of American civilization, which influenced his work on Melville and helped to create later the grand theme of his poetical work. Merk was a student of Fredrick Jackson Turner, a writer of the so called frontier theory, so Olson could see himself in a continuum of American geo-philosophical tradition.

Olson's work on Melville did not move forward quickly, it took until 1945 before he sent it to a publisher. Meanwhile Olson looked for job after his grant monies ended. In September 1942, Olson got a work at the Office of War Information, its foreign language section. The business of the agency was "psychological warfare", and the foreign language division was one of the most important contributors in that effort. During its first years, the office was a haven for artistic creation and innovation, giving work to many well known artists and writers and securing a relatively cozy environment in the middle of the war. "Merchandise men", as Olson called them, gradually started to take over the office, and following many of his colleagues, like historian Arthur Schlesinger, Olson left the office in 1944. Olson was especially disappointed with the administrations Pacific policy, which directed its attention to Chinese nationalists instead of equal recognition of Mao.

The "tricks of politics" were of interest for ambitious Olson even after leaving the Office of War Information. He soon found another high level

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13   Clark 2000. Ralph Maud has published a short biographical sketch of Olson as well, concentrating on a critique of Clark. See Maud 2008. Worth mentioning is also Charles Olson in Connecticut by Charles Boer (1975), which offers a personal portrait of Olson. Here I follow Clark's presentation, which is the source for this chapter unless otherwise mentioned.

political job at the Democratic National Committee, in its Foreign Nationalities Division, where he started as director in July 1944. In Roosevelt's last presidential campaign, Olson's task was to support the ethnic minorities and secure their vote and fight against Dewey's discriminatory attitudes.

Despite being on the losing side in the vice-presidential campaign for Henry Wallace, Olson had high hopes for another, more influential position in the new Roosevelt administration. He speculated he would be offered a cabinet-level post of assistant secretary, or even the position of postmaster general. Never offered such position, Olson retreated from politics claiming political life was not suitable for a creative person.

Olson's continued struggle for the rights of minorities was reflected in his first moves in the literary field. Alongside with his first published poems, which dealt with the horrors of war and concentration camps, he became interested in the faith of Ezra Pound, who was, after trial for treason, locked in a mental institution. Combining the ideas of Pound and Melville, and his earlier interest in westward movement of American civilization, Olson reinvented himself as Olson the Poet and started to rebuild his political ideas in poetry. Olson's first poetry was most local poetry, the poetry of a city state.

The combination of city state and modern democratic ideas was a somewhat nostalgic effort to raise the status of a poet in society. In 1945 Olson wrote in a letter to anthropologist Ruth Benedict that

> I have a feeling you will know what I mean when I regret we are not city states here in this wild land. Differentiation, yes. But also the chance for a person like yourself or myself to be central to social action at the same time and because of one's own creative work. I envy Yeats his Ireland.14

Olson's obsession with Gloucester as a polis stems from this idea of a city where a poet can manage the city's businesses and participate in its politics in an effective way. But Olson's initial horizon of physical closeness and poets' participation at the most concrete level soon widened to include the whole western civilization at the level of history and ideas.

Correcting and democratizing Pound's ideas made Olson the primus inter pares in the field of poetical theory. Even though his ideas may lack originality, when compared to those of William Carlos Williams, or Pound himself, the presentation and form Olson gave them was in the end what made his influence so deep in the poetics of the 1960's. As a rector of the Black Mountain College, a school of liberal arts education, and as a speaker and theorist Olson achieved a status of poetical authority among his contemporaries.

Olson's major work, *Maximus Poems*, was still unfinished when he died in 1970 although he had been working on it for over two decades. Fragments of the final part of the trilogy were collected later by George F. Butterick. Since the 1980's Olson has been a relatively unknown figure in American literature, and still is, despite a small renaissance of his ideas in the 1990's. In respect to this

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14   Quoted in Clark 2000, 94.

dissertation he is an important turnstile when moving from the ideas of Pound to post-modernity.

1.1.4 Charles Bernstein

New York poet Charles Bernstein is only living member of the four poets under scrutiny and also still active as a poet and as a teacher, so it is not much of a surprise that there is not yet a full-scale biography written about him. He has not discussed his past much in his published works either, although in some poems there are references that could be seen as autobiographical. Here we must be content to summarize what he said in an interview published in his collection *My Way*.[15]

Charles Bernstein was born in New York in 1950. His grandparents were of Russian Jewish origin who moved to New York in the late 19th Century. His parents were assimilationist Jews, so Jewish traditions were not emphasized at home. For Bernstein, the idea of a Jewish identity was more influenced by the poetry of Louis Zukofsky, Charles Reznikoff and Jerome Rothenberg, who were "exploring and realizing alternative identity formations".

In the 1960's, Bernstein joined the student movement, lining up with anti-war demonstrators and participating in the important events of his generation like protest activities at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. During his studies at Harvard, Bernstein became involved in anti-establishment theatre production, and was influenced by Pinter's and Beckett's plays.

Poetry came into picture relatively late, as Bernstein became increasingly interested in poetry only after his graduation. Bernstein worked briefly in different charity projects, meanwhile reading poetry and also writing some poems. With the help of Rothenberg he contacted Ron Silliman, a California based poet and publisher, to whom Bernstein sent his poems. Silliman introduced Bernstein to the circles of nascent language poetry. After spending two years in California, Bernstein moved back to New York in 1975, where he contacted Bruce Andrews, and in 1978 started the journal *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*.

Bernstein explained that the importance of the journal lay in that it was

> an on-going and open-ended collaborative conversation and exchange on a series of particular and partisan, but also mutable and provisional, poetic principles and proclivities conducted in a decentralized manner by a number of differently situated editors, reading series coordinators, poets, and readers: a linked series of poetic tendencies and collaborative exchanges among a range of poets who desired, for a period of time, to make this social exchange a primary site of their work. [--]" and the point was "not to define its own activity or to prescribe a singular form of poetry, but rather to insist on particular *possibilities* for poetry and poetics.[16]

As the language poetry never had a unified agenda, it became a collective term to a group of poets that had likeminded orientations, loosening during the

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15 Bernstein 1999. Poems using autobiographical material, see especially his 1980 collection Controlling Interests.
16 Bernstein 1999, 249. Italics in the original..

years. The group also became established in the sense that they were no longer total outsiders as they tried to posit themselves in the 1970's, but, as Bernstein, earned their living by teaching and studying at universities and other institutions. After teaching at the State University of New York since 1990, Bernstein has held the Donald T. Regan chair in the department of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Pennsylvania since 2003. Bernstein has published 16 poetry collections and six books of essays.

1.2 America

As much as this is a book on American political poetry, unavoidably this is also a book about America, the United States, as it has been seen by the poets discussed here. Juxtapositions and different styles can be seen here, too. And they can also be interpreted as different layers or levels of the same project. At the rhetorical level, the target is the direct manifestations of how politicians and the public define America and its politics; such endeavours reach from Amiri Baraka's poems on civil rights movement and the economic status of minorities to Charles Bernstein's poems addressing the hegemonic positions of America in the post-Cold War era world and the war on terror and its impacts on Americanism.

These already carry with them seeds to a deeper level, to the questioning of the vocabulary and ideas behind such acts as 9/11 and its aftermath by Baraka, or, as addressed by Bernstein, to dismantling the language of American masculine militants waging the war in the Middle East. At that level, the language of Americanism itself comes into focus, and is juxtaposed with such elements as femininity, polyphony and ambivalence.

If "poetry is the beginning of politics", it is also the beginning of a nation as political entity. The ways and means of poetry in shaping what is and what will be the USA were already envisioned by Walt Whitman, for whom "America itself is the greatest poem" (a quote he borrowed from Emerson). The story of the American myth is also central to Charles Olson's poetry and prose: he starts in the backwashes of Melville, explores the roots of mans travel from the Mediterranean and across the Atlantic to the quests end in the Pacific. After conquering the Pacific and *translatio imperii* arriving at its final post, a new era begins, Americans are the "last first people", people who charted the last unknown: "The Pacific is the end of the UNKNOWN [--] END of the individuals responsibility to himself. Ahab is full stop"[17]. It is the triangle of three myths of American expansion: those of "city on a hill" by John Winthrop; "manifest destiny" by John O'Sullivan; and "frontier nation" by Frederick Jackson Turner, that also characterise the utopias and dystopias of poetical America. One may say these are three arche-political categories of American politics, the deepest layers of political imagination.

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17   Charles Olson 1997a, 105. Capitals by Olson.

The idea of manifest destiny, the God given right to expand the American empire, spans from Whitman's poetry to the days after 9/11. In his editorial on 2 December 1847 in the *Brooklyn Eagle*, Whitman wrote*:* "It is for the interest of mankind that [American] power and territory should be extended. . . . We claim those lands . . . by a law superior to parchment and dry diplomatic rules"[18]. Coming to the 21st Century and the "war on terror", that destiny has become a curse, as is hinted in Lawrence Ferlinghetti's poem "Totalitarian Democracy" in 2005[19]:

> The birth of a nation of sheep
> The deep deep sleep of Middle America
> The underground wave of feel-good fascism
> The uneasy rule of the super-rich
> The total triumph of imperial America
> The final proof of our Manifest Destiny
> The first loud cry of America über alles
> Echoing in freedom's alleys
> The last lament for lost democracy
> The total triumph of
> totalitarian plutocracy

For these American poets, the question of America and Americanism has thus been central for over one and half centuries, and one may argue it has been that from the very early days of the Revolution. To discuss politics and poetry in the American context, these themes are essential, and take a central role in this research.

It seems that changes in poetical styles or forms, or at least the explicitly announced need for these changes, seem to follow political events. This does not to go back to Marxist literature theory about arts as reflection of society. It is actually a common argument among poets that goes just the opposite way: poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world as Percy Bysshe Shelley put it, but political changes indeed are taken into consideration and need to "write oneself out of the political impasses" seems to be prevalent tendency, and there is a clearly explicated appeal for new poetry, "new language" also after 9/11, an appeal for new poetry seems to have followed every major disaster in US politics and society.

On the question of the relation between poetical activity and political engagement, there is a statement by essayist and poet James Scully, who has written that "[protest] poetry is issue-bound, spectatorial [--] It tends to be reactive, victim-oriented, incapacitated [--] Dissident poetry, however, does not respect boundaries between private and public, self and other. In breaking the

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18   Whitman 2003, 370.
19   Ferlinghetti 2005, 285.

boundaries it breaks silence, opening poetry up, putting it in the middle of life [--] It is a poetry that talks back, that would act as part of the world, not simply as mirror of it."[20] For Scully, truly political poetry is not engaged poetry which represents inequalities and other problems of the world but poetry which is itself politics, not just a political representation that challenges established politics but acts in politics on its own terms.

In a sense, for all of the poets analysed here, poetry is continuing politics by other means, some of them, like Whitman, making this explicitly clear, and all of them have also been involved in the practice of daily politics. For Whitman and Olson political activism preceded their turn towards poetry after certain disappointments in their political careers. Thus they continued their needs for political expression in the form of poetry. Implicitly present is of course the idea that poetry goes beyond what ordinary politics can achieve.

For Pound and for Bernstein, poetry preceded politics and their approach to politics has been more indirect. Both of them have been more interested in the structural aspects of language and politics. Or as Bernstein put it in differentiating himself from any form of agitation and propaganda, agit-prop, "the political power of poetry is not measured in numbers; it instructs us to count differently.[21]"

The political backgrounds of poets presented in this study vary from obviously left leaning Olson and Marxist Bernstein to the fascism of Pound. Whitman may be termed a radical democrat, if one needs such labels. Despite that, what is common to all of them is certain kind of republicanism: poetry is seen as an elitist endeavour, even though it is also a form of democratic thought. This is the paradox all of them struggle with.

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20 Quoted in Rich 2003, xv.
21 Bernstein 1992, 226.

2 AMERICAN POLITICAL POETRY: HISTORY, CONTEXTS, AND THEORY

2.1 Pre-history of political poetry

On many occasions since the early Greek philosophy, poetry and poets have been given a status of seers and visionaries. The line between the philosophical and poetical was very thin in antiquity, for example Solon was both legislator and poet. Even Plato, though banishing the artists, wrote in *Faidros* that poet was able to understand *logos* via his manic abilities.

Since the early Greek period, poetry gradually became accepted as a technical skill, a form of artisanship. The classics remained authorities and examples such as Horace and his *Ars Poetica* served as models for poetical perfection. However, by the 19th Century, poets started to regain their lost status of visionary thinkers. Poetry also fought for independence from other forms of thinking. As Charles Baudelaire wrote in 1859, "the object of poetry is not Truth, the object of poetry is Poetry itself"[22], or in other words, using phrase by Gautier, it was *L'art pour l'art*. Percy Shelley was even more pompous, when claiming in his essay "In Defence of Poetry" in 1821 that "poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world"[23].

Shelley adjusted the Platonic conception of knowledge: the poet's mission was to create and newly define the *logos*. But also the aspect of time was already present; the poet was able to see the future.

Like Shelley, Baudelaire also considered that the poet was not just non-partisan, apolitical visionary, but also participating and taking his or her own subjective stance. Considering the nature of critique, Baudelaire wrote that "to be justified, critique must be partisan, passionate, political. So critique must be made from limited perspective, but from such, that opens most views.[24]"

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22 Quoted in Hamburger 1982, 4.
23 Shelley 1903, 46.
24 Quoted in de Jonge 1976, 79.

The question about the relation between poetry and politics became an ongoing topic only since the start of the 1900's. The reason for this belatedness lies in the new conceptualisations of both poetry and politics that then enabled speaking of them within the same discourse in modern terms. The time was ripe for the collision of the modern political vocabulary and modern poetical ideas.

Even though new questions, which were raised especially by the German expressionists, relied on Nietzsche and Baudelaire and on their ideas about the nature of arts and poetry, the approach was new. In his 1912 article "Der Dichter greift in die Politik", German expressionist Ludwig Rubiner sees political poetry as a destroyer, as deconstruction of all systems of ancient regime: "We live only from our disasters, troublemaker is a private honorary title, destroyer a religious concept. That's why it is good that literature explodes into politics."[25]

In essay written in 1908, "Politisierung des Theaters", Rubiner juxtaposes the "art theatre" and "political theatre". The theatre experience for him is not an individual but a social occasion, the audience is "socialised". The value of theatre lies not in its "general importance and timelessness" but it "focuses on the moment". Instead of psychic experience which individualises the spectator, new theatre creates anew the audience as community.[26] Rubiner criticises the pure art for its aims to isolate the art experience to individual pleasure and to shut out the political and social aspects from the arts. Especially the art music aiming at the absolute music was to be rejected: "Music is opposite to moral"[27]. Rubiners views are opposite those presented by Thomas Mann in 1918 in his *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitisches*, as Mann saw the apolitical German culture as superior to the morally and politically engaged French "civilisation literature". Rubiner saw in the rejection of the German culture a chance to change, a way into the political.

In his essay "Der Dichter greift in die Politik", Rubiner presents a maxim according to which "politics is the expression of our moral views"[28]. Battles are no longer fought on the field of the literary-aesthetic, but on the moral-ethical one. Rubiner's ideal poet goes against the prevailing materialistic world-view, no matter if that view is presented by the bourgeoisie or the labour movement. "The poet goes into politics, that is: he breaks and reveals. He believes his intensity, his explosive force."[29] The poet destroys old moralities in order to create new ones. The political poet believes in "his life, body, movement". The poetry of renewal is thus all-encompassing, even bodily activity, which sets things in motion. Actuality, movement, intensity are the lifting powers of new political poetry.

The essential part of Rubiner's poetical- and political ideas is displacement of the pure forms to make a way for intensity and values, for the political. The

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25   Rubiner 1976a, 255.
26   Rubiner 1976, 153-154.
27   Rubiner 1976b, 189.
28   Rubiner 1976a, 251.
29   Ibid. 263.

politicisation of the poetical forms thus starts to take shape in Rubiner's writings. He sees Stefan George as a legislator of old poetics and politics[30], new directions will be of open form and it opens cumulatively, not via singular poems or poetical objects. Form is determined by the situation and goal, not by the timeless aestheticism.

The political in the poetical does not mean a vision coming from above, from some eternal perspective, but from inside, as he writes in his 1913 essay "Lyrische Erfahrungen", "thinking is a poet's reality"[31]. The poet creates his own perspective to reality and politicises it. Rubiner clarifies the difference between thinking and timeless visioning. Poetry is not only a practical and technical application, but a tool for thinking and politics. Poetry integrates seamlessly into politics as an activity as, like poetry, politics is not just abstract contemplation about the foundations of a community or society but a time-bound battle against hierarchisations and classifications. A dimension which Rubiner plays with is time and not space, as is the case in the older conceptions of society and politics. His understanding of politics is thus unarguably modern. Poetry and politics are future oriented activities.

But despite his claims about novelty of his approach, he accepts one writer as his predecessor: Walt Whitman, American poet of 19th Century. Whitman being also of great importance to all American poetry, reading his poetry is proper way so start this journey to American political poetry. But before doing that, I'll take a short look to earlier discussions about poets role in American society, and more generally, to different strategies to politicize poetry.

2.2   Strategies of political poetry or how to read poetry politically

in truth / We have no gift to set a statesman right[32]

Yeats

There have been quite a few earlier attempts for defining the political aspects of poetry. It is, in general, quite clear for everybody what is poetry, and most people have a certain understanding about what they think is politics or political. But the combination of these two things is much more difficult. Very often poetry and politics have been seen as two entirely different spheres of activity.

The question of relation between poetry and politics is a modern one. As Denise Levertov, who was also a poet, has mentioned, the question was not at all problematic before the Romantic era and its individualised lyric form, which is still today very often thought of as synonym to all poetry. Older forms like the epic or ballad were clearly communal, not individual, and the issues dealt

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30   Rubiner 1976c, 199
31   Ibid.
32   Yeats 1996, 155.

within these forms were also in a non-problematic manner in connection with the world outside.[33]

Political poetry has been seen as something that is bad as poetry, and likewise quite often bad as politics: political poetry as a term tends to lead ones' mind to think of poets who serve the state and write laudatory poets about great statesmen. In this view, a poet in politics is an opportunist or just an extremely naïve person. But this is not necessarily the case. Many celebrated poets write about political topics, and have been directly involved in politics. Persons like Pablo Neruda, Osip Mandelstam, W.H. Auden may come to mind when considering poets actively taking part in politics, and not many would call them bad poets, or if they have been so called, the reasons are often more political than poetical. They may have had their more embarrassing moments, like when Neruda wrote "Molotov and Voroshilov are there / I see them with the others, the high generals / the indomitable ones"[34]. But more often poets have been seen as victims of politics, as Mandelstam was in the hands of Stalin.

2.2.1 "Poetry makes nothing happen"

One of the poets who continued to have a foot on the both sides of the fence was W.H. Auden. He was of Irish origin but later moved to USA, and then to southern Europe. Auden's best known statement about the poets' role in society may be his elegy for W.B. Yeats, "In Memory of W.B. Yeats". The second and the most quoted part of the poem is:

> You were silly like us; your gift survived it all:
> The parish of rich women, physical decay,
> Yourself. Mad Ireland hurt you into poetry.
> Now Ireland has her madness and her weather still,
> For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives
> In the valley of its making where executives
> Would never want to tamper, flows on south
> From ranches of isolation and the busy griefs,
> Raw towns that we believe and die in; it survives,
> A way of happening, a mouth.[35]

The message casual analysts often draw from poem is summarised in lines stating "poetry makes nothing happen" and its importance lies according to many just in celebration of poetry as an antithesis to activities of everyday life, and also of politics.[36] But that statement is refuted later in the poem and its

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33   Levertov 1981, 117-118.
34   Neruda 1950, 31.
35   Auden 1991, 247-248.
36   Michael Thurston (2001, 6) has commented on the poems reception: "the line has come to summarize a set of institutional assumptions about poetry as a special kind

message is thus just the opposite of that common reading. Poetry indeed makes things happen, but not directly:

> Follow, poet, follow right
> To the bottom of the night,
> With your unconstraining voice
> Still persuade us to rejoice.
>
> With the farming of a verse
> Make a vineyard of the curse,
> Sing of human unsuccess
> In a rapture of distress.
>
> In the deserts of the heart
> Let the healing fountains start,
> In the prison of his days
> Teach the free man how to praise.

Poetry makes thing happen via personal experience, and by making or enabling them to see things differently, the poet who digs beyond the layers of the familiar puts the change into motion. Here, Auden is actually following Shelley's idea about poets having an important role as a "legislator". There are also the two different politics of time inside the poem: the first lines seem to hint that the poet can only be remembered by his eternal words; what a poet can achieve is to be remembered by some admirers. But the second part shows things in different light. The poets' words can make things change and in that change is the true value of a great poet. In his 1939 essay on Voltaire, Auden also presents his idea of democracy: "For democracy is not a political system or party but an attitude of mind"[37].

For the political idea of the poem to function, it is essential that Yeats becomes a thing inside the poem, not important as a person but as language. He is seen as a city, "The provinces of his body revolted, / The squares of his mind were empty, / Silence invaded the suburbs". It is not the poet but the poem and its language that creates a space for activity that goes beyond its own margins. Act and activity of reading and recitation is in the end what remains of poetry, "it survives, / A way of happening, a mouth".

As it happens, this poem about the death of Yeats was probably the very first, or at least one of the first poems Auden wrote in his new home in the USA. Auden heard of Yeats' death three days after his arrival in New York. Auden left for the USA in order to get rid of "Mad Ireland" and its mad politics. During the

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of discourse, removed from the world of action and consequence and thus prevented from acting, prevented from having consequences".

37   Auden 2002, 8.

1930's Auden tried to combine the task of a poet with Marxist politics, even though his communism was more idealistic than practical and even though his odes to comrades had their share of satire as well. Being disappointed in politics after his experiences as a propagandist for Republicans during the Spanish Civil war and after writing reportage about Sino-Japanese war, he continued his politics by other means, in poetry seen as being beyond or above politics. Auden's "escape" to America was hotly debated even in the British parliament. For many American poets Auden became an icon of modernism.

Auden may be seen as a proponent of an idea that poetry is inevitably entangled with politics, as both are linguistic practices. However, he also emphasises the personal experiences one may draw from in poetry. In Auden conflict between eternal values and activism is unsolvable, and experience and speech are as important as the structural elements of language. This conflict is widely reflected in the post-WWII poetry in the USA, and also in its analysis.

2.2.2 Take nothing for granted

If something is clear, when speaking of political poetry, it is that nothing can be taken for granted. Poetry can be used as a direct part, not even as continuation of politics but as part of it. Poetry can be used as a political text in its most direct sense: it is then just political speak set to meter; usually that type of poetry is called agit-prop. But there also is politics in poetry beyond sheer agit-prop. Even the most formal poetry, and even the nonsense-poetry which does not contain any legible and recognizable words, has political implications if read properly. This is to say, that every poetical work has political *potential.* Take for example the "sound machines" of Bruce Andrews in his Give Em Enough Rope:

> Equation Sphinxlike Pmphlet
> Misinform Sweet Business Miss Dot Your Eye Favorably
> Impressive Rough Interest
> Sensational Base Natural Problematize Hey Look
> Dominate Ruler Passion
> Added Passing Sharp Policy Moving Loco Fancy Line Vibration
> Talking Cognitive I'm When Touched
> Detention[38]

The problem is from where do we derive our political explanation, on what do we base it? It may be as Derrida put it, that there is nothing behind the text, but it also true that there is nothing in the text itself either. A word as a sound, in its materiality, signifies nothing. It must be contextualized, put in relation with other sounds, other systems of meaning, juxtaposed. And this is where we get into the political. And this is also where our problems start.

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[38]   Andrews 1987, 115. Misspellings are in the original.

Andrews, whose above quoted writing appears to be nonsense, is not just a poet but also a professor of political science. We may assume he is not just babbling but is saying something to us, or to someone. But is he serious? Published as a book it cannot be just a joke. And it is published as poetry, so it is poetry. So we assume it is poetry and it means something. But can we be sure what the meaning is based only on those lines quoted; can we discern it from something that is presented as art in order to make us think? Basically the "poem" looks like it is readymade, just words picked and copied and pasted together.

But it is not entirely arbitrary: there seems to be rough metrics, the words have been divided in lines not following ordinary grammatical structures, and one can even hear an echo of a rhyme scheme. Words seem to carry some kind of an idea of vacillation between dominance and freedom.

What is essential to the poem is to think of it as a space, or a field. What Andrews created in his "poem", is the idea of the space filled with language with all its profanities, actualities and, politics. It is about the observation of this chaos called life, life as immediately given. To put it all in lines, to show it in its chaotic existence, is to present it to the reader as fresh and new. The reader organises this seemingly unprocessed text into something meaningful, and the reader's task is made explicit by the roughness of the material and by the hints given in the lines and structure. The poem presents in its own way how we create language out of straws, and the politics of reading and political meanings are part of that process.

Thus, the questions the poem raises are also questions about its political structuring: to whom does the proper meaning of the text belong and whose texts should be prioritized, those of the authors' or our own reading? Any interpretation is a violent act, whether it is done by the author, or someone else.

Whereas the novel and the pre-modern poem are self-contained worlds within themselves, manifestations of one piece of existing reality, even though fictional, the poems in this study are discussion, they discuss the very basic elements of reality that language creates and challenge those same elements.

In this work I have deliberately juxtaposed the two types of poetries, those of language and speech. It has been my *modus operandi* to open up the political subtexts of those works. However, one must bear in mind that the demarcation is not as sharp as it appears. It is important to remember how language poet Ron Silliman corrected Robert Grenier's denial of speech: "I hate speech, but like talks"[39]. The language poets, even though strictly language oriented, prefer conversational way of approach too. One may argue that "conversationality" is one of the main characteristics of American poetry throughout its history as has been its tendency towards national self-reflection. How to speak of America and how to write about it were essential themes for Whitman, and has been a focus for many writers since then. Writing of language itself as a medium for this project is one way to approach these questions.

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39   Quoted in Cabri 2004, 65.

As a direct tool in politics, poetry can be used as a rhetorical device for political goals, to sharpen the message, or vice versa, to blur the message which has been taken as obvious in other forms of writing. Poetry has been a special case of language for most of the representatives of the language philosophy. That is because poetry is language taken at its extremes, it is a form of language most aware of its made nature. It is language at its last stage, at its most self-conscious level. Everything is "suspicious" in poetry, there is no stable subject, no stable meaning of words, and the relation between form and content is problematized to such an extent that one cannot tell which comes first. This reworking of the political concepts and discourses can serve as rhetorical re-orienteering, or, as in Andrews' poem, revealing the works of politics in every sphere of language.

Even the political content can also become a part of the form when the political tone is used in order to break the system of what is taken as poetical language. This is the case, for example, in the poetry of Charles Olson: everyday life, politics, businesses, fishing intermingle into a celebration of non-linear thinking and serve as a meta-poetical statement for non-eternal nature of every language, and all poetics. It is a form of kinetics, of moving forward, of an orientation in space, and politics *must* be part of that space. Political content is a necessity in his poetics as it is a part of our existence in language.

Finally, poetry can be used as tool for broadening the sensual conceptions of our society, bringing new meanings and new ways of seeing and sensing to the front. Then poetry serves as an impetus for something new from which new politics can grow, as an "unacknowledged legislator" as Shelley put it, or as determining "the place and stakes of politics as form of experience" as Ranciere has said of the role of arts in the political sphere.

These different types of political poetry can be seen, instead of juxtapositions, also as layers or levels. At the rhetorical level, language is seen as the medium for extra-language purposes. Language itself is not yet questioned or explored in all its possibilities but is taken as one tool in a tool-box of making politics. At the next level, language begins to evolve as part of the process of questions becoming part of the political sphere. Language can be used to make things appear as political questions and their limits, limits of politics and language, are tested and dismantled; language is politicized. At the final level, language and politics are observed as fundamental parts of our existence and being. This final level moves outside of proper politics towards questioning its very basis, to the level here politics and language only begin to evolve. This level is in a sense protopolitical, or, to use a term coined by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, arche-political. Thus we move from the practical to the epistemological and finally towards the ontology of politics. That "poetry is the beginning of politics", as Charles Bernstein states, seems to be the conclusion most poets come to when they explore the possibilities of political poetry to its very limits, independent of their poetical preconditions.

These different levels cannot be seen, as my analysis also shows, as exclusive, but as each layer supporting the others. How much each layer is

emphasised is dependent on the goals and situation of the writer, but more or less all the layers are to some extent present in, or can at least be found in, all of the political poetry, even in most of the so called agit-prop poetry.

2.3   From ABC to analysis

How to read in general and particularly how to read poetry is not a simple issue. As my material consists of both poetical works and prose, it is not possible to put them under an umbrella of one single method of reading. The basic analytical method I'm using when reading the poems is the so called close reading and I combine it with the hermeneutical analysis of the text. The close reading method was pioneered by I.A. Richards in the 1920's and has been associated with the school of New Criticism. The technique itself is quite simple: close attention is paid to individual words, syntax, and the order of sentences to reveal how the basic text operates at its basic level; I find it rather poignant that Richards himself called this method navigation.[40] In this exegesis the emphasis is put on particular over general. This method obviously could be continued ad nauseam, even scrutinising a single word in a poem under analysis could comprise a whole book. Since the 1980's this method has also been under critique, as it has been seen as hiding the ideological level of the text.

Thus, in order to get into some kind of an idea of the whole text and its ideological presumptions, and to get into a synthesis or at least to a fuller picture, one needs to proceed from these chartings of the particular to more general level. To do this I follow the ideas given by Paul Ricoeur in his *Interpretation Theory* (1976) and later works. Close reading is like field work diary in anthropology: it consists of preliminary perceptions, of the first encounter with the text, and creates a basis for more thorough analysis. Thereafter I follow the leads given in the text itself to the interpretation of my observations to create its meaning. In Ricoeur's words actualize "the meaning of the text for the present reader"[41]. To appropriate the meaning of the poems I broaden the perspective by following their intertextual leads, analyse their contexts and especially reflect them in the light of their prose works. To create a hermeneusis of a text also demands constant movement between the different levels of interpretation during the process so reading is not as straightforward as it may sound.

Close reading limits oneself only to the inner mechanisms of text at hand, and in that sense it could be seen as ahistorical and atemporal; text is an object that functions following its own self-determined rules. Ricoeur sees this as one

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40   Richards 2004, 10. Richards sets the navigation as his "main subject": "Navigation, in fact – the art of knowing where we are wherever, as mental travellers, we may go – is the main subject of the book". As will be discussed later in this work, navigation was an important metaphor also for Pound and Olson.
41   Ricoeur 1981, 181

of the greatest problems in close reading and also in early phenomenology; what is understood and appropriated in a text is not just the intention of the author hidden behind the text, or its inner logic, or even the historical situation with its possible audience where texts come from, but "the disclosure of a possible way of looking at things, which is the genuine referential power of the text" [42]. Therein lies the still present political potentiality of texts I am interpreting: in opening up the political vocabulary and hegemonic structures that are prevailing in the situation the author is writing from and about, and bringing those disclosures to the reader of today. As Ricoeur paraphrases Croce, "there is only a history of the potentialities of the present"; and "history, in this sense, explores the field of ímaginative´ variations which surround the present and the real that we take for granted in everyday life".[43]

Another problem Ricoeur sees in close reading is its methodological attitude, objectivity, which, by cutting the ties to densities of reality and by deconstructing the text under analytical loupe, loses at sight the historical reality of interpreter; objectivity is to certain extent always an illusion. In his view, texts are always both distancing and communicative, communication in distance. "The world of the work", as he calls it, is thus not limited to the text proper but is in itself already an opening towards the reader.[44] Close reading stops at the level of explaining, and leaves aside its understanding, i.e. it stays on the sense of text and suspends the reference (or in other words, connotation instead of denotation).

This distancing/communication scheme is coined with Ricoeur's ideas about hermeneutic process as moving between explanation and understanding. As he points out, the verbal design of text is the field in which literature criticism operates, and it does this by suspending the spontaneous motion towards world outside, towards the world of reference. Suspending reference means studying the work in its materiality, at the semantic level. But, as he claims, this is not a one-way street: "The creation of a concrete object – the poem itself – cuts language off from the didactic function of the sign, but at the same time opens up access to reality in the mode of fiction and feeling"[45]. As in metaphor, fictional texts operate at the second level of reference, which Ricoeur' calls split reference: the ties to the reality are cut but not totally abolished as metaphors, or any other literary devices that transports meaning from reality to fiction, cannot sustain their ambivalence without reference to the original state of reality, which they play with. Literary reading is not possible, but it is still hinted at:

> When we receive a metaphorical statement as meaningful, we perceive both the literal meaning which is bound by the semantic incongruity, and the new meaning which makes sense in the present context. Metaphor is a clear case where polysemy

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42   Ricoeur 1979, 92
43   Ricoeur 1981, 295.
44   Ibid. 131-132.
45   Ricoeur 2007, 271.

> is preserved instead of being screened. Two lines of interpretation are opened at the same time and several readings are allowed together and put into tension.[46]

The integrity of the text is shattered by the use of rhetorical devices, so in a sense it is paradoxical to study the actions within text from the point of self-sustainable wholeness of the work of art. If we see the text as an open field with its vectors pointing in different directions and acting at the limits of reality and fiction, this paradox seems to disappear. Polysemy is added when two axis of fictional elements in text, the paradigmatic and syntagmatic, operate simultaneously, of which neither is excluded, but in different kinds of texts one or another is prioritized. Syntagmatic relations refer intra-textually to other signifiers co-present within the text, whilst paradigmatic relations refer inter-textually to signifiers which are absent from the text. The syntagmatic axis is also called horizontal axis, as it moves between signifiers and relies on their relation. A similar leap between literary and virtual could be said to be operating also at that axis, in metonymical shift between signifiers.

Essential for the process of this analysis are Ricoeur's concern for the shift from sense to the world, transition from the sensual elements and structure of the work to its understanding and its world; or in a Platonian question, the relation between facts and emotions. The shift here is duplicated at the next step of my analysis, where movement is from certain texts to certain politics, from notions concerning politics towards politics of texts.

In my reading I have loosely followed the interpretation process Ricoeur described in his Interpretation Theory. The first step of interpretation is forming hypothesis. In my work I have proposed a hypothesis that is based on the division between language poetry and speech poetry as a basis for the formation of political understanding. As I see it, conceptualizations of language and writing in different writers form the basis and starting point for their political ideas.

Moving from hypothesis formation on the basis of subjective guessing to validating that hypothesis is the second step of analysis. By using the close reading technique, I form a picture of how texts operate, how they argue, what kind of metaphors and other rhetorical devices they use.

The third step of analysis is to outline the "world of text", that is, to move from internal elements of text towards its referential aspects or, in other words, from explanation to understanding. This part of analysis includes the comparison between the context of writing, the text itself, and its intertexts, for example manifestos and other texts referred to or alluded to in a poetical work; and finally, setting texts in dialogue with each other and into the context of today.

An important aspect in my reading of poetry is an assumption of the openness of texts that Ricoeur also stressed. As the reading of their own descriptions of their texts reveal, the poetical works under scrutiny here are in no way finished and closed artefacts or objects. That may have been their goal,

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46   Ricœur 1991, 83.

but what we deal with in Olson's *Maximus Poems*, or in Pound's *Cantos* or even in Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* is an unfinished work of art, that according to the authors' own lament were incoherent, and constantly in the process of being made. All of these authors made corrections to their texts even on their death beds.

In his 1997 preface to Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, Gyatry Chakravorty Spivak described criticism as:

> The so-called secondary material is not a simple adjunct to the so called primary text. The latter inserts itself within the interstices of the former, filling holes that are always already there. Even as it adds itself to the text, criticism supplies a lack in the text and the gaps in the chain of criticism anterior to it. The text is not unique (the acknowledged presence of polysemy already challenges that uniqueness); the critic creates a substitute. The text belongs to language, not to the sovereign and generating author.[47]

In a sense, then, all criticism and analysis is a necessary, violent act towards a text, creating, at least to some extent, coherence and unity in it that is not there in the original, but also leaving out meanings and connotations that were meant by the author. Filling in the gaps is the task of critique or analyst, but in order to limit its brutality, critique should also be as open as possible and leave room for alternative interpretations, and it should also open itself to as many interpretations as possible.

2.3.1 Language of poetry, poetical language

The art for the sake of art approach suggests that poetry and arts in general are outside or indeed above the daily issues of political life. Gadamer for one makes a sharp distinction between engaged art and pure art: adding political content diminishes poetry's artistic quality. Pure art is in his opinion self referential. But even if art is self referential, one may think poetry has an influence in politics in broader sense, as arts may be seen as influencing how things are seen and experienced. In Jacques Ranciere's thinking, sensual aspects of arts define politics, as he says:

> [a]esthetics can be understood in a Kantian sense – re-examined perhaps by Foucault – as the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as form of experience.[48]

A similar idea has also been presented by language-poet Lyn Hejinian: "In the realm of the political, as in that of the material world around us, the "knowledge of sensible realities" is vital, and if I have argued that poetic language contributes critically to making realities sensible, it must address both the material character of the political and political character of the material"[49].

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47 Spivak 1997, lxxiv.
48 Ranciere 2006, 13.
49 Hejinian 2000, 137.

For Hejinian it is a two-way path: neither politics nor poetics is prioritised or privileged.

In Hejinian's view, arts and poetry are basically creating the foundations for politics even though arts and poetry are not part of the political sphere. Poetry seen as a form of rhetoric, however, may be interpreted as meaning that politics and poetry go parallel lines; both are practices of language even if they have differing goals in their endeavours. Furthermore, poetry could be seen as analogical to politics in a sense that both are linguistic events, both try to engage the reader or participant in interaction with its own world. In the end, all these questions raise another question, i.e. the question about language and its poetics.

At the basic textual level of a poem we encounter the question of language, language is *the* medium of a poet. One of the most important dividing lines between the politically oriented poets analysed here lies in their concepts of language. In terms of continental philosophy, it might be described as a dichotomy that exists between langue and parole, or expression versus structure, or even enactment versus analysis. It is indeed arguable that the whole "project of modernism" in poetics can be outlined in the context of these dichotomies, when poetical modernism is seen as a reaction to formal linguistics in preference to found language, everyday language, the language of speech, the vernacular.

According to Roman Jakobsen, poetical language, at its purest stage, is language in which referential function ceases to exist. "The grammatical concepts [--] find their widest applications in poetry as the most formalised manifestation of language".[50] The poetic function of the linguistic fiction is opposite to the cognitive function of language. Jakobson quotes Sir Philip Sidney, "now or the Poet, he nothing affirmeth, and therefore never lieth" and Jeremy Bentham, "the Fictions of the poet are pure of insincerity"[51].

In relation to prose, a distinctive element of the poetical is its inwardness and non-linearity:

> As the etymology of the Latin term *versus* itself suggests, verse contains the idea of regular recurrence, in contradistinction to prose, the etymology of whose Latin term *prosa (provorsa)* suggests a movement directed forward. Verse involves the immediate sensation of present time as well as a backward glance at the impulse of preceding verses and the vivid anticipation of the verses to follow. These three conjoined impressions form the active interplay of the invariant and the variations.[52]

The case Jakobson presents for poetical text as based on movements on a paradigmatic axis is of an ideal type. Different types of poetry operate differently in relation to referentiality. The works I analyse could be called epics, which is, according to Roman Jakobson, poetry that "strongly involves the referential function of language"[53].

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50   Jakobson 1985, 39.
51   Ibid. p. 39.
52   Jakobson 1985, 23.
53   Jakobson 1981, 26.

Even though Hans-Georg Gadamer was not as formalists as Jakobson, Gadamer also saw poetical language as a special case of textual autonomy, which is ideally non-referential. According to Gadamer, engaged poetry means slipping away from poetry's poetical function and "revolutionary poetry is clearly distinguished from what is to be called "art""[54]. Pure poetry does not engage, but creates a whole that works under its own laws which cannot be evaluated by some external measures. In that sense it is similar to a philosophical system in miniature form.

This ceasing of referential function may be seen, like Gadamer does, as closing out the political from poetical, but it could also be seen in quite the opposite manner: Freed from necessities of reference, poetry can be seen as exploring and revealing the contingent possibilities of language, including the language of politics. Thus, to see poetry from the perspective of non-engagement does not necessarily mean that poetry cannot have a political aspect, but, as in language poetry, it means the opposite. Only poetry which does not commit itself to some political goal or participate in current political struggles can have political potentiality in itself and on its own terms. In that case, poetry would always be dissident, against established forms of representations, and it would politicise those given representations by diagnosing the ideologies that are sedimented in language. This is especially the conclusion of the so called language poets who this study will analyse through the poetry of Charles Bernstein.

As language poets have pondered the question of politics in language and poetry, it is appropriate to look at the theoretical background of my analysis from the view-point of their ideas. An essential part of this work consists of the pre-history of language poetry and how it became what it is today and what are the political implications and consequences of that development.

2.3.2 Langpo

Language poetry, of informally "langpo", got its start in the 1970's among a group of American poets interested in formalism and new criticism. As its name says, it focuses its poetical efforts on the depths of language. What it tried to show was that the naturalistic language of earlier movements, like poetry of speech and expressive poetry in general, had hidden the underlying ideological assumptions that are created in a form of discourse and language. The reification of language thus hid the important role of language as a vehicle of bourgeois ideology. Language poetry works at the level of text, of signifier and goes against the representational idea of poetry. The politics of the referent play an important part in this.

From the view-point of language poets, the earlier forms of poetry were based on the rhythm of breathing and speech-like form. The language poets thought poetry was like a communal practice of privileged citizens, and by way of some technological innovations they tried to democratize poetic language

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54   Gadamer 1987, 136.

like Walt Whitman had done a century earlier with his personal poetry written in vernacular. Speech poets wanted to see the poem as a field and not as an object, thereby differentiating them from symbolist or hermetic poetry. Of those poets, Allen Ginsberg may be the best known example. The speech poets were also engaged politically, and in their opinion, that was also one of the tasks of a poet, to go public, to take stand, to oppose and to argue. Poetry slam and beat poetry were perhaps the best manifestations of this public role of the poet, which was seen as a novelty in 1950's. However, there is not such a difference from Whitman's opening lines of *Leaves of Grass* "One's-self I sing, a simple separate person / Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse" to the revolutionary visions of Ginsberg: "the day of the publication of the true literature of the American / body will be day of Revolution"[55]. The starting point is one's physicality, one's own body that will be multiplied to encompass the whole nation.

As my analysis will also show, the leap from Whitman to present day poets is not necessarily an immense one, as there are certain arguably modern elements in his poetry. But language poetry tried to avoid the poetics of direct political engagement with its naturalistic tendencies, and attempted to go deeper in the analysis of political in text and language itself. What came of it, during its development over 30 years, seems not to be what we usually understand with the term political poetry, but a new form of philosophical poetry. Later in this study I discuss their problematic relation to newly born poetry activism that concentrates on the issues like War on Terror and 9/11.

Some of the ideas on textuality which language poets wanted to put forward can be recognised in the poetry of Ezra Pound. Although it can be argued that Pound, with his Chinese ideograms, combined the signified and signifier into a single sign and thus bridged the gap between them, nevertheless, there is a constructive difference between mimetic and expressive poetry of earlier generations and Pound's poetical system. Pound's poetry, especially in his Cantos, moves along metonymical lines and uses juxtaposition as an organising principle, being in a sense in a state of constant transgression. For Pound there is no such thing as language equalling the truth, but poetical system is about mastering and playing with that difference, difference between signifier and signified. Language for Pound is not natural and corresponding to reality, but a tool that can be used to construct different kinds of realities. It is true that Pound returned to the centrality of self in his latest poems when his politico-poetical system collapsed, and that his idea of history is basically as metaphysical as is Whitman's, but what he was aiming at was to the direction of fundamentally modern idea of language and poetry as a construction.

Question and quest in language poetry was to create an alternative to hegemonical systems of signification. The language poets aim at resistance to the "collective imperative" by linguistic innovations. Their theoretical innovations are derived mostly from the post-structuralists, Derrida and Barthes being the source of inspiration. Marxist ideas were also present in their

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55   Ginsberg 2006, 175.

early writings. When Barthes wrote in his *Pleasure of the Text*, "any completed utterance runs the risk of being ideological" [56], this statement was later reiterated in language poet Charles Bernstein's work *A poetics*: "The violence of every generalization crushes the hopes for a democracy of thoughts". [57] Resistance to closure of thought and Western *logos* can already be found from Charles Olson. Consider an example in a 1959 letter to Elaine Feinstein where Olson wrote: "the attack, I suppose, on the ´completed thought,´ or, the Idea, yes?"[58].

Barthes celebrates the incompleteness, the gaps in the language, sublime that transgress the boundaries of pleasure of reading, "bliss", texts that repudiate the "Political Father" that controls the grammar. In the bliss of the text "everything comes about – indeed in every sense everything comes – at first glance"[59]; that is, text as an event. Barthes compares event in text, as text, to political choice in quasi-Schmittian style: "In the intellectual field, political choice is a suspension of language – thus a bliss. Yet language resumes, in its consistent stable form (the political stereotype). Which language must then be swallowed, without nausea. Another bliss (other edge): it consists in de-politicizing what is apparently political, and in politicizing what apparently is not."[60]

In *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, Supplement Number One, published in June 1980 and edited by Steve McCaffery, "language-centered" writers ponder their relation to politics under the title "The Politics of the Referent". McCaffery describes the style of language poetry as a "counter-communicative, decipheral style" [61]. The fragmentary and non-narrative style works like Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*, it alienates from text and shows it as made, non-natural.[62]

McCaffery argues that "the implication behind a decipheral style of reading is that a given text is partial, incomplete or imperfect, suggesting in these terms not necessarily an aesthetic deficiency but rather a radically political invitation to the reader to cast off his former pre-ordained role as the recipient of a message and to enter the domain of the writer"[63]."[T]he text becomes the communal space of a labour, initiated by the writer and extended by the second writer (the reader)"[64]. Here we have stress on spatiality of the text in its graphic, immanent presence, where meaning is absent or to be formulated, deciphered by the reader. A poem is thus a "rotating energy source" between the writer

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56 Barthes 1975, 50.
57 Bernstein 1998, 113.
58 Olson 1997e, 250.
59 Barthes 1975, 53
60 Ibid., 44
61 McCaffery 1980, 3.
62 The concept of Verfremdungseffekt originates from Viktor Shklovsky: "The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important." (Shklovsky 1965, 12)
63 McCaffery 1980, 6.
64 Ibid. 8.

and the reader or, as McCaffery calls it, "an open field" or "milieu"[65]. He emphasises the non-historical events, the experience of the reader in front of the sign emptied of its function. "To see language is to experience its opacity; to read signs is to pursue their operations of spatial discharge"[66].

McCaffery's original version begins with this declaration:

> There is a group of writers today united in the feeling that literature has entered *a crisis of the sign* [--] and that the foremost task at hand – a more linguistic and philosophic than "poetic" task – is to demystify the referential fallacy of language. "Reference, [--] is that kind of blindness a window makes of the pane it is, that motoric thrust of the word which takes you out of language into a tenuous world of the other and so prevents you seeing what it is you see[67].

Such a thrust is what McCaffery calls the removal of "the arrow of reference"-- is essential because "language is above all else a system of signs and . . . writing must stress its semiotic nature through modes of investigation and probe, rather than mimetic, instrumental indications."

Marjorie Perloff sees the process, making, as the most essential aspect of language poetry:

> [L]anguage theory reminded us that poetry is a *making* [*poien*], a construction using language, rhythm, sound, and visual image, that the subject, far from being simply the poet speaking in his or her natural "voice," was itself a complex construction, and that--most important--there was actually something at stake in producing a body of poems, and that poetic discourse belonged to the same universe as philosophical and political discourse[68].

Countering the ideas of Jakobson, according to views of the language poetry, the text and poetry must not to seen as an object ruled by its own laws, but rather as a communal relationship between text and reader, where the act of reading is as important as writing and the reader becomes a part of that process. Poetry is, through this act of reading, bound to time and space, not eternal. And here Gadamer (1987, 107) joins the language poets as he writes that the same also applies to the forms of poetry. Form is not neutral in a historical or in political sense.

When noticing this, one may analyze the poetry not as an object, but as a form of participation and activity without fear being "contaminated" with political which is actually always present in poetry, in one form or another. Language is not "natural" but made.

It is impossible to overstress the importance of Robert Grenier's statement "I hate speech" as a starting point of Language poetry. It can be interpreted that Grenier puts concretised or "made" language in a prioritised position against the "natural" speech of earlier American poets. It asserts that the language of

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65   Ibid. 11, 12.
66   Ibid. 16.
67   Ibid.2.
68   Perloff, "After Language Poetry: Innovation and its Theoretical Discontents". Undated online essay:
      http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/perloff/after_langpo.html.

for example Ginsberg is not at all natural but is a completely fabricated language put into the pages of book and could not be further from "real" speaking. There is always an aesthetic and constructed aspect in poetry when it is put onto the paper; it is already, as Derrida would put it, a "dangerous supplement", or "techne". Grenier calls this "shadow": "the exemplary instance of language here is an adjective ('specific,' 'loveliest,' 'difficult,' 'real,' 'consequential') intending and so drawing being from some superior reality, as its shadow"[69].

However, one should also not overemphasize Grenier's statement when thinking of it as an opposite position against speech, as it is more a correction or advancement. Grenier's idea was to get deeper into the area where the restrictions put on speech no longer exist: "I want writing what is thought/where **feeling** is/**words are born**"[70]. It was, as Barret Watten has pointed out, continuing war by other means. Or, one could say, it deepened the cultural criticism of the expressivist poets by politicising the language. Watten's argument is explicit in his 2002 essay, "The Turn to Language and the 1960s," which describes the origins of the language poetry movement as a result of the failure of the political poetry of the 1960s. Language poetry did not mean a change of strategy but of tactics.

Frequently, the tactics of language poetry criticized the illusions of poetic transparency, including: the transparency of subjectivity (the lyric self), the transparency of language (common language made pure), and the transparency of image (the image as window into the real). For example, in their collective 1988 essay, "Aesthetic Tendency and the Politics of Poetry: A Manifesto," five language poets, including Watten, offer two proposals: 1) to dissociate the "marginal isolated individualism" of the narrative persona so valued in contemporary poetry, and 2) to write a "contaminated" rather than a "pure" language.

Like Watten, Charles Bernstein also looks beyond the borders between language poetry and expressivity:

> Making the contemporary aware of itself, conscious of its own thought process, is a necessary ground for the political. For this reason, a poetry's historical (structural) expressivity is necessary but not sufficient measure of its values: it locates but does not determine, or exhaust, its political dynamic. An acute awareness of contemporaneity can produce (or abet) resistance: can provide information, in the sense of formal imagination, to readers. You have to understand what you're confronted with, have maps, identify the bunk – the virus coming into your system – know *what it is*, where that *what* is, as much as anything else, formal or ideological, and so *not visible*.[71]

Thus, Bernstein notices the pre- or proto-political nature of his endeavour, it is about restructuring or debasing the political, and not about politics *per se*. Bernstein is antagonistic to all forms, political as well as poetical, and that make his "political power of poetry" operate only on the particular, atomized reader.

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69   Grenier 1971, non-paginated.
70   Grenier 1971a, non-paginated. Emphasis by Grenier.
71   Bernstein 1998, 177. Italics by Bernstein.

He states that, "The political power of poetry is not measured in numbers; it instructs us to count differently."[72] To not count differently, that is, to rely on given forms, is to give power away to those who determine the rules of game. In a sense, one may see this as a new avant-garde, which has a well known paradox built in it: seen as offering a critique of representation, the avant-garde can only contradict itself as a stable form of representation. Here one could also notice the impossibility of constant deconstruction. As many language poets themselves have noticed, there is inevitable drive towards marginality in their poetical aspirations.

One could refer to Bernstein's efforts in terms used by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe as "arche-politics". Bernstein himself says:

> [I]n its counterconventional investigations, poetry engages *public* language at its roots in that it tests the limits of conventionality while forging alternate conventions [--] the contained scale of such poetic engagements allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the formation of public space: of polis[73].

When commenting Rousseau, he also says:

> [I]n The Social Contract Rousseau writes that since our conventions are provisional, the public may choose to reconvene in order to withdraw authority from those conventions that no longer serve our purposes. Poetry is one of the few areas where this right of reconvening is exercised.[74]

This idea is well distilled in Bernstein's statement: "Poetry is not end of politics. It is the begin of politics"[75]. However, it is not political activity, but remoulding the ground for politics.

In these statements one may notice a shift of focus from a Derridean thought of language as play of signifiers to more Heideggerian tones of poetry as (re)founding or grounding act. For Heidegger poetry is, at least as he presents it in his Letter on Humanism[76], a privileged form of language and manifests the "foundations" of our Being in language, and poets are the guardians of the house of Being: "Language is the house of Being. In its home human beings dwell. Those who think and those who create with words are the guardians of this home." Of essence here is that Heidegger relates this "manifestations of being" to language and *saying*, i.e. in *action*. A hindrance to this is the Occidental subject/object dichotomy which isolates thinking into theory, but language in action can go beyond this; "the liberation of language from grammar into a more original essential framework is reserved for thought and poetic creation."[77]

Here one may follow the philosophical line behind these somewhat opposing interpretations of poetry presented by speech and language poetry,

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72   Ibid. 226.
73   Ibid. 219.
74   Ibid. 225.
75   Bernstein 2006a.
76   Heidegger 1998, 193
77   Ibid. 239-240.

the line of demarcation which could be also called Heideggerian versus Derridean. But as is the case with the poets, so it is with the philosophers: they are not so much at odds with each other as it seems. As David Couzens Hoy writes,

> Heidegger and Derrida do differ on whether language has built into it a transcendental need for referentiality, but this disagreement should not lead to the misconstrual of Heidegger as a metaphysical dualist with a correspondence theory of truth" [--] "there is no such thing as the meaning of Being, according to Heidegger, and one suspects that he gradually comes to realize that "Being" is merely a metalinguistic notion resulting from a transcendental deduction based on the need for something to which language could refer.[78]

What I would like to argue is that even for Heidegger there is undecidability in his ideas on language, it is more of the process than of the result. For Derrida this is obvious.

For the poets at hand, as for language so it is for Olson, that even though he has inclination towards metaphysicality of speech, when coming to language itself he leaves aside the "natural" constructions and goes on to argue for movement, transgression and uncompleted thought. "Ideas" are for him, as for Pound too, only true when in action. For Pound this is still just a revelatory and epistemological aspect, but for Olson it is the whole core and only core there is for "truth". Derrida's definition of difference in action is akin to the same direction:

> "Difference is what makes this movement of signification possible only if each element said to present, appearing on the stage of presence, is related to something other than itself but retains the mark of a past element and already lets itself be hollowed out by the mark of its relationship to a future element".[79]

The political poets discussed here tend to stress openness; and achieving this, one specific style, parataxis, is regularly used. It stresses the kinesis, spatiality, and interrelatedness of things, and is thus more "democratic" than metaphorical presentation[80]. In her discussion on metonymy, language poet Lyn Hejinian argued that

> "metonymy moves attention from thing to thing; its principle is combination rather than selection. Compared to metaphor, which depends on code, metonym preserves context, foregrounds interrelationship. And again in comparison to metaphor, which is based on similarity, and in which meanings are conserved and transferred from one thing to something said to be like it, the metonymic world is unstable. While metonymy maintains the intactness of particulars, its paratactic perspective gives it multiple vanishing points"[81]

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78   Hoy 1979, 232.
79   Derrida 1973, 142.
80   Rae Armantrout has called metaphorical closure imperialistic: "There is no outside to this metaphoric system, no acknowledged division within it. It is Imperialistic." Armantrout 2007, 41.
81   Hejinian 2000, 148.

The epistemological difference between different projects lie in their subject position, as for speech poets the primus motor is the poet himself but for language poets it is the language that speaks, but basically even for Whitman language as a tool is contingent and truthfulness of words is not bound to their correspondence to some extra-linguistic facts.

2.4 Attempts to define the poets' role in society and the political in poetry

> "Our logrolling, our stumps and their politics, our fisheries, our Negroes, and Indians, our boasts, and our repudiations, the wrath of rogues, and the pusillanimity of honest men, the northern trade, the southern planting, the western clearing, Oregon, and Texas, are yet unsung. Yet America is a poem in our eyes; its ample geography dazzles the imagination, and it will not wait long for metres."
>
> – Ralph Waldo Emerson[82]

The issues of nationalism, nation building and thus society and politics too, have been quite central to the whole of American poetry since its first published works. Transcendentalists like Emerson and Walt Whitman were trying to find a new, American and democratic language free of colonial or royal implications. Scholarly studies have followed rather slowly behind.

Of the modern day American literature scholars, one of the earliest to read literature, and also poetry, in terms of politics was F.O. Matthiesen. In 1941 Matthiesen published a very comprehensive study about democratic languages of Melville, Whitman, Emerson and several other major figures of American literature. His study, *American Renaissance*, concentrated on the ideas of language and democracy in the works of the writers of American transcendentalism.[83]

After Matthiesen not much was written about poetry's relation to politics until the coming of the Beat-era in 1950's. Even then, those who wrote of it were mostly poets themselves. More profound scholarly interest in this issue may be said to have started only in the 1980's, when literature theorists addressed the issues raised by the so called language poets. The linguistic turn in social sciences also has its share in this new interest in cross-disciplinary approach. Several of the language poets were also literature scholars and strongly influenced by the continental post-modern philosophy, which also shows in their poetical works. One rare earlier example in Anglo-Saxon literature is C.M. Bowra's 1966 analysis in *Poets and Politics*, which did not raise much discussion or find followers, perhaps because his analysis was very historical and tendentious. Anyhow, Bowra saw political poetry as possible and legitimate,

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82 Emerson 2004, 16.
83 Matthiesen 1968.

something that was not very common at that time, at least not outside radical circles.[84]

Poetical changes often happen during or after great social upheavals, so it is not very surprising that anthologies and scholarly studies on political poetry pay considerable attention to those periods in literature. War poetry has been especially well studied, although the stress has focused on the two world wars. The post-9/11 era poetry has not yet been studied much, but surprisingly little attention has been paid to Vietnam War –poetry. Of one of the rare exceptions, *Memories of Lost War* by Subarno Chattarji concentrates mostly on veterans' responses, but also has an interesting discussion about the politics of poetry in general. According to his analysis, the political level of the war in Vietnam was framed as a continuum to the great American narratives: frontier nation, city on a hill and manifest destiny. However, at the grass roots level, the responses were different, and so was the case in poetry too. Poetry created a counter narrative about the nation in despair and mourning. Traditional collective memory clashed with contemporary public memory. The attention of the public reflected the need to change the current vocabulary and the poetical change can be seen as an outcome of that need. Crises can also revive the political potential of older poetry, as old pieces are circulated in new contexts.

However, it may be a generalization to say that most of the theoretical analysis and criticism written after WWII about the politics of poetry concentrates around the issue of modernism. The negative side of the modernist tradition has especially been present with its assumed anti-rhetorical and also anti-political attitude but also paradoxically its hidden or even announced tendencies towards totalitarian politics. Basically this is also a question about the poets' role in society. If the poets' role is to lead or show the way, then a (high) modernist detached attitude is unforgivable.

The issues of modernism and poetical agency were central themes in a special issue "Politics and Poetic Value" of the journal Critical Inquiry in 1987. The articles echo the idea of contingency, that is the idea that poetry is time-bound and that poems do not transcend their moments of origin, their interpretation depends on the context. However, in his introduction Robert von Hallberg also stresses that focusing too much on the political aspects of poetry slides too easily towards evaluation on the basis of authors or critics political position.

The anti-modernist tendency is at its most explicit in Alicia Ostriker's purposefully polemical article. She dismisses modernism as it pretends to be apolitical: "The critic who attempts to disguise advocacy, pretending to possess literary standards without ideological implications, is not to be trusted"[85]. Personal experience is set against the detached modernism of Eliot and his

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84 The negative attitude of many scholars towards political poetry may, of course, be explained also by their limited view on politics in general. Politics in poetry was mostly seen through nationalistic and militant tendencies or as propaganda. The political aspects of questioning the subjectivism or language were not seen as relevant or even possible.

85 Ostriker 1987, 583.

disciples. However, as she also emphasises the reading of poetry, poetry becomes in her interpretation also a ritual and communal act. Her ideal poet goes breaking the rules and uses "lively imagery against dry abstraction, humor against precept, the play of improvisation and the body's rhythms against the strictures of prior form"[86]. Her emphasis is on the poets authentic voice and on the poetical agent knowingly using his or her rhetorical means to create emotions speaking against the "oppressor's language". Qualifications, as may be seen, are thus also extra-poetical.

Robert Pinsky's answer to the question of the poets' role in the same issue of Critical Inquiry is more comprehensive and inclusive: ""All poetry is political."". Pinsky states that "the act of judgment prior to the vision of any poem is a social judgment. It always embodies, I believe, a resistance or transformation of communal values"[87]. Poetry and its politics, or its message, seems to be created before the text, not inside the text or in reading. The intention of the writer is what makes poetry political. Pinsky outlines a dialogical relation between art and society, but in his opinion the most important task of the poet is to continue from the earlier achievements of art, and to defend the arts from stagnating political forces:

> "The poet's first social responsibility, to continue the art, can be filled only through the second, opposed responsibility to change the terms of the art as given – and it is given socially, which is to say politically. What that will mean in the next poem anyone writes is by definition unknowable, with all the possibility of art.[88]"

The last sentence echo the idea of contingency, poetry changes with the society around it. The autonomy of poetry seems to be essential.

Dowdy is one of latest who has addressed this complex issue. His *American Political Poetry into the 21st Century*, published in 2007, analyzes a range of poets and also rap-music. One of the topics of this study is my understanding of why Dowdy's analysis cannot grasp the field of political poetry in its entirety. However, first I will consider its more fruitful sides. Dowdy's book concentrates on different rhetorical strategies in poetry. In his definition, "a political poem is one that speaks to political issues (if only indirectly), one that consciously engages political and socioeconomic conditions, its energy directed, at least partially, beyond the poem itself [89]". Dowdy's approach is thus agency and content oriented.

Dowdy divides in his analysis the different strategies to three categories, although he admits that these overlap constantly. The first category is the "embodied agency", poems that foreground individual and collective experience. The poet is locatable and present in these poems, even if it is staged poetical "I", and these poems use the lived experiences of real historical actors.[90] The second category Dowdy presents is the "equivocal agency". These

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86   Ibid. 589.
87   Pinsky 1987, 433
88   Ibid. 433.
89   Dowdy 2007, 11.
90   Ibid. 23-24.

poems rely on a different kind of agency, and direct experience is problematised using irony, parody, paradox and other alienating means. The subject of the poem in this category is on a journey or in a process. Naturalness of language may also be questioned. [91] Dowdy's third category is called "migratory agency". These are poems that have bilingual texture, which according to Dowdy challenge English's position as the approved language for poetic, social and political expression in the United States. Bilingualism makes the political character of language apparent, and, as boundary crossing phenomenon, Chicano poetry may also open up the discourses on Americanism and on communality as well as on poetry's relation to that, as, according to Dowdy, the role of poetry in Latin American countries is more public and revered.[92]

According to Dowdy, language poetry fails and is thus not included in his analysis because "it *fails as a language of politics*" (italics by Dowdy). Dowdy indicates that language poetry is too obscure, too inaccessible and lacks a human agency in order to create any analysable form of political activity. In Dowdy's view political poetry is basically a question of rhetorical choices of a morally responsible agent. As such, his classifications are well on target.[93]

Dowdy's analysis is limited by its concentration on agency based analysis. It also is almost formalistic in its tendency to classifications. Some of his categories may be seen as informative, but in general are too strict to face the whole problematic of politics of poetry. His approach to the issue of medium, which in this case is language, seems narrow. Dowdy's view on politics appears to be entirely progressive: change or the will to change is only thing that counts. Agency is mentioned but not problematised much.

The lack of analysis of language is, I think, the most problematic part in Dowdy's presentation. The only chapter devoted to aspects of language concentrates entirely on using different languages as either a sign of an authority, like in Eliot and Pound, or as a way of anti-colonialist protest against the dominance of English. The question of how subjects are produced in language, which is one of the key issues in language poetry, is almost totally absent.

This one-sidedness is even more unfounded as lines of argument between schools of poetry have been based on the division between language and speech, or between formal poetry and rhetoric poetry. It is still prevalent, as for example "dialogue" between two strongly politically engaged poets Barrett Watten and Amiri Baraka clearly proves[94], and as is also summarised by

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91   Ibid. 27.
92   Ibid. 28-29.
93   Ibid. 190.
94   A report by Kristin Prevallet in Jacket Magazine (issue 12, July 2000): "Baraka had aggressively disagreed with Watten's contextualizing of the 1960s, and ultimately sought to set the record straight and assert his own conception of radical politics. Although these two poets were supposedly speaking the same language, there was an absolute breach on their ability to communicate with one another. Watten was prepared for a theoretical discussion that would clarify the points he was making in his paper. Baraka, on the other hand, was prepared for a verbal confrontation that

Watten, who, despite disagreements, tries to find common ground between them:

> "The textual politics of Language school are commonly opposed to the expressive poetics [--] that emerged in the same decade, for good reasons. With the former, the self-presence of the expressive subject is put under erasure, while the latter the formal autonomy of modernist poetics is rejected as politics"[95].

As Watten confirms, seeds of this confrontation were sown in the 1960's. Also, among the rhetorically oriented analysts in the aforementioned Critical Inquiry issue in 1987, there was one voice of dissent. Language poet Jerome McGann emphasised that form comes first, that the form of a poem properly criticizes the political orders that rest upon linguistic structures. No matter the rhetoric if form supports the systems of oppression. For McGann the poets like Pinsky represented "poetry of accommodation" instead of his own oppositional poetics and politics. To McGann the stress on "suburban" personal politics is only a symptom of the turn towards the right in the politics of the Nixon era. The content may be progressive, but in its traditional tones poetics like that of Pinsky give the game up. Furthermore, for McGann it is irrelevant to talk of any agency before outlining the powers that make it. Outlining is for him the true task of the poetry.[96]

McGann, as many of the language poets, commodification and alienation of language is an obvious target: "The object of writing must be to set language free, to return it from the domains of the abstract and the conventional (the communities of SLOGANEERS, whose name today is Legion) to a world of human beings and human uses."[97]

Whereas those who see poetry as rhetoric aim at direct involvement and effects, in language poetry the level they see poetry can have influence over politics is the consciousness. For McGann, who quotes language poet Ron Silliman, "[p]oetry represents the "social function of the language arts" as a liberating rather than a repressive structure: "to carry the class struggle for consciousness to the level of consciousness""[98]. In their opinion, as the political problems are deeper than cases solvable in ordinary political struggle, so must be the means for resolving them be more radical.

American political poetry may thus be seen as having two opposite strategies: one that bases its ideas on rhetoric and speech and takes direct part in politics; and the other that is structure oriented and emphasises language as

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would assert his position as a political activist who had witnessed a very different counter-cultural movement than Watten had presented. These two modes of debate — one rooted in formal discourse and the other in quick rhetorical insults — made this a tough match to watch. The contrast of these two extremes made it apparent that these were two men who could not speak to each other because of their very different approaches to speech and language." Online: http://www.jacketmagazine.com/12/prevallet-orono.html.

95   Watten 2002, 139, n2.
96   McGann 1987, 625-626.
97   Ibid. 634-635. Capitals by McGann.
98   Ibid. 641.

the starting point of any politically relevant poetry and stresses the formation of subjects as the most important political issue. This I see as a major dividing line in poetico-political strategies in American poetry in the post-WWII era, despite there being poets that cannot be fit into those categories and despite there being disagreements inside the groupings as well.

Even though the aforementioned divisions in their present form may be said to stem from the 1960's or 1970's, the conflict between rhetoric and language goes much further back in the history of American poetry, and it is thus reasonable start this analysis from the beginning, with Walt Whitman.

3   WALT WHITMAN AND "SANER WAR OF POLITICS"

> He is America. His crudity is an exceeding great stench, but it is America. He is the hollow place in the rock that echoes with his time. He does "chant the crucial state" and he is the "voice triumphant." He is disgusting. He is an exceedingly nauseating pill, but he accomplishes his mission. Entirely free from the renaissance humanist ideal of the complete man or from the Greek idealism, he is content to be what he is, and he is his time and his people. He is a genius because he has vision of what he is and of his function.[99]

> Ezra Pound in "What I feel About Walt Whitman"

Walt Whitman (1819-1892) may be a stereotype case of what Harold Bloom has described as an anxiety of influence. So deep is his revolt against Whitman's poetics that the schoolmaster of modernism, Ezra Pound (1885-1972) , feels an physical repulsion against him but still cannot deny certain admiration as well. Pound writes about Whitman that "he is America" and that "his message is my message". One also has to remember, that Pound and Whitman are politically disciples of the same tradition of political republicanism in its Jeffersonian form and are challengers of representative system. In *both* of them, it is the politics which seems to be the most difficult part to come to terms with. In this chapter I will try to reconstruct the Whitman's politics from his poems and essays focusing not on his idealistic visions but on his views about the practicalities of political life.

As Betsy Erkkila[100] commented, the political aspects of Whitman's poetry have been, if not totally ignored, at least placed in a secondary position in most of the scholarly works on his poetry. However, there are some examples. Kenneth Burke[101] concentrates mostly on what he calls "Whitman's policy", Whitman's transcendental political vision, and leaves aside the perspective of active participation, the politics. The same applies to some extent also to Erkkila's study *Whitman the Political Poet*. Nevertheless, William Carlos

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99   Pound 1973, 145.
100   Erkkila 1989, 8-9)
101   Burke 1966.

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Williams [102] laments that Whitman only goes after the content and is not interested in perfecting the formal and stylistic elements of poetry. Peter J. Bellis points out that the New Critical tendency has actually been "to separate Whitman's revolution in poetic form from its political context and contents." [103] The general tendency seems to have been to try to "tame" Whitman's more radical ideas to some form of spirituality by way of psychologising and to bring him back into line as an "old-fashioned libertarian" or even conservative, as was done for example by Richard Chase in his Whitman-study. [104]

As I see it, for Whitman poetry was a continuation of politics by other means. There is no clear demarcation between what is political and what is poetical in his work. To stress the point further, one should perhaps not even speak of "political poetry" when thinking of Whitman, although the political element is also very strongly present in his work, but, so essential is the element of politics in his work, one could label his project as "poetical politics". For Whitman politics is, like poetry as well, a physical act and a struggle.

Unlike most of the earlier studies on Whitman, I have left aside most of the spiritual and transcendental elements, the political part, of Whitman's work and concentrate on his ideas of practical politics. If, as I suggest, Whitman had in mind the idea of continuing his political endeavours via literature, then we can at least try to shape that practical purpose on more concrete terms. One may of course remember here that Whitman himself was also involved with daily-politics especially as a journalist, but also as speaker and via his political pamphlets.

To briefly contextualise the writings I will be analysing here, we have to bear in mind the political situation of the United States in the mid 19th century. The emancipation of slaves and political rights of women were on the agenda and ideology of the so called American exceptionalism was emerging. The concept of "Manifest destiny" was formulated by John L. O'Sullivan in 1845. [105] From the perspective of this article, the most important aspect is the conflict between federalism and republicanism, which was still raging. Only after the Civil War did these ideological differences abate and were reconciled to some extent.

Although his poetry can be seen as an answer to the political crises in the United States of the mid 19th century [106], Whitman does not give us much hint what his republic would be like or how it would work. There are no direct political recommendations to be found. Instead his stress is frequently on the spirit and individuality, not on constitutional arrangements, but we can find some traces of his policy, and his idea of politics, from *Leaves of Grass* and *Democratic Vistas*.

The body politic, which is ubiquitously present in *Leaves of Grass*, seems to be threefold: first, it refers to the organisation of the polity; second, it refers also

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102 Williams 2001, xxiii-xxxii.
103 Bellis, 1999, 72. See also Mack 2002.
104 Chase 1955, 185-186.
105 About the concept, see Hietala, 2003.
106 See Reynolds 1999.

to physicality of that polity, which bases its existence on the organic unity of the masses; and third, there is the political dimension of the individual body, personal politics. Whitman presents his personality as divided into a one single body, and from that idea of a fragmented self he derives his national idea of plurality in unity, *e pluribus unum*.

In *Democratic Vistas*, Whitman represents a theory of three stages of democracy. The first stage was the forming, or framing, of the political foundations; and the second dealt with the creation of the material prosperity and economic growth. Those two stages were passed when Whitman was writing his *Democratic Vistas*. His focus was on the third stage, which was about:

> announcing a native expression-spirit, getting into form, adult, and through mentality, for these States, self-contain'd, different from others, more expansive, more rich and free, to be evidenced by original authors and poets to come, by American personalities, plenty of them, male and female, traversing the States, none excepted--and by native superber tableaux and growths of language, songs, operas, orations, lectures, architecture--and by a sublime and serious Religious Democracy sternly taking command, dissolving the old, sloughing off surfaces, and from its own interior and vital principles, reconstructing, democratizing society. (DV, 409-410)[107]

These three stages of Whitman's democratization project can be interpreted as variations from the three master narratives of American ideology: "city on a hill", "manifest destiny", and "frontier nation". In all of them in Whitman one may find the ideas of expansion, empire, exceptionalism and westward movement. Jacksonian tones are quite easy to note from *Democratic Vistas*, and even *Leaves of Grass*. The message of Whitman's political writings is that the achievements of the founding fathers have to be secured by the reviving of the American spirit and by keeping the process of democratization in motion.

3.1   Role of the poet in society

> "None of the single, nearly equal, roughly similar citizens of a democracy will do as a subject for poetry, but the nation itself calls for poetic treatment. The very likeness of individuals, which rules them out as subjects for poetry on their own, helps the poet to group them in imagination and make a coherent picture of the nation as a whole. Democracies see themselves more vividly than do other nations, thus imposing an aspect wonderfully suited to painters of the ideal."
>
> Alexis de Tocqueville[108]

Although definitely a seeker of an ideal democracy and writer of an abstract, common man, Walt Whitman's work is perhaps the best example to prove Tocqueville's analysis at least partly wrong. He seeks to give a voice to every

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107   All parenthesised references are to this edition: Walt Whitman, "Democratic Vistas," in Prose Works 1892, Vol. 2, Ed. Floyd Stovall (New York: New York University Press, 1964) 361–426.

108   Tocqueville 1969, 485.

level and every member of the society by naming individuals among the masses and he continues to balance between the ideal of individuality, personalism, and equality of the masses. To manage this paradox is Whitman's touchstone for a functioning democracy.

At first glance, it seems obvious that Whitman is on the side of the radical interpretation of Jefferson's idea of republicanism: "Man of the open", as characterised by Whitman, denies the possibility of true representation, it is sheer presence in the manner of Jeffersonian/Jacksonian republicanism based on the idea of small, agrarian communities.[109] In a simple small community, corruption is absent and a natural civic ideal is in force. This ideal community is described in Democratic Vistas:

> "I can conceive a community, to-day and here, in which [--] the perfect personalities, without noise meet; say in some pleasant western settlement or town, where a couple of hundred best men and women, of ordinary worldly status, have by luck been drawn together, with nothing extra of genius or wealth, but virtuous, chaste, industrious, cheerful, resolute, friendly and devout [--] elections, all attended to." (DV, 403)

Put in more abstract terms, a republicanist civic ideal of public good thus opposes the federalist, liberalist idea of specialization and representation of private interest [110]. Or, as Whitman (DV, 394) puts it, "singleness" and "simplicity" against the "artificialized state of society". Anyhow, the balance between individuality and communality is quite delicate and, as Jesse R. Goldhammer [111] states, there is even a certain aristocratic tendency in Whitman's writings when considering the political role of the poet or politicians *per se*. The poet is also the educator of the masses, even when himself part of those masses.

In *Democratic Vistas*, Whitman stresses that mass is potency which needs to be morally educated, with the help of literature especially, in order to gain true democratic spirit; the task is difficult but not impossible: "But the mass [--] only from it [--] comes the chance of individualism [--] our task is to reconcile them." "Must not the virtue of modern Individualism [--] seriously affect, perhaps keep down entirely, in America, the like of the ancient virtue of Patriotism, the fervid and absorbing love of general country?" (DV, 373) This challenging mission, reconciliation of the idea of the mass-democracy and individuality, is put in motion also in the 1867 inscription to *Leaves of Grass* (LoG, 1)[112]: "One's-self I sing, a simple separate person, / Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse." Consider that the task is literary, aesthetic; it is "uttered", not given. For Whitman the community in diversity is aesthetic by nature, and it is the poet who keeps the balance between the individual and masses as unsolvable

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109 The ideas and development of republican democracy in America are brilliantly described in John Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition (1975).

110 Cf. Pocock 1975, 551.

111 Goldhammer 1996, 64. Cf. Kateb 1990.

112 All parenthesised references are to this edition: Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass (New York: Random House, 2001).

but still manageable. Diversity and grotesque are "equalized" in a synthesis of an aggregate nation:

> Of these States the poet is the equable man, / Not in him but off from him things are grotesque, eccentric, fail of / their full returns, / Nothing out of its place is good, nothing in its place is bad, / He bestows on every object or quality its fit proportion, neither / more nor less, / He is the arbiter of the diverse, he is the key, / He is the equalizer of his age and land (LoG, 431).

In order to bring the ideas of abstract constitutionalism into practise, Whitman urges the nation to write its own democratic form, to write a republic. The nation needs its democratic ideas to be crystallized and to be figured out and this can be done in arts, especially in literature. "At all times, perhaps, the central point in any nation [--] is its national literature, especially its archetypal poems" (DV, 365-366). In the pre-revolutionary years there was a common anticipation of the coming flowering of the higher arts as soon political liberty could be secured; according to old idea of *translatio imperii,* the assumption was that as civilizations travelled west the muses would follow. Liberty would come first and the muses would follow.[113] In Whitman, this idea is turned upside down and the muses could thus hasten the coming of liberty and democracy:

> [A] single new thought, imagination, abstract principle, even literary style, fit for the time, put in shape by some great literatus, and projected among mankind, may duly cause changes, growths, removals, greater than the longest and bloodiest war, or the most stupendous merely political, dynastic, or commercial overturn. (DV, 366.)

For Whitman literature is not only a form of self-expression, and although the ideas of natural language are well present in his 1855 preface to *Leaves of Grass*, language also appears as a form of enactment. Language is a way to higher goals that can be achieved through changes in the way thinking is created in language.

Whitman shows a strong impulse to lash out against America, for he saw himself as a literary agitator. In his later years he declared, "I think agitation is the most important factor of all - the most deeply important. To stir, to question, to suspect, to examine, to denounce!"[114] In the 1855 preface to *Leaves of Grass* he announced that in a morally slothful age the poet is best equipped to "make every word he speaks draw blood [--] he never stagnates."[115] Conflict, agitation, and constant questioning take a central part especially in the poems written shortly after the Civil War. In "By Blue Ontario's Shores" lyrical I boasts: "I am he who walks the States with a barbed tongue, questioning every one I meet" (LoG, 425). With almost anarchic tone of civil disobedience Whitman's poem "Myself and Mine" declares: "Let others praise eminent men and hold up peace, I hold up agitation and conflict." (LoG, 298) Despite statements like

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113   Ellis 2002, 5-7.
114   Traubel 1964, 29.
115   Whitman 1982, 9.

these, he was not that unusual because stress on agitation was not uncommon in the U.S.A. of 1850's and 1860's among the preachers and abolitionists[116].

In Whitman's writings, the politics of a physical, "physiognomic" presence seems to be in constant confrontation with the more transcendental visions of the political. In his Civil War poems, which reflect the crisis of representation on both the level of political and the level of poetical, it is the body, the corpses, that seems to disturb the idealistic vision of the national unity. Mutilated bodies escape representation, they only have their demanding presence[117]. Bodies disturb the political objectives. That is why Whitman usually does not use his own voice but borrows voice when speaking of the corpses or wounded soldiers. In order to maintain the idealistic vision of unity, the bodies can be described only as abstractions, as part of the masses, but that representation seems to collapse at the bedside of the wounded soldier.

This problem with the body is exemplified in his Lincoln poems. Lincoln seems to be both a body and the idea. The physiognomic presence, the phenomenon Lincoln the politician seems to be against the transcendental idea of Lincoln the statesman. Portraits of Lincoln in Whitman's Specimen Days are very detailed physical descriptions; the description of Lincoln's face seems to grow out as an epiphany of the whole spirit of Democracy. But with the death of Lincoln this fascination for physiognomy seems to fade away: Lincoln's corpse is not present in Whitman's elegiac poems which memorize Lincoln. It is like one keeps the corpse absent in order to keep the vision alive.

3.2   Dynamics of Democracy

Democratization is for Whitman a project of all spheres, not just politics but also military, economics and religion: "[I]n religion, literature, colleges, and schools – democracy in all public and private life, and in the army and navy" (DV, 389). And politics, then, is everybody's business: "To practically enter into politics is an important part of American personalism" (DV, 399).[118]

Social mobility, action and movement are Whitman's guarantors of true democracy, because only the constant race towards advancement keeps the democratic and republican spirit alive and reconciles the paradox between individualism and levelling democracy. In Whitman's major poetical work, *Leaves of Grass*, that spirit is put in motion via skilful orators: "O the orator's joys! / To inflate the chest, to roll the thunder of the voice out from the / ribs

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116   See Reynolds 2005, 138-139.
117   Cf. Sychterz 2003.
118   Whitman's words seems to be similar to the ideas of expressionist poet Ludwig Rubiner who wrote in his 1910 essay Der Dichter Greift in die Politik poets role that when a "poet gets into politics, he breaks and reveals. He believes in his intensity, his explosive force". A poet destroys old moralities and creates new ones. A political poet believes in his "life, body, movement". Not surprisingly, when anticipating the reappearance of political poetry, Rubiner explicitly names Whitman as the first political poet. See Rubiner, 1976a, 209-210.

and throat, / To make the people rage, weep, hate, desire, with yourself, / To lead America--to quell America with a great tongue" (LoG, 226).

Politics is, like poetry, a skill of language and speech that is bound with the present and not with the stabilized, restrained past: "The beauty of independence, departure, actions that rely on themselves, / The American contempt for statutes and ceremonies, the boundless / impatience of restraint" (LoG, 232). Whitman's lines echo the aforementioned paradox of democracy: one needs representative, even heroic figures for the education and guidance of the masses, but one must beware that one does not let them ruin the egalitarian basis of the democratic society. Nevertheless, there is certain conservative strand in Whitman's ideas. As many his contemporaries, Whitman also sees an imminent danger in the masses. His solution is to keep ahead of those possible dangers: "It is useless to deny it: Democracy grows rankly up the thickest, noxious, deadliest plants and fruits of all—brings worse and worse invaders-- needs newer, larger, stronger, keener compensations and compellers" (DV, 422).

In the same manner, Whitman's first lines of *Leaves of Grass* is about "athletic Democracy", it is also described in his *Democratic Vistas*; virtue and active citizenship, movement and circulation, for Whitman, means the strengthening of democracy: "As circulation to air, so is agitation and a plentiful degree of speculative license to political and moral sanity" (DV, 383). That remark is a demarcation between the politics and the political; politics may be seen as a guarantor of properly working political machinery, outlined in the constitution. And, despite his occasionally harsh criticism of some politicians, Whitman truly admires the political struggle and politicians in general, as he describes politicians as "freedom's athletes", calls political democracy a "training-school for making first-class men", and uses words like "arena", "fight" and "attack" when speaking of political life (DV, 385-386). Politics as an activity and battle coins well into his ubiquitously carnal, masculine, and vital vocabulary. This almost militant aspect of politics is taken to its extremes in Whitman's civil war writings, where his compassion in front of the wounded soldiers, but also his admiration of their braveness and the beauty of their heroic fight is clear. To him the democratic spirit culminates in the person of the soldier dying for the public cause.[119]

In *Leaves of Grass*[120] Whitman makes a revealing, metapoetical remark about physical endeavour: "Camerado, this is no book / Who touches this, touches a man" (LoG, 619) Whitman sees himself as a representative poet who gives voice to all the people of democracy by his own presence. A good example of his way of blending the poetical "I" and the text in a physical union

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119   Cf. Whitman 1961, 285-286.
120   Here I use the so called "death-bed" edition of Leaves of Grass. It appeared in January 1892, only two months before Whitman died. One may find some differences between this and earlier editions, and, although that analysis goes beyond the scope of my study, some minor relevance for the political reading may be found from editions which show his somewhat differing attitudes before and after the Civil War. The death-bed edition may be seen as Whitman's last word.

can also be found from his Song of Myself, which ends in physical dissolution as the poet becomes one with the landscape: "If you want me again, look for me under your boot-soles". "Human bodies are words, myriads of words" (LoG, 275).

For Whitman a poem is not a closed creation but a process, and when it ends, it is time for the poet to vanish and let the reader continue. The poet has no place outside the poem but he is dispersed into it. This is also confirmed in Whitman's 1888 essay "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads" where he describes his style as "Suggestiveness" and writes that "The reader will always have his or her part to do"[121]. In his preface to the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman's poetics are also described as an endless process and action: "A great poem is no finish to a man or woman but rather a beginning. Has any one fancied he could sit at last under some due authority and rest satisfied with explanations and realize and be content and full? To no such terminus does the greatest poet bring … he brings neither cessation or sheltered fatness and ease. The touch of him tells in action."[122]

Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* is politics itself, a song for a nation and song of a nation, but also a political vision where the people en-masse and their individualities are to be arbitrated. In a footnote to his preface to the 1876 edition of the *Leaves of Grass* he clarifies his political objectives: "the special meaning of the 'Calamus' cluster of 'Leaves of Grass', (and more or less running through the book, and cropping out in "Drum-Taps,") mainly resides in its political significance."[123] In the Calamus section to which he refers, the political emphasis is on spirit of comradeship. Democracy en-masse guides his flowing, paratactical style, which allows every person, no matter which race or sex, to have their voice heard: "The words of the true poems give you more than poems, / They give you to form for yourself poems, religions, politics, war, / peace, behavior, histories, essays, daily life, and every thing else, / They balance ranks, colors, races, creeds, and the sexes" (LoG, 212).

The Calamus section also offers the reader the spiritual backbone of democracy. In that cluster, honesty to one's ideals, one's vision, is presented as the bond that makes the true democratic nation; the politician should perhaps be virtuous, but never a virtuoso who is playing just for the game's sake and has no principles. In a portrait of a politician in the poem "The Song of the Answerer" this protean character is taken to its extremities. It seems almost like the poem's "I" is to be mocked as Whitman's own alter ego, who can adjust himself to any role; and perhaps revealingly one may find the poem's "I" to ask "do you hear the ironical echoes" (LoG, 212).

On almost every occasion in *Leaves of Grass* politics is mentioned with some other qualities of life, the relationships stretches from family relations (LoG, 208) to poetry and religion (LoG, 212), to civilization as a whole (LoG, 270). Politics has a central place in the poem and is one of the most essential

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121 Whitman 1964a, 725.
122 Whitman 1982, 25.
123 Whitman 1982a , 1037.

aspects of human activity, although his democratic parataxis does not allow any field of activity to be prioritised.

In the poem's world, politics has certain autonomy, but it is not self-sufficient but, like other forms of human activity, is dependent on earth: "No politics, song, religion, behavior, or what not, is of account, / unless it compare with the amplitude of the earth, / Unless it face the exactness, vitality, impartiality, rectitude of / the earth" (LoG, 280). This stress on nature's fundamental role may be seen as an implicit reference to certain idea of political realism. Whitman's notion about Machiavelli is in this context quite telling: Whitman urges not to "celebrate parlors, proprieties, traditions, dresseries," but "nature as she is; "I don't believe we'll ever get deeper than the saying attributed to Machiavelli, the Italian fellow, to some prince or other—some one: you have seen it? Machiavelli said: 'I shall chastise you by picturing you'—or something to that effect. How profound that is! I approach nature not to explain but to picture. Who can explain?"[124]

Towards the end of the poem "Nature" turns out to be more like transcendental equalizer, impartial force, which should be obeyed or at least listened. In the poem "To a President" the addressee lacks the best qualities of nature: "of the politics of Nature you have / not learn'd the great amplitude, rectitude, impartiality" (LoG, 341). In a more universal sense, man as a part of nature makes him basically equal in life and in death. Nature is in the poem equal with the mass, with the whole population of the nation, population which is the source of its strength: "Doctrines, politics and civilization exurge from you" (LoG, 270). The individual is one with the earth, with the nature; and cosmic unity is reached in the form of one that is singular in spirit, plural in appearances: "Out of politics, triumphs, battles, life, what at last finally remains? / When shows break up what but One's-Self is sure?" (LoG, 555)

Essential to whole dynamic structure of the Republic presented in *Leaves of Grass* is its constant movement, its incompleteness and progressivity: "Others take finish, but the Republic is ever constructive and ever / keeps vista" (430). This means its orientation is towards the future, as *Democratic Vistas* (362) reminds us, "America [--] counts, as I reckon, for her justification and success [--] almost entirely on the future". But that is not to be taken as a momentary situation but more like a permanent characteristic of democratic society. It has to be on the move, or face the threat of tyranny and feudalism: "O days of the future I believe in you--I isolate myself for your sake, / O America because you build for mankind I build for you [--] Lead the present with friendly hand toward the future" (LoG, 430). Likewise, the task lies in the ever moving future in "Pioneers! O Pioneers", "We take up the task eternal" (LoG, 288): "Through the battle, through defeat, moving yet and never stopping" (LoG, 290).

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124   Traubel, 1953, 149-150.

3.3   Politics of paradox, paradox of politics

Whitman's poetry is in constant struggle between two basically opposing aspects of democracy: those of individualism and those of equality. In this struggle Whitman seems to contradict himself on many occasions, but he admits it without any hesitation and those contradictions may be seen as part of his poetico-political project and part of his poetry of personalism. For Whitman poetry seems to be a process which includes different perspectives and different ideas in a democratic mixture, a play of ideas and visions. From his poems, one may derive a certain kind of aesthetic concept of politics, where, on an equal basis, each and every one may put forward their own representation of the political reality. Thus, as an aesthetic form, for Whitman politics is basically a representative art by nature, like is his poetry.

However, that does not mean that he would not have his very own *Leitmotiv* in his work. In the end, one may see that despite his admiration of practical politics and the daily struggles of the politicians, and despite his egalitarian emphasis on equal participation, Whitman's stress is on the more abstract level of political. Politics and poetry as action or activity serve the greater political goal, that of national unity, and they are parts of that ubiquitous fight for the deepening of the democracy in society. Politics is at least the lesser evil, and lesser danger to the nation, when compared to war, and one could say that for Whitman politics is a continuation of the war by other means, replacing military combat by "saner wars, sweet wars, life-giving wars" (LoG, 451).

The ultimate paradox of Whitman's democracy is that it is supposed to remain a paradox between the nation and the individual in order to survive. Politics is needed to avoid or channel the fatal dangers of too much passion and the diversions which could turn into war, but taming the passions too much could lead to a stagnation, which could permanently harm the ideals of equality and democracy. In a sense this is indeed a paradoxical cycle.

4   POUND'S CANTOS

The combination of terms aesthetic and political has been a common feature when analysing the fascist and national-socialist era. As Martin Jay has put it, the connection between what Benjamin called "the aestheticization of politics" and fascism has become firmly established.[125] These two terms are frequently linked with Ezra Pound and his Cantos.

Ezra Pound's work has been a difficult case because of his importance in the modernist movement. Scholars often tend either to exclude all the political aspects from his poetry, or, more often, discuss both but argue that despite his politics the artistic value of the Cantos is undeniable[126]. It suffices to take just one example of the apologetic ways of dealing with Pound's politics. When writing about Pound's *Pisan Cantos* in his book *The Poetic Achievement of Ezra Pound*, Michael Alexander argues that:

> [y]et as his crankiness stands revealed for what it is, his poetry achieves an emotional freedom and force, a fusion of mythical and actual, a psychological necessity, which it perhaps never before possessed. The voice realizes the movement of the mind so perfectly that the reader can reach a stage when he is no longer bothered by Pound's deluded political judgement.[127]

However, as I see it, aesthetic ideas and politics are two sides of same coin in Pound's work; they cannot be dealt with as isolated spheres of his thinking. The force of his poetry stems from the same source as his political views; his poetry and politics are rooted in his ideas of action and movement. Also the poetical and political changes in his poetry seem to go hand in hand. But there are at least two different Pounds to read, as his ideas seem to oscillate between objective and subjective views on history.

Reading the Cantos is difficult task. Pound weaves such a dense web of inter-textual relations that the reader needs knowledge of different cultures and

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125   Jay 1992, 42.
126   The most interesting exception to this segregation between Pound's politics and poetics are Alan Marshall's work in 2009 and study by Peter Nicholl in 1984.
127   Alexander 1981, 193.

of history, in order to understand the kaleidoscopic image presented. In this act of reading, meaning becomes a triangular relationship between the text and reader and texts referred to, and the meaning of his poetry is constructed between different texts and their interpretation. In an early letter to his wife Dorothy, Pound mentions this interaction between the reader and the text as the basis of art: "The whole thing a process of art, of the more difficult art in which we are half media & half creators."[128] In this early phase, the reader is not just a passive receiver of information but an active participant in the process. Even the obscurity of his style can be seen as serving this purpose of activating the reader, as Pound wrote in 1938 in his Guide to Kulchur that "Real knowledge does NOT fall off the page into one's stomach"[129]. The process is interpretative and creative, not natural, and does not stem from any authoritative point of view. The reader is urged to move inside the text, and also outside of its borders, but under the guidance of the craftsman, the poet.

The Cantos was Pound's magnum opus and was written over a period of several decades. There is an obvious change in his poetics, and politics, during those years. As, among others, Alan Marshall has noted, earlier cantos, at least until Adams' part, are still republican in tone and emphasise intersubjective action and movement as poetical and political principles, whereas the post-WWII *Pisan Cantos* show a poet who has abandoned any idea of *polis* or republic based on active citizenship, and directs attention to history as a natural process.[130]

The change in Pound's poetry started in his early cantos, where the poetical "I" is set aside. His early cantos move between subjective and objective views of history, but during the 1930's the shift is towards objective position. Pound's last cantos bring back the poetical "I" and the poet's authority is the sole thing that keeps the fragmentary poems together. Especially the Adams' Cantos seems to lack any coherent logic or rationale, which Pound also lamented in his last poems, concerning the whole epos, writing in Canto 116 that "Tho' my errors and wrecks lie about me. / And I am not a demigod, / I cannot make it cohere"[131].

As Nick Selby has defined, the historical cantos dealing with the American Revolution that Pound began writing in the 1930's, and especially the cantos on the persona of John Adams, are often composed as motto-like texts. According to Selby "the motto implies a discourse of authority, a language in which word and world are forced together, where no gap is admitted between aesthetic and political judgements".[132] In these cantos, as Selby argues, political judgement becomes seemingly a matter of style, because it obscures arguments made by John Adams by placing them in a new, fragmentary and non-coherent form. There is only a hint of Adams' rationalism left in the Pound's interpretation. As Selby notes, Pound's style of abbreviation and reduction creates the effect of

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128   Pound and Litz 1984, 76.
129   Pound 1970, 107.
130   See Marshall 2009.
131   Pound 1999, 816.
132   Selby 1995, 61.

rhythm and the immediacy of a mass political rally. Lack of aesthetic distance, gap, is obvious. Politics and aesthetics become one.

In the Adams Cantos, Pound provides legal phraseology and rhetoric with irrefutable taxonomies. As in the Jefferson Cantos, history depends on a particular style and his rewriting shows history as a process of textual revision, his later Cantos move towards more closed and fixed forms. He becomes a teacher who is a follower of Adams, Poundian *paideuma* works by the method of drastic cutting. He presents Adams in terms of first principles and thus corrects the fuzzy style of the original works he is quoting. Pound's poetic technique of motto-making reduces complex historical events to simplistic formulations.

The Adams Cantos are an extremely condensed representation of circulating themes of history[133]; and, politics, style and poetry becomes the same, in a mimetic manner of circulation, and circulation is a repeated theme throughout the work and also in the monetary ideas which are prevalent in it[134]. Language is pushed to the limits of its representative power, almost becoming a closed system of constant and overlapping system of self-reference. As Selby argues, it is especially the theme of circulation that expands to the whole width of the canvas. The poem is, to a certain extent, a self-supporting, closed system. The public and private identities of Adams are also combined and what comes out is no more an emulation but imitation of historical reality. Circulation becomes an overlapping myth that supports the whole structure; it is both a topic and a metapoetical statement revealing the structure of the poems. Underlining his authoritarian style, Pound also closes the reader into the text with his paternal "we".

Nick Selby sees the Cantos as special case of fascist language. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe has argued that fascism is a fall of representative system into a sheer presence of authority, to sheer mimesis of original myth.[135] That leads to an aesthetized view of politics, as was noticed by Walter Benjamin in his writings about technological changes in arts. Aesthetics in its original sensual meaning is seen by Walter Benjamin as a lack of difference, it brings together the worlds of subject and object, representative and what is represented and thus works as a bridge between otherwise divided faculties of thought. This confluence hides the constructed nature of reality. It is also a closed system

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133 One of the Pound's famous maxims was represented in his ABC of Reading as "Dichten=Condensare".

134 Pound's ideas on money are a topic itself, but go beyond the scope of this research. Here it suffices to say that he was an ardent opponent of the central banking system and of what he, among others, called money creating. According to Pound, money has to be based on real assets like gold, on a one to one ratio. Probably the most well known supporter of these ideas today is Ron Paul, who has been seeking presidency of the USA three times. The ideas Pound presents on money can be seen as a parallel to his ideas on language and aesthetics.

135 Lacoue-Labarthe deals with the problematics of nation building and figuration in several of his works, mostly in connection with his analysis of Heidegger's language. See for example his 1997 essay "Spirit of National Socialism and its Destiny", 151-152.

because facts are colonized by language; words have their meaning only in the context which Pound gives them.

When coming to the *Pisan Cantos*, Pound's ideas about judging historical events turn towards natural processes. No more is there political struggle between men of republic to determine the outcome of "revolution", but the Diocesian paradise has its form already looming in its material: "stone knowing the form which the carver imparts it / the stone knows the form"[136]. It is not Adams, Jefferson or Mussolini that outline the constitution; they just "impart" it. The poet/politician is reduced to Plato's craftsman, who follows the demands of the material at hand.[137]

Pound stated in his radio speech from Mussolini's Italy to England that "Rhetoric about 'our representatives in Parliament' is NOT the point. The point is that your Parliament does NOT represent you"[138]. Pound is taking his principles selectively from the "founding fathers", especially from the letters of John Adams, whose letter to Jefferson was quoted in his *Cantos* "You fear the one, I the few"[139]. This fear of aristocracy and corruption of power in hands of the few, the representatives with a non-imperative, non-mimetic mandate, may have been one of the factors that led Pound to support Mussolini.

Pound's position against the representative system is interesting in literary-political sense. His writing becomes more and more eclectic during the Cantos where the poetical and political forms go hand in hand: Pound was obsessed with right form of government and meanwhile his poetry shifts towards fixed forms. "[N]o more agreeable employment / than the study of the best kind of government / to determine form you must determine the end"[140]. After the idea of leadership of one man collapsed, Pound's poetic structure also collapsed, till the end of Cantos it becomes more and more fragmentary, authority steps aside and dialogue comes in.

However, this "copy and paste" style hides beneath it Pound's major poetical ideas concerning action and its description, and also his intertextuality. In the earliest cantos the reader has room to interpret, but from Adams Cantos onward authority of the writer seems to close that room. This is most striking in the Adams Cantos as they are based mostly on one source, which Pound arbitrarily cuts into fragments.

Despite setting his authority over historical events, Pound also relativizes the eternal value of history when writing about the Declaration of Independence. In Canto LXVII he quotes one of Adams' letters, where Adams

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136 Canto LXXIV, in Pound 1999, 450.
137 Idea is often present in fascistic and national-socialist literature. Mussolini referred often to people as clay in sculptors' hands, and there are similar references in Joseph Goebbels' novel Michael: "Der Staatsmann ist auch ein Künstler. Für ihn ist das Volk nichts anderes, als was für den Bildhauer der Stein ist." (Goebbels (1929/1942, 21.) In Goebbels view on Aesthetic State, the idea is already there, in the Volk, politician forms the state on the basis of this pre-existing idea.
138 Pound 1978, 134.
139 Canto LXIX, in Pound 1999, 407.
140 Canto LXVII, in Pound 1999, 392.

says that "it is not pointed as I wd/ make it"[141]. Thus the self-evident truths of Declaration are seen as contingent and dependent on the particular historical moment, and also on the style of the author, that of Jefferson.

Later, the *Pisan Cantos* focus on the memory of the author instead of written sources, and history is seen from multiple perspectives. This is already nascent in the earlier cantos where Pound writes from multiple of perspectives and sees from the actors subjective point of view, as in Canto LIX: "periplum, not as land looks on a map / but as sea bord seen by men sailing"[142].

Periplum is a map drawn from the perspective of a sailor-poet, unlike the typical bird's-eye view of a chart, the coincidence of the idea of abstraction of the map and the action of sailing. The sailor is, as put in the first Canto, the *polytropos* man of many faces and many tricks, Odysseus. In Canto XLVII Odysseus is on a voyage towards knowledge not yet known, "[k]nowledge the shade of a shade, / Yet must thou sail after knowledge / Knowing less than drugged beasts"[143], knowledge that is revealed in action. It is a craftsman's knowledge, not yet words of a sage or of transcendental vision.

In Alan Marshall's view, "action" is already essential to Pound's interbellum poetics.[144] In Pound's poetry after 1919, to grasp the target in action is to see it with minimal subjective or linguistic obfuscation. It is Pound's epistemological idea that guides the collection of "facts", and their juxtapositions. Action and movement are central to his early cantos. In Guide to Kulchur, Pound wrote, that "Ideas are true as they go into action"[145]. This epistemological idea was already at its nascent state in 1916, when Pound wrote of his poem "In a Station of the Metro", that "In a poem like this sort one is trying to record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts onto a thing inward and subjective"[146]. Here we have a transformation that balances between subjective and objective, in an instant of action. In his two-line poem "In a Station of the Metro" this idea is crystallised:

> The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
>   Petals on a wet, black bough.

Two images, one factual and echoing the perceptive subject, another metaphorical and generalised, objective, come together in a process of transformation. This overlapping of the images emphasise not the images themselves but the space of friction between them, the action between positions.

For Pound, the idea and action are the same, heroic men are known for their virtues in action. According to Alasdair MacIntyre, "a man in heroic society is what he does", heroic society is one in which "morality and social

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141   Ibid. 392.
142   Ibid. 324.
143   Ibid. 236.
144   Marshall 2009, 55-91.
145   Pound 1970, 188.
146   Pound 1970a, 89.

structure are in fact one and the same"[147]. In his short essay "Freedom de Facto" written in 1940, Pound sees human theorising as being unable to grasp the idea of action, "theoreticians have dealt with a still world." "What is needed is "opportunistic politics" for a "flowing world" for "liberty is not defendable on a static theory". Here he goes against the Machiavellian paradigm of politics, arguing that his "democracy was theoretic, even his idea of movement is a circle and did not attain any conception whatever of the flow, his point was revolving in a fixed orbit"[148]. Even if Selby sees the Adams Cantos being constructed basically on the idea of circulation, Pound does not seem to abandon the idea of progress entirely even in the 1940's.

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147   MacIntyre 2007, 122.
148   Pound 1973a, 273.

5   TO BEGIN ANEW – POUND BY OLSON

Even though movement and action were overshadowed during the 1930's by Ezra Pound's ideas on harmony and stability, as exemplified in his poems in the character of Adams and also Mussolini, ideas of movement were not totally moved aside. After the war, these again emerged more and more often in his poetry, even though the stress is this time is on nature and its processes.

It is to these remains of progressivism and movement that Charles Olson, democrat party worker who turned to poetry after WWII, adhered to when trying to democratize Pound. During the WWII, Olson and Pound were on the opposing sides of the aisle: Pound propagated Mussolini and Fascism in his radio speeches, Olson worked for the Office of War Information producing propaganda material for the support of the USA's war efforts. After the war, Pound was seen as traitor, and Olson started to visit him at St. Elizabeth's Hospital where Pound was locked in after legal proceedings declared him "unsound". Olson helped him to keep contact with his publisher and also read some of the drafts Pound made for his *Pisan Cantos*.[149]

Olson was one of the few writers in the 1950's who saw Pound's poetry in political terms. This distinguished Olson from the new critics. The new critics tried to make a sharp distinction between Pound's catastrophic politics and his excellent poetry. However, there was public opinion, which simply saw Pound as an anti-democratic elitist, and people judged his poetry on the basis of his character. For many, there was no way of separating literature from politics, or a writer from his text.[150] Olson was not apologetic when it came to Pound's politics, but felt the same kind of *nausea* when dealing with an old man's anti-semitic slurs that Pound felt when reading Whitman. In his early poem, "A Lustrum for You, E.P.", written in 1945, Olson announced his disgust:

> Sing out, sing hate.
> There is a wind, mister

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149   Of Olson's visits at St. Elizabeth, see Olson 1975.
150   On the public debate about Pound and his poetry and politics after the war, see Blake 2000.

> where the smell, o anti-semite
>
> in the nose is as
>
> vomit, poet.

In Olson's opinion, the language of Pound's poetry was as political as his prose essays and radio speeches. Surprisingly, Olson still lauds Pound for his poetry. Olson saw in it seeds for democratic poetry, even though the "old man" did not get it himself. In a letter written in 1950 to Robert Creeley, Olson, with his peculiar prose style, spoke of his respect for Pound's language, and also how Pound could not make the conclusions needed: "I still believe the Path of Ezra is the 'oly won, even tho I do not believe him capable of fronting to that which is thuggish abt the 'eart."[151]

The part of Cantos that was especially important for Olson, and the part he read before it went to print, was the *Pisan Cantos*. Much of Olson's poetical ideas are derived from that work by Pound. In the *Pisan Cantos*, Olson sees Pound as the reactionary politician becoming Pound the revolutionary poet. It is Pound's idea of "kulch", the culture, which made the effect. Olson wrote to Robert Creeley in 1950 that "The REAL question is, kulch, as, again, the old man, got in right, from the start".[152]

Paradoxically, Olson thinks, Pound's poetry is at its best when the man is weakest. What Olson saw as problematic in Pound was his will and ego. What was needed to correct Pound's poetry was to get rid of will and ego, to go with the flow of words and be spontaneous, or, as Olson put it, "going by language". In the *Pisan Cantos* Pound was at his weakest, both emotionally and physically.[153] When naked to language, Pound could go through the process and let the language direct the course, ego no longer prohibited the free flow of his observations.

Another element that Olson saw important in the *Pisan Cantos* was their immediateness. Pound relies on his memory and lets it go freely. Whatever comes to him, from perception or from memory, is now valuable material for poetry. In the immediateness of a moment, his memory and perception enter the poem and become part of the evolution process of the poem.

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151 Olson and Robert Creeley 1980, 92.

152 Olson and Creeley 1980a, 81. The idea of going to the roots is also Whitman's recipe for the deepening of democracy. The idea is basically the same as Ranciere represented, ie. That the basis of aesthetic politics lies in arts' ability to change attention, to change things are perceived and thus redefine the political.

153 The draft of the Pisan Cantos was written while Pound was prisoner of the Allies in Pisa. First he was held in a tent outside, and saw many collaborators facing the death sentence, and feared of losing his memory. That was one of the reasons he began to write, and he wrote spontaneously and rapidly. Most of the Cantos were written within just a few weeks.

6 CHARLES OLSON, POET OF THE OPEN FORM

Olson intended to make a break from pre-war subjectivism, which was partly characterized by a romantic image of poetic genius and by the ideology of art for art's sake. The central manifestation of Olson's intentions was his essay "Projective Verse" written in 1950, envisioning a new kind of poetry of open form. According to Olson, poetry should be guided towards the spoken word and the rhythm of breathing. The poem was about to be thought of as an open field and written in open form and free verse.[154] The distinction between the process and product of poetry is reaffirmed in a sharp contrast to the romantic ideal of poetry, a distinction which has many at least implicit political consequences as well as it has many explicit poetical goals. Olson writes in "Projective Verse" that:

> the principle, the law which presides conspicuously over such composition, and, when obeyed, is the reason why a projective poem can come into being. It is this: FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN THE EXTENSION OF CONTENT. (Or so it got phrased by one, R. Creeley, and it makes sense to me, with this possible corollary, that right form, in any given poem, is the only and exclusively possible extension of content under hand.) [155]

In other words, every poem, by the dictates of its "law", would have its own, unique shape. Therefore, one cannot speak of the *poesis* of any specific form of poetry undetermined by content. When the poem is thought of not as an object but as a field, it loses its eternal value and comes into being as a part of the

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154 The theme of open work of art was studied by Umberto Eco in 1962 in his Opera Aperta, or Open Work. According to Eco, openness has several dimensions, including the ambiguity of the work of art, its openness towards public in a sense that it does not propose any given meaning, its openness in a sense of work in progress. Eco links openness to phenomenology: "In order to be defined, the object must be related back to the total series of which, by virtue of being one possible apparition, it is a member. In this way the traditional dualism between being and appearance is replaced by a straight polarity of finite and infinite, which locates the infinite at the very core of the finite. This sort of "openness" is at the heart of every act of perception." Eco 1989, 16. This resembles also the statement Pound made concerning action, i.e. that "ideas are true as they go into action".

155 Olson 1997c, 240. Capitals and parentheses by Olson.

process between reader and writer. When taken as analogical to the concept of political society in the republican tradition which was viewed in the concrete, as a secular and consequently time-bound phenomenon, it can be seen as was characterized by John Pocock in his Machiavellian Moment[156]. Poetry is as contingent as political society.

When describing his idea of perception Olson writes that "Observation of any kind is, like argument in prose, properly previous to the act of poem, and, if allowed in, must be so juxtaposed, apposed, set in, that it does not, for instant, sap the going energy of the content toward its form."[157] Observation and perception are kinetic axis of Olson's poetry and from "Projective Verse" one may notice that Olson's idea of poetry is focused on perception in a phenomenological manner: Olson writes that "One perception must lead immediately and directly to a further perception."[158] He argues further that "Objects [--] must be taken as participants in the kinetic of the poem [--] and that these elements are to be seen as creating the tensions of a poem just as totally as do those other objects create what we know as the world."[159]. "[E]lements of a poem can be allowed to have the play of their separate energies"[160]. Energetic vision and presence goes against the Cartesian model of differentiation between body and soul and thus also against representational system of liberal politics which has its ontological roots in ideas of Descartes. Meaning is created simultaneously in the body in form of breath and action and in language as logos.

6.1   Epic and history

Charles Olson's (1910-1970) *Maximus Poems* puts into action the ideas Olson presented in his "Projective Verse". On many occasions, the *Maximus Poems* have been compared to Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, and one could also call the *Maximus Poems* a "postmodern epic" that uses its collage of different texts, voices and narratives to explore one single fishing community in Gloucester, Massachusetts and through that community enlarges to explore the foundations of the whole nation. It is a poem of a nation and the western civilization as a whole.

The polyvocality dismantles the idea of one ego, one subject position, as a guiding principle of poetical work. Olson got this idea from Pound, whose *Pisan Cantos* lack a coherent subject and wander through history and personal reflections seeing the world from constantly moving positions. It is this lack of coherence Pound lamented that Olson sets as his structuring principle. Where autocratic Pound failed, democratic Olson continued.

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156   Pocock 1975, 9.
157   Olson 1997c, 243.
158   Ibid. 240.
159   Ibid. 243.
160   Ibid. 244.

On many occasions, the epic has been characterized as the most political form of poetry as it seems to explore the very fundamental issues of society in its state of birth. According to Hegel, "Consequently the content and form of epic proper is the entire world-outlook and objective manifestation of a national spirit presented in its self-objectifying shape as an actual event"[161]. This is, of course, in Hegel's reading the case with Odysseus and Ilias, but to some extent the same also applies to later works like Divina Commedia by Dante or Milton's Paradise Lost.

According to Hegel's classical crystallization, lyric poetry is subjective, epic poetry is objective, and these two are fused in drama. According to Georg Lukacs, "from epic poetry men expect a clearer, sharper mirror of themselves and of their social activity. The art of the epic poet consists in a proper distribution of emphasis and in a just accentuation of what is essential. A work becomes impressive and universal according to how much it presents the essential element -- man and his social practice -- not as an artificial product of the artist's virtuosity but as something that emerges and grows naturally, as something not invented, but simply discovered"[162].

However, even though usually exploring the national character, the postmodern epic goes beyond a demarcation between the objective and subjective: as in Pound's *Cantos*, also in *Maximus Poems* one is not able to distinguish between objective narration, or discourse, and the subjective voice, but there is rather an intentional a mixture of both, and even the "documentary" sources both works use come under scrutiny and their objectivity is put in question as well.

Olson's historical exploration started with his study of Moby Dick, where he described Henry Melvillle as "the last first man" and outlined a last phase of American history, a phase when geographical enlargement came to its end at the continent, and continued at the sea, and in the history, also to seek new mental spaces. In his book on Melville, Olson writes, "I take space to be the central fact to man born in America, from Folsom cave to now"[163]. In Olson's poetry, space is exemplified both in style and in content and for example by means of parataxis where the poet and the reader are included in the movement that the language composes, rather than on top of it and directing it.

To those "first men", like Melville, it is only the present and future that counts. That idea of movement and projection is what Olson traces in his poetry; Olson described his poetry in geometrical terms as projective.

In his later writings, he objected to the central ideas of modernist poetry, which focused on the image. The most problematic part of the modernist poetry was, exemplified by the poetry of Ezra Pound, it being retrospective; and Olson wrote that it was built on "remembering", "lines capture a mood of loss, a beauty of loss"[164]. Thus he said Ezra Pound was trying to be the ultimate image

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161   Hegel 1998, 1044.
162   Lukacs 2005, 126.
163   Olson 1997a, 17.
164   Olson 1997b, 145-146.

of the western man, but failed because of his nostalgia, and Olson indicates that nostalgia also guided Pound towards fascism and racism.

Olson's first published poetical works were a series of poems about the Buchenwald concentration camp. The holocaust seemed to be the point where one needed to start anew, to rewrite and overwrite the whole western history and culture, and by that rewriting Olson tried to seize and retrace the opportunities which the New World still could offer. In his Buchenwald book he wrote that,

> My name is NO RACE   address
> Buchenwald   new Altamira cave[165]

Altamira is presented as a starting point of human imagination, like Buchenwald is also a new starting point, the start of a new phase. It is very much like Jerome Rothenberg later wrote, paraphrasing Adorno, that "after Auschwitz / there is only poetry no hope / no other language left to heal / no language & no faces"[166].

The juxtaposition of Buchenwald and Altamira brings together times passed and times present, universalizing the experience and putting the poem in space of events instead of using the linear time concept. The context is now.

Race is also of importance here, as it can be read as an allusion to Pound's *Pisan Cantos* and its references to Odysseus, who was declared in Canto LXXIV to be "OU TIS", "no one", the word is capitalized both in Pound and Olson. In a draft of the *Pisan Cantos*, Pound uses lines "I am no man, my name is no man". Use of the open spaces between words is also familiar from Canto LXXIV, enacting breath and pause. While using Pound's technical elements, Olson broadens the idea of "no man" to consist of all the human kind. Mentioning "race" Olson also counters the individual "no" of Pound and his refusal to condemn the genocide of the Jews.[167]

Forgetting the past, or reimagining it, is also the theme in the *Maximus Poems*, where "Man" is constantly described as being naked and at the start of his journey:

> He left him naked,
> the man said, and
> nakedness
> is what one means

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165   Olson 1997, 46.
166   Rothenberg 2007, 165.
167   Cf. Hatlen (2000. For Olson, minorities were important throughout his career. During the war, he worked at Office of War Information, as an assistant chief of its Foreign Language Division, and later as Foreign Nationalities Director at the Democratic National Committee. He was also the son of an immigrant father, and his roots were in multicultural Gloucester. In his poetry, too, he empathized with minorities of Gloucester.

that all start up
to the eye and soul
as though it had never
happened before[168].

To see things in a fresh way is the epistemological idea that holds Olson's work together. One needs to go *with* the events and language, not to stay outside of them. To achieve this, the explorer must put aside his ego, to be open to all that happens.

6.2 Poetry as a field and as a space for enactment: the First Letter of Maximus

Olson's first poem, written in a form of a letter, is a key to the whole poem. Metaphors and symbols show the central themes and the central idea of the poem.

Olson described his efforts as a voyage:

"the poem is a voyage, and I want a good voyage"[169]

The very first lines of the *Maximus Poems* present the central character of poem, a public voice called Maximus. Essential to Olson's view of history and politics is his statement that "Maximus is, of course, a verb"[170]. But the lines also present the quest of the poem: the newly created *polis*.[171] As George F. Butterick states, some of Olson's earlier figures, like "Bigman", were also civilizers and city-builders, so the idea of Maximus evolved from many earlier attempts of describing fresh start heroes [172].

In a letter to David Ignatow, Olson describes his writing as thoroughly political, and sets his target in the re-creation of the political community:

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168 Olson 1987: The Maximus Poems, I, 107. From here on Maximus Poems referred to as MP. Where fitting, reference is given within text.
169 Charles Olson, conversation with George F. Butterick, June 1968, quoted in Butterick 1980, 11.
170 Olson 1979, 120.
171 There was long gap between the first and second Letters of Maximus. Olson had many quite similar ideas about writing a long poem before he started writing Maximus and idea of Maximus as a start of a long series of poems crystallized only around 1953, three years after the first poem. So although the first lines do guide to the central themes of the whole opus, that may not have been Olson's intention when he was writing those lines. (See Butterick 1980, xxx-xxxi.)
172 Butterick 1980, xxxii-xxxiii.

> THE RE-BASE of the political is [--] REBIRTH of the conception of MAN and of COSMOS; only by that width and down-drive can the ´creation` of society be reimagined; thus politics [--] only has character after [--] the character is restored[173].

The title, *Maximus Poems*, refers in its name to second century AD Greek sophist Maximus of Tyre. By taking the sophist as his main figure, Olson opposes himself to the Platonic concept of forms, as he explains it in his essay "Human Universe"[174]: "His [Plato's] world of Ideas, of forms as extricable from content, is as much and as dangerous an issue as are logic and classification, and they need to be as such if we are to get to some alternative to the whole Greek system". This is of course one of the main ideas in "Projective Verse" as well.

What Olson said the *Maximus Poems* to be was as much the history of Gloucester as a poem about Gloucester. In one of his notes in *Mayan Letters*, written during the early phase of writing process of *Maximus Poems*, Olson writes that "the trouble is, it is very difficult, to be both a poet and, an historian"[175]. Unlike Pound's idea of epic as "a poem including history", one might think, as Butterick suggests, the form of the *Maximus Poems* as "the act of history"[176]. What this suggests is that central to the form of the *Maximus Poems* is Olson's idea of history as an act of investigation and digging. And, as I see it, same applies to politics.

The poem started as a letter to Olson's friend, Francis Bouldereff and poem got its final form during three years of revisions and rewriting.[177] What came of it was a proclamation:

I, Maximus of Gloucester, to You

Off-shore, by hidden islands in the blood
jewels and miracles, I, Maximus
a metal hot from boiling water, tell you
what is a lance, who obeys the figures of
the present dance[178]

In the first lines of the first Letter, Maximus presents his passionate attitude and position outside community. As the stress on physicality reveals, the "lance" can be understood both metaphorically as sharpness of mind and more concretely as totality of mind and body as in dance. Outside the community which Maximus addresses "I" is able also to define its basic elements and to see the community as a whole, the theme of wholeness is continued in several Letters. Direct address also emphasizes the concreteness of situation and creates the effect of a strong personal presence. "Metal hot from boiling water" can be

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173   Olson 2000, 270.
174   Olson 1997d, 156-157.
175   See also Butterick 1980, ix.
176   Ibid. xix.
177   Cf. Maud 1999, online: http://www.charlesolson.ca/Files/Max1.htm
178   MP, I.1. Italics by Olson.

interpreted as a methodical note: here the mind operates in a rush, writing freely and with passion. Words and perceptions are put on paper immediately as they come and the flow of language guides the process. That is the basis of Olson's "projective" writing.

Butterick has noted that in Olson's later writings he connects the theme of dance to the metaphor of a labyrinth[179]. According to Greek myth, Daedalus, the ancient inventor of the labyrinth, built a dancing floor after the Minotaur living in the labyrinth was killed and freedom could again prevail. The labyrinth can be seen as an endless form and it also puts stress on the combination of spiritual and physical exploration, which is also core questions of task set: "the thing you're after, / may lie around the bend"[180]. The labyrinth hints thus of a defined space where free, bodily movement may take place and it is similar to an extension of the concept of dance.

Dance is also a well known metaphor in Friedrich Schiller's writings about the aesthetic state. For Schiller, free movement, physical play, which is best exemplified in dance, is "at once its own end and its own means"[181]. It is thus opposite to anything given, or ordered outside. "Uncoordinated leaps of joy turn into dance [--] begin to obey the rhythm"[182]. So dance can connect the physical and spiritual levels into a harmonic movement of freedom without interventions of any specified form. Form comes from inside and is specific to content under hand, the form is determined by the substance which it has to suit.

This is in agreement with Olson's maxim in his poetical manifesto, "Projective Verse" (1951): "form is never more than the extension of the content". In "Projective Verse", Olson writes that the syllable is born from the "union of the mind and the ear" and from this union comes the figures of the dance, "the dance of the intellect"[183]. Indentations and line crossings accentuate the dancing style of Olson's *Maximus*. Furthermore, in unison with the ideas of "Projective Verse" the occasional very short lines of *Maximus* put stress on syllables.

In the following stanzas, the patron saint of the Gloucester fishing community, Antony of Padua, emerges in the form of a bird, who is especially invoked for the recovery of things lost, a theme which is immanent in the whole work:

> And there! (strong) thrust, the mast! flight
> (of the bird
> o kylix, o
> Antony of Padua

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179   Butterick 1980, 11.
180   MP, 1.1.
181   Schiller 1967, 209.
182   Ibid. 213.
183   Olson 1997c, 242.

> sweep low, o bless
>
> the roofs, the old ones, the gentle steep ones
>
> on whose ridge-poles the gulls sit, from which they depart
>
>
> And the flake-racks
>
> of my city![184]

The figure of the bird and its nest expands the vision of initial proclamation towards the pessimistic vision of whole nation as sickened by its own excrement: its history. New England is called a "pejorocracy", its peoples aim "mu-sick". To start anew, one must eliminate the old layers, rebuild the nest: "(o Gloucester-man, / weave / your birds and fingers / new, your roof-tops, / clean shit upon racks / sunned on / American / braid [--] o kill kill kill kill kill / those / who advertise you / out)"[185]. Here Olson stresses change, movement and process, the poem is characterized by fragmentary, self-revising, incremental, stammering forward motion.

Throughout the first Letter one may find accents of materiality, of facts, and substance as the basis of form: "love is form, and cannot be without / important substance" (MP, I.1); "facts, to be dealt with, as the sea is, the demand / that they be played by [--] by the ear"(MP, I, 2); "one loves only form, / and form only comes / into existence when / the thing is born" (MP, I, 3). This emphasis on form and its materiality echoes the themes of "Projective Verse", as one also finds the theme of the ear (cf. MP I. 4), which is essential to the whole *Maximus Poems*. Olson's vision of *polis* has a physical presence from the first stanzas.

Two other figures are essential to the idea of the whole poem: the "lady of good voyage" (MP, I.2), who is also present in Eliot's *Four Quartets*, and a passing mention of "hill" (ibid.). The lady of good voyage may be seen here as a metalyrical element of exploration, of going forward, as is described in poem "as bow-sprit for / forwarding" (MP, I.2). It sets the combination of "sharp" metaphors like "strike", "lance", "beak" and "mast" as an object that raises or intrudes into the landscape of pejorocracy of New England.

"Hill" is here as the center of the city, and, although unmentioned in the first Letters, can be seen hinting at John Winthrop's description in his 1630 sermon "A Modell of Christian Charity" of the New England as a "city on a hill": "For wee must consider that wee shall be as a citty upon a hill. The eies of all people are uppon us. [186] " When turning his attention towards daily businesses of the city, Winthrop, being one of the earliest leaders of the New England community, emerges as one of the central characters of the Olson's

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184   MP, I.1.
185   MP, I.4.
186   John Winthrop: "A Modell of Christian Charity". Online:
         http://www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/phall/03.%20winthrop,%20Christian%20Cha.pdf

poem. This phrase by Winthrop comes under scrutiny because it is a central element of the idea of American exceptionalism.

6.3   "Polis now is a few": Management of the city

Managing the republic of letters is not a task that could be ruled from the outside, but only in the action itself, as Olson writes in an analogy:

> About Economics. It's like politics: I don't myself know how you manage them except by practising them.[187]

The second and third Maximus Letters chart the founding of the city and reveal its deficiencies that originated from the very first years of the city's existence. Looking back to the history of the city shows that there are certain themes which can be derived from the founding act, because "people / don't change. They only stand more / revealed." (MP, I, 5).

One has to remember here, that even though Olson names his city as "polis", it is not to be confused with Greek model: in Olson's *polis*, commerce and handicraft are essential and analogical to the practice of politics; and it does not have the character of homogeneity of the age of the Founders or the Greeks[188]. The craftsmen have the "eyes" that are essential to understand the *polis* as a whole.

There is no "truth" of *polis* and politics outside its daily practices and Olson's *polis* is an act and an activity. Even though practices remain relatively constant in the run of history, they still have the essential character of inclination to the present, to what is at hand, and to what can be perceived. The reason he names his city a *polis* may perhaps be found from his definition of *polis* in an essay "Definitions by Undoings": "POLIS, then, is a filled up thing (in the passive as city"[189]. *Polis* is thus an active form of a city, a verb, like Maximus is.

The omnipotent attitude that is present in the first lines of the *Maximus Poems* changes when attention is shifted towards more concrete aspects of city-management: "….tell you? ha! who / can tell another how / to manage swimming?" (MP, I.5). Coming down from the heights of the bird's-eye view means that attention is increasingly directed towards the details and the effort to maintain the scheme of totality becomes even more challenging.

The history of the city is hidden, and it reveals itself only when seen in the proper light: "they hid, or tried to hide, the fact the cargo their ships brought back / was black" (ibid.). The allusion is obvious: the city was at least partially financed by the slave trade, which is also where they went wrong from the start. The city built itself around the idea of similitude and a single race and

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187   Olson, 1997f, 309.
188   Cf. Butterick 1980, 24-25.
189   Quot. Butterick 1980, 25. Open ended parenthesis by Olson.

language, whereas Olson's Maximus tracks down the heterogenic origins of the city and celebrates its hidden multinational character: "As the people of the earth are now, Gloucester / is heterogeneous" (MP, I.10).

The ideal type of person in Olson's city is a man who makes his living by his own hand, not "entertainers, sellers", who not take part in daily businesses but are "absentee-owned". (MP, 1.10). Not the abstractions but the facts are what counts.

Pejocrary is the threat to the whole nation and Maximus fears their power: "o tansy city, root city / let them make you / as the nation is" (MP, 1.11). To see the city as a whole is not to be "local", "isolated", but to have the eyes and to "hear a word", to "know as the house knows. Wearing its white face. Its clapboard mask" (MP 1.12). The newly defined *polis* is thus the whole world and oneself at the same time: "One must discover the totality of any – every – single of us"[190].

It is only an individual who can see the essential, who can hear and see the true character of the community; the citizenship is not the answer, at least not before it is newly defined: "I speak to any of you, not to you all, to no group, not to you as citizens / as my Tyrian might have. Polis now / is a few, is coherence yet even new (the island of this city / is mainland now of who? who can say who are / citizens?" (MP 1.11).

In sequence called "The Songs of Maximus", the lyrical I of the poem starts to explore the ways of perception that plunder the city and seeks for the attention needed to build the city anew outside the "sellers" and "marketers", outside "musickracket of all ownership". "In the land of plenty, have / nothing to do with it / take the way of / the lowest, including / your legs, go / contrary, go / sing" (MP, I.15). Singing as individual activity is preferred to an all encompassing mu-sick of salesmen and entertainers.

After that short intermezzo Maximus goes back to his letters, this time directly addressed to the editor of local magazine, Vincent Ferrini. Ferrini's publication policy receives Maximus' rebuttal, because Ferrini lets himself and his magazine be contaminated by "scratch-me-back" politics; it does not walk on its own legs. Therefore the magazine has no "life, / with a capital F" in it either. (MP, I. 24.) "Drift" of Maximus is to move, not to be hemmed on sentimentality. He warns Ferrini, that "Back is only for those who do not move (as future is, / you in particular need to be warned, / any of you who have the habit of / "the people" – as though there were anything / the equal of / the context of / now!" (MP, 1.22).

Political corruption emerges as a central theme throughout the *Maximus poems*, there are characters like John Burke in one of the poems, who "Against the greased ways / of the city now (of the nation) this politician / himself a twisted animal [--] will not / tolerate" (MP 147). In poem about Burke, it is again emphasized, that not just corruption, but also inaction is to be condemned. Those who stay hemmed on sentimentality or the past, are only useful idiots for those who act. "Every council member rose except Burke, who

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190   Quot. Butterick 1980, 25.

remained in his chair, staring at the table" (MP 149). At its worst, politics stays in the ever repeating pattern. As Craig Stormont has shown, the poem's target was indeed to show inability and corruption on one side, and the lack of activity on the other side in local politics of Gloucester[191]. It was "the fast buck & easy blood" politics, as Olson later described his own political career[192].

6.4   From form to the content

There are, of course, several layers and themes in Olson's poems, and being written over a period of almost 20 years, one could easily argue that the poem does not make a coherent picture. Not all the threads are tied, but there is one central element, which I see as elemental also to his political ideas. In his first letters, as throughout the work, Maximus constantly exploits expressions like "drift" that are derived from navigation. Navigation manifests oneself as a conceit of poetics and politics. However, unlike in Plato's Republic, in Olson's *polis* there are many ships. As a model of all epics, Homer's Odyssey may have inspired Olson.

In poetry, probably the most famous "ship of state" –poem was written by Horace. Ode XIV, by Horace, of his first book of Carmina, has frequently been seen as an allegory of state. To the fathers of poetry, the image of a ship caught in a storm and struggling to make harbor was a superb way of expressing the life course of a hero or the political fate of a state. The metaphor is found with the first meaning in Aeschylus and with the second in Sophocles, who speaks of "the shipwreck of state" and the "well-steered ship of state." The second figure of the ship of state was established in Italy by Cicero and then utilized by Horace. To mention a modern usage of ship metaphor, consider the formulation by Michael Oakeshott: "In political activity men sail a boundless and bottomless sea; there is neither harbor for shelter nor floor for anchorage, neither starting point nor appointed destination. [--] The enterprise is to keep afloat on an even keel.[193]" Ubiquitous naval vocabulary hints at the same basic ideas of politics in *Maximus Poems*.

The core of Olson's political idea, in the light of *Maximus Poems* lies in the interconnectedness and enactment. He moves away from the classical idea of compartmentalization that he sees as prevailing in politics, and in political vocabulary, and he stresses that new language has to be found. The classical idea of compartmentalization which he criticizes is shown at several levels: at the constitutional level via the system of representation, at the politico-philosophical level via separation between *bios* or *oikos* and *polis*; and at the ontological-epistemological level via the separation between body and soul. Taking these levels out of their hierarchical positions, to the field or to the sea,

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191   Stormont 2007.
192   Clark 2000, 112.
193   Oakeshott 1962, 127.

makes the change possible. This, basically American ideal of spatial democracy, was present in Olson's poetry, as he preferred metonymical vocabulary of space, scale and relation instead of vertical symbolism or metaphors.

In the course of the long poem, Maximus is shown to be involved with many contradictions, motions to different directions, and differing lines of reading, self-denial, multiple speakers and multiple historical documents, the poem finally ends with dissolution of the line and of the text. What are left are only fragments of crossing lines. The process of dissolution goes on throughout the poem, it is exemplified for example by the open ended parentheses, but it reaches its climax in the last part of the book. The last word of the poem is "myself", that is all there is left, which is where it started.

Where do we end up after this short look at this single though long poem, when keeping in mind Olson's maxim that "form is never more than the extension of the content"? The poem may be read as a critique of contemporary culture and it obviously has some archaistic elements as well, and surely it carries in itself many formal elements of epic poetry.

Perhaps the key is in what Walter Benjamin says concerning cinema: "With the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended. The enlargement of a snapshot does not simply render more precise what in any case was visible, though unclear: it reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject. So, too, slow motion not only presents familiar qualities of movement but reveals in them entirely unknown ones"

To take it a bit further, Paul De Man has argued that what is in fact unreadable in text which makes it readable; that breaking the code actually is what one reads in the act of reading and other parts are taken as obvious. Hence, De Man supposes the antirepresentational in text to be its nodal point, to be its true presence.[194] What *Maximus Poems* is about, is not exactly breaking the code but rewriting it, emulating, by creating a poetical montage. It thus opens up numerous possibilities to the rereading of American history, and via that, also opens up a field for new interpretations of the past; creating new layers upon it and effacing some of it. It is about making anew, creating a new perspective in given frames, emulating. One could also call it a certain kind of palimpsest.

Don Byrd, contrasting Olson to Pound writes that

> For Olson there is no authority which guarantees a final release from involvement in time and space; there is no prospect of arriving at perfected unity; there is no transcendent order which will make itself manifest. Even in Olson's earliest poetry, the unity and stability which appears is the present. The poem is an instrument by which one attempts to overcome the tendency of life to settle down into ever repeating sets of habits.[195]

Order is always in the making, like the form of language is only an illusion made in the parole. Habit, which is like Pound's tradition, can also be seen as fascist, totalitarian, as Roland Barthes comments. Poetry interrupts that, makes

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194   de Man 1982, 245.
195   Byrd 1980, 6.

new, not mimesis. Poetry is thus the caesura of power, interruption of discourse, historical and/or political.

Olson writes that "any image around which any people concentrate and commit themselves is a usable one just because it is theirs… truth is never more than its own action"[196]. But that is why one must "hold the mirror up to authority"[197]

Olson's politician is an artisan who creates things not based on the transcendental ideal but on immanent topography. His Gloucester is also a model of local politics based on topography and the form in *Maximus Poems* is analogical to the ideas it proposes about politics. The Poem is the enactment of Olson's cultural revolution. This practicality of his is underlined by his rejection of poetics, for the "new primacy of art as function and as methodology the determinant of form. For it suddenly shows itself as intensely interesting *tool* not of society, but of communication (communication, which is the will of the forms of any arts)"[198]. Poetry is thus ultimately participatory or, as he wrote, "transmission of energy"; not reflection upon but engagement with.

Olson connects poetry with morality, not with ethics: in a 1952 letter to Cid Corman, Olson explains that "I am more and more persuaded that the revolution I am responsible for is this one, of the identity of a person and his expression (that these are not separable) – and that this is why art is only morality"[199]. Poetry for Olson is less like sculpture or painting, which are spectatorial and thus passive, and more like participatory theatre; and the obscurity of his poetry is about to lead to enactment because when requiring interpretation, the reader becomes involved in the poem's ongoing energy and its hermeneutic circle. Separation between actor and audience disappears.[200] From the point of referentiality, the poem is an open field, reference is not inside the poem and its language but directed outside; thus Olson's poetry is open in two senses: as a relation between the audience and the author; and as a relation between language and the world. For Olson the poem is thus non-mimetic but also still expressive.

Language is a method to oppose mimesis as understood getting stuck with what is limited by objects: "It isn't necessarily that the letter or the word in itself has power, but that until man has put the word or the letter onto the thing that he has no means to use the power, that the power without the language stays circumscribed in the object".[201]

When willing to overcome the transcendental, eternal time concept of earlier poets, Olson goes to the other extreme of no-time: that of the present, which for him equals space. The present is shown in a reference to the labyrinth

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196   Hallberg 1978, 20.
197   Olson 1997d, 102.
198   Quoted in Hallberg 1978, 31. Originally from University of Hartford, Storrs, Olson collections, unpublished essay called "The Necessary Propositions". Italics mine, parentheses by Olson.
199   Olson 1969, 102.
200   Hallberg 1978, 32.
201   Quoted in Hallberg 1978, 34, originally from Olson's unpublished essay "Projective Verse II".

in the first Letter of Maximus, emphasising the action and motion in limited but endless space. Here the dance is metaphorizing the present condition of which man has to become. Bodily movement in space and time is the dance.

For Olson, as one may observe from his presentations in *Muthologos*, the republic of letters is actually analogical to the republic of politics, of citizens: each poet creates their own representation of reality, which are then contested at the market of readers. The practice of writing, as the practice of politics is then seen as shaping one's own vision based on perception and grasp of the present situation, and creating the basis for going forward, to let the past be the past.

7   THE THIRD DIMENSION

The seeds of progress from Olson's poetry to new dimensions were already sown at its start. The new generation, the language poets, celebrated some parts of Olson's poetry, especially the first part of Maximus, but saw that he became caught in the egocentrism he wanted to dispose of.[202] The language poets did what Olson had done to Pound years earlier: They took Olson's failures as an opening to a new direction.

After the first 23 letters of Maximus, Olson thought he was in trouble. He could not follow the ideas he presented in "Projective Verse", but got more embedded in the ideas Pound had represented and, while using historical material and sometimes copying old documents in verbatim, his work started to look like new version of Pound's Cantos and moved away from the perception of the objects to their interpretation as parts of a system of events. Olson made a self-critical note about first poems in his own copy of the book:

> watch 23 r (+ check over 11-22) to make sure the clear
> stain of polis is on anything…
>
> polis as such stopping expressing itself as ´eyes` or
> whatever ´message` + started coming out of its ears (or
> like a crack across the mouth instead[203]

When Olson started to stress the importance of the "eye" in his poems, they lost the kinetic energy he wanted to follow in his "Projective Verse". The loss of energy had its own effects on the content. His polis stayed in a static situation, history was no more "a verb" but an object of inquiry. The idea of "making it a

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202   On the critique by language poets concerning the Maximus Poems, see for example Steve McCaffery (2001): "Charles Olson's Art of Language"; Charles Bernstein (2001a): "Undone Business"; and Bob Perelman (1996): The Marginalization of Poetry: Language Writing and Literary History.
203   Quoted in Christensen 1979, 135.

new" collapsed into a nostalgic vision of the lost world, reminiscent of Pound's lament of "lost city of Dioce" in his *Pisan Cantos*. The paradox is that Olson too enmeshed in his own politics and, instead of continuing his "cultural revolution" in language by going by language, he started to nitpick the impasses of Gloucester's local politics. Scope of his vision shifted from "RE-BASING" the political to the personal politics of a citizen.[204]

It can be argued that Olson's projections added a new dimension to his egocentric style of writing. There no longer was the single unifying factor of the author that held the work together, even the image as the essential component of the work was gone. Olson set aside the ego by multiplying it. And the static image started to move in the Olson's kinetic fields. All these elements were derived from "weak spots" in Pound's writing, of lapses in his egocentric imagism. Olson saw an important aspect in Pound's lapses, it was a chance to develop a new methodology that would put emphasis on the poetry as a medium and acknowledge the factor of materiality of sign as the starting point of a poem. Poetry is a process, which happens between language and its user, and language should not be readily consumed. Language is not just an innocent carrier of a message, but the essence of the poem that creates a projection inside the poem and to the world.

Many of the elements Olson proposed are present in language writing. For the language poets, it is essential to think of writing as a process, and not to think of text as a commodity but as a relationship between text and reader. The openness of the text, seeing the text as a field instead of an object is also very relevant idea for them. For example, Bruce Andrews sees the post-modern idea of surface, a horizontal axis, as essential to language poetry:

> The vertical axis (downwards, as a ladder tempting us) need not structure the reading – for it does not structure the text. That is what I would mean by calling it non-referentially organized writing, as a subset of language-centered writing. Horizontally organized principles, without an insistent (that is to say, imposed) depth. Secret meaning is not a hidden layer, but a hidden organization of the surface. Not latent, but quite handsomely manifest.
>
> Meaning is not produced *by* the sign, but by the contexts we bring to the potentials of language – not enforced by a vertical elevator, the mark of the double, the vacation. The impulse toward excavation, toward contextual explanation, can be put in the background – for such a hollowing out the lower depths, of labyrinthine caves of signification, goes on within the gaps. All light, all in broad daylight: bring your own context. Radiant surfaces; myth.[205]

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204 These two dimensions, the profoundly political aspect of his poetry as an exploration of language, and its politics as a reaction or antithesis of current politics, are what separate two schools of Olson's followers: on one hand those stressing the active politics in his vision of polis, like Amiri Baraka, who stress that poetry is in itself a part of politics, and has direct political effects; and on the other hand those from the school of language poets who grasped Olson's idea of textual revolution and stressed that poetry was only the beginning of politics. Olson seems to have both aspects in his Maximus: poetry as politics and poetry as political.

205 Andrews 1984, 33. Italics by Andrews.

Charles Bernstein also stressed the surface, the field, as a key element of poetry. No direction should be given by some preconceived scheme, because "any prior principle of composition violates the priority I want give to the inherence of surface, to the total necessity in the durational space of the poem for every moment to *count*"[206]. This principle of composition could be seen as parallel to what Olson saw as his biggest failures in his *Maximus Poems*, his inability "to make sure the clear stain of polis is on anything", and that the static "eye" as a vertical element has become too prevalent over the kinetics of breath as a horizontal element.

Language as medium is the most important aspect in language writing. Language poets agree with Olson, and partly with Pound also, it is not the content itself that is the most interesting aspect of political poetry, but what is special to the poetry is its method. Bruce Andrews has summarized it as follows:

> [T]his is the reflexivity we should be on the look-out for – social kind, that comes through *method* (of writing, of reading) – not (just) `content´. Method as prescription – posing problems, eliciting reading. Nothing passes unalarmed. Limits aren't located until they are pushed. Rewriting the social body – as a body to body transaction: to write *into operation* a `reading body` which is more & more self-avowedly social. Lay bare the device, spurn the facts as not self-evident. A V-effect, to combat the obvious; to stand out = to rebel; counter-embodiment, with our "paper bullets of the brain". All this points to look at language as medium – in two respects: first, as sign system; second, as discourse or ideology. Concentric circles, one inside the other. In both cases, though, the same concern: stop repressing the active construction, the *making* of meaning, the *making* of sense – social sense.[207]

Andrews' lists problems inherent in current writing: "The usual assumption about unmediated communication, giving ´voice` to ´individual` ´experience´, the transparency of the medium (language), the instrumentalizing of language, pluralism [.]"[208]

But there was a third dimension as well, a new axis, which both Pound and Olson hinted at but which they never elaborated profoundly. The third dimension is the materiality of the sign.

Pound was interested in Chinese ideograms, and Olson was fascinated by the Mayan hieroglyphs. Concerning glyphs, Olson wrote that

> [A] glyph is a design or composition which stands in its own space and exists – whether cut in stone or written by brush – both by the act of the plastic imagination which led to its invention in the first place and by the act of its presentation in any given case since. Both involved – I shall try to show – a graphic discipline of the highest order… Simultaneously, the art is "language" because each of these glyphs has meanings arbitrarily assigned to it, denotations and connotations.[209]

Olson was interested in how image and sign became a material unity that is not outside the physical world but an act in between the physical and the virtual,

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206 Bernstein 2001, 38.
207 Andrews 1998, 24.
208 Ibid. 23.
209 Quoted in McCaffery 2001, 55.

but never actually developed this idea extensively. For Olson, words did play on a field against each other, creating kinetics of the text through juxtaposition and other means, a poem must "be a high energy-construct and, at all points, an energy-discharge"[210]. But language poetry added "hyper-level" to this.[211] As the referent cannot be controlled, words play also at the virtual level, in the mind of the reader, creating new connections and disconnections.

According to Charles Bernstein, Olson became too entangled with his ideas of place and breath so that textual revolution was halted: "Olson's overly literal insistence on breath and place too often distracts from the enactment of line and location as facts primarily of text", and his heroism turns into "a will to dominate language."[212] For Bernstein, the most important aspect of the *Maximus Poems* was its insistence on counter-hegemony, which he sees as political as well as poetical:

> The significance of Olson's alternative to the homogenizing, totalizing rhetoric of conventional literary practice is as much political as aesthetic. Olson attempted to create a work that would be as all-encompassing as that projected by the rhetoric of rationalism – a language, as Don Byrd puts it, 'inside which life can be conducted'. Both the passionate language of 'Letter 3' and the formal strategies of The Poems by Maximus are infused with this attempt to counter-hegemony (that is, full-scale alternative to the dominance of the ideologies of rationalism, stasis, etc.). But it may be that the epic demands of such counter-hegemony led Olson away from a strategy of maximal textual heterogeneity in order to hold onto the unity of the heroic conceit and unity of Maximus's historical and geographical – thematic – concerns.[213]

What Olson's counter-hegemonical projects lacks in its heroic seriousness, is where Bernstein finds his third dimension. According to Bernstein, Olsons's "phallocentric syntax [--] values the declarative more than the convoluted, grandiosity more than humor, assurance more than confusion"[214]. In his own poetry, Bernstein stresses these elements that direct the attention to hyper-level, to the level where meaning is not given but ambiguous, and where the reader is a participant in the process of meaning production. Opening up the hegemonic discourse is of the essence, and the aim is not to create a counter-discourse but leaves it open and does not force the reader to some predetermined scheme.

The problems of fighting hegemonic discourses became especially evident after 9/11. The language poets, even though in essence they are a movement which stresses the political aspect of poetry, remain outside the movement of "Poets Against the War". The case of Charles Bernstein reveals that their commitment to the ideas of language poetry is also a hindrance against direct participation and in this they more or less followed what Olson saw as his

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210 Olson 1997c, 240.
211 In an early essay by Charles Bernstein, this "hyper-level", "hypertext", is presented as an addition to what Olson did in his work. See Bernstein 2001..
212 Bernstein 2001a, 329.
213 Ibid. 331.
214 Ibid. 331. Barrett Watten has presented similar analysis in his Total Syntax, arguing that early Olson still had the idea of polyvocality, especially in his "Kingfishers", but in Maximus Poems declaratory tones could not veil the effect that it was Olson speaking throughout the whole poem.

failure: to not follow one's poetical ideas and to give too much importance to current politics hinders one from continuing the cultural revolution, the "true change" which poetry can achieve.

8 WAITING FOR THE BARBARIANS – AMERICAN POLITICAL POETRY AFTER 9/11

Poetry and crises in society seem to have an intimate connection. Three major events, the Civil War, the Holocaust and 9/11 loom large in the American poetical landscape. Wars that have affected the United States have often been turning points in poetry.

As Simon Featherstone[215] states, war poetry "seems to insist on the closeness of writing to often appalling personal experience", and is least open to any kind of literary intrusion. Often war poetry has been considered as a special, isolated case of literary history. He points out that when reading war poetry alongside with literary and theoretical ideas of the time of its writing, one may notice war poetry draws from the same resources as did peace time poetry, even though impulse for writing was the extremity of the experience it transformed to poetry. The development of modernism went hand in hand with the experience of the First World War. Often poetry turns into metapoetry, questioning the meaning and importance of poetry, its relevance for the situation at hand.

Featherstone's focus is on poetry of two World Wars. In American poetry war poetry emerged in greater magnitude during the Civil War. A large part of Whitman's poetry focuses on war or its aftermath. For him war was a great tragedy, but not outside his poetical scope and did not happen in isolation. His view on war was such that conflicts and disagreements should be dealt with in poetry and politics; he urged a move towards a "saner war of politics".

The First World War bought with it modernist experimental poetry, which was partly related to war experiences, or even glorifying it, as was the case with the futurists and especially Marinetti. The imagery of war was embedded in T.S. Eliot's *Waste Land*, and was based on his critique of war enthusiasm.

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215   Featherstone 1995, 1.

During the war, Eliot wrote that "We must learn to take poetry seriously," and "all this war enthusiasm" doesn't even take the war seriously.[216]

The next watershed in poetry was WWII. Seen from a more general perspective, American poetry since early modernism had followed basically two different sets of tracks: on one hand there was emphasis on poetical experience and speech, intuition, and natural language; on the other hand was poetry of language and alienation effect, artificiality, and experimental language. Both seemed to be at an impasse after WWII, and new combinations emerged. Post-holocaust poetry may be seen as a synthesis of experimental language and inner vision. Poetry turned towards subjectivism. Subjective analysis of factual reality and its kaleidoscopic composition was a nouvelle vogue of the 1950's poetry.

Starting in the late 1950's, the US became increasingly involved in Vietnam and a "new generation" brought a turn towards public poetry especially among the so called beat poets. This was a poetry of speech and proclamation, and it in a sense re-politicized the poetry. For the beat poets, poetry was a place for public proclamations, criticism, and political judgment. As a reaction to beat poetry, what they saw as the naturalization of poetic language, a more nuanced version of avantgarde was born in the early the 1970's, this time taking its inspiration from European deconstructive thinkers and putting its attention on hegemonic discourses and language.

This turn is evident even in one of the Vietnam War poems, John Balaban's "After Our War" which asks after the effects of war in language, in aesthetics:

> After the war [--] / will the ancient tales still tell us new truths? / Will the myriad world surrender new metaphor? / After our war, how will love speak?

According to H. Bruce Franklin, starting in full effect during the Vietnam war, war poetry seems "to erode the barriers between poetry as literature of the elite and poetry as relished by the masses".[217] During times of crisis, poetry seems to be an appropriate medium to share ones experiences and give consolation. After 9/11 the world wide web gave an extra boost to sharing and writing poetry and made it accessible. A poetry boom may be one of the factors that puts the established poets to re-examine their writing, and especially in its relation to masses and politics.

One may notice that during the crises established poets, the poetical elite or academic, seems to go towards a "slower reading" of events. Poetry should be taken seriously, not in terms of the masses but in terms of poetry itself and what is specific to it as art form.

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216 Quoted in Simmers 2006. Online: http://greatwarfiction.wordpress.com/tseliots-letter-to-the-nation.
217 H. Bruce Franklin, quoted in Wiest, Barbier and Robins 2009, 220.

8.1　Two caesuras

> The whole play of history and power is disrupted by
> This event, but so, too, are the conditions of analysis,
> You have to take your time.
>
> - Jean Baudrillard: The Spirit of Terrorism

Poetic responses reflect the more general ideas about poetry and politics in different poetry schools. Schools of American poetry have been trying to answer the challenge of earlier catastrophe, that of the holocaust as symbolized by Auschwitz, along the lines marked by Theodor Adorno, and those responses provide an interesting point of comparison. One may say that especially the American language poetry was partly developed around the postmodern analysis of the holocaust and the linguistic problems its representations occasioned. For them, 9/11 appeared as a challenging touchstone of the validity of their poetic and political ideas. Poetry was put to the test, they were challenged to apply their poetical ideas to the present situation and to make ad hoc political judgments.

Several postmodern writers saw the holocaust and its ultimate symbol, Auschwitz, as a *caesura* in modern western history. For Jean-François Lyotard it serves as a symbolic end of the (common) project of modernity[218] and as a first and the most important example for introducing his idea of différend, incommensurability, something that cannot yet be phrased and thus leaves as silent, waiting, and means the end of speculative in its Hegelian sense. Lacoue-Labarthe has called it a revelation of the essence of the west, the end of the western idea: "In fact God died at Auschwitz, in any case the God of the Greco-Christian West"[219]. For Lacoue-Labarthe, Auschwitz is explicitly "the caesura of our times". It symbolizes the impasse resulting from regimes of terror, and because of those regimes, the impasse of the idea of modernity and its crucial ideologies of nationalism and human rights.

Seen from the perspective of the 21st century, the post- 1945 era has been very much a post-Auschwitz era. Postmodern discourse, which set Auschwitz as a symbol of pure evil took its form during the 1960's. However, even earlier responses to the Nazi-terror emphasized the camps as an end of one ideology and stressed the need for a new kind of thinking.

It is clearly visible even from the earliest texts about the camps, from the first witness statements and memoirs, that the question of representation was acute: terror regimes took their actions so far beyond imagination, that new language was needed; and new language had already been created inside the camps, as Primo Levi proves**:** "We say 'hunger,' we say 'tiredness,' 'fear' and

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218　Lyotard 1988, 90.
219　Lacoue-Labarthe 1990, 37.

'pain,' we say 'winter' and they are different things. They are free words, created and used by free men who lived in comfort and suffering in their homes"[220]. Giorgio Agamben has called this "the aporia of Auschwitz"[221], a reality so real that words escape their true meaning.

Reactions to the 2001 World Trade Center (hereafter WTC) terror act were very similar when compared to the reactions to Nazi terror, the holocaust occasionally served as a model for reactions. What was prevalent in many reactions was the visuality of the act. Words were hard to find so reaction was a silent gaze. 9/11 was described by Robert Kagan as a "the return of history", contrasting Francis Fukuyama's thesis about the end of history. Jean Baudrillard described it as an "absolute event"[222]. Comparisons were also made to September 1st 1939 and Pearl Harbor. Afterwards there have been several interpretations about its meaning in history, and one constantly repeated phrase is it being a caesura in history, a conception criticized later by Jürgen Habermas[223]

The uniqueness of the event was quickly established. Comparisons were made to other later attacks, but also were they quickly objected, one should not make comparison. Recently one comparison has been made between 9/11 and the 2008 attacks in Mumbai, some called it "India's 9/11". The comparison itself, obviously, makes 9/11 a "benchmark" and already in that way unique. Amitav Ghosh, in a New York Times article denying the accuracy of the comparison, indicates that those attacks were not commensurable because 9/11 was something never seen in US history, whereas India had a long history of terrorism.[224]

Ghosh's article sums up the metaphorization of 9/11 in public opinion: "As a metaphor "9/11" is invested not just with the memory of what happened in Manhattan and at the Pentagon in 2001, but also with the penumbra of emotions that surround the events: the feeling that "the world will never be the same," the notion that this was "the day the world woke up"" As with many other reactions, for Ghosh the most essential thing is not the attack itself but what followed.

8.2   Public poetry and 9/11

Poetic responses to 9/11 have provoked several articles about the public role of poetry. As has been noted, poems began to surface in public places and public forums right after the attack, and poetry most often took a form of lament or apocalypse. As an event that was visual but its reasons and effects not fully

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220   Levi 1996, 123.
221   Agamben 2005, 12.
222   Baudrillard 2003, 4.
223   Borradori 2003, 27.
224   Ghosh, 2008. Online:
        http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/03/opinion/03ghosh.html?pagewanted=all

comprehended, subjective and fragmentary forms of poetry superseded prose as the prime medium, particularly for community building, and social message in general.[225]

The aftermath of the attack was the heyday of the public poetry, poetry was published in newspapers and new forms of media in an amount unseen since the 1960's; and reminiscent of the public poetry of the beat era, poetry slam, or public poetry reading happenings, were reawakened. Even the White House tried to take part in the new success of poetry by inviting poets to discuss poetry in a symposium called "Poetry and the American Voice". However, responses were manifold. Many poets celebrated a new wave of patriotism, others were more critical and pointed their criticism towards the Bush administration or even towards Western society as a whole.

For poetry, both events, the holocaust and 9/11, set an enormous challenge to what comes to representation, language and vocabulary. Adorno set Auschwitz as an ending point of one cultural epoch in his statement about the poetry after Auschwitz. For Charles Olson, Buchenwald represented an end but also a new start, he found an analogy between Buchenwald and Altamira. For Jerome Rothenberg, after Auschwitz there was only poetry.

Poets remarks about 9/11 hastily followed the pattern. In October 2001, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, who has seen both WWII and 9/11, declared that poetry should be classified "as B.S and A.S. – Before and After September 11". Charles Bernstein labeled his 12.9.2001 online-poem as "Today is the next day of the rest of your life". For Amiri Baraka 9/11 "signifies the end of "Weimar 2""[226].

One comparison between 9/11 and the holocaust was made by Galway Kinnell. His poem "When the Towers Fell" (2002) quotes extensively from a holocaust-poem, Paul Celan's "Todesfuga." Kinnell's poem, using now his own words, sets 9/11 into a long lineage of violence and terror: "This is not a comparison but a corollary, / not a likeness but a lineage / in the twentieth-century history of violent death".[227]

There are several obvious differences between the events and memory politics of the events. Reactions to 9/11 were similar to the reactions to Auschwitz, but reactions to the acts of 2001 were immediate, whereas it took years to shape the image of Auschwitz we have today. More importantly, Auschwitz was not visible at the time of the events, it became visible only after the war, and even then it was visible only via witnesses, of the actual place only ruins were left. 9/11 was followed in live broadcast via television by millions. Visuality, time and memory were themes also raised by the poets.

Soon after 9/11 the United States' Poet Laureate, Billy Collins stated that it is not poets role to give direct, collective response to events, but stressed poetry's inwardness:

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225   Alkalay-Gut 2005, 257.
226   Ferlinghetti, quoted in Alkalay-Gut 2005, 257; Charles Bernstein 2006, 20; Amiri Baraka 2003, 51.
227   Kinnell 2002.

> In the aftermath of the catastrophe of Sept. 11, which was nothing less than a psychic invasion of the United States, many people I know turned intuitively to poetry as a source of sanity and perhaps even consolation. Poetry has always accommodated loss and keening; it may be said to be the original grief counseling center. But American poets will have a hard time if they attempt a direct response to these events, because poetry by its nature moves us inward, not outward to the public and the collective.
>
> A poem about mushrooms or about a walk with the dog is a more eloquent response to Sept. 11 than a poem that announces that wholesale murder is a bad thing.[228]

As the attacks were seen by millions of people all around the world, the line between a collective and an intimate experience became blurred, in a sense everyone in the world was there. Collins puts poetry in its traditional role in non-political sphere, but as a source of consolation.

Poet Alicia Ostriker, like Collins, saw the poets task not in direct response, but also saw in it political potential:

> The writer's task in times of trouble is, I believe, first of all not therapeutic but diagnostic. For we can't be healed if we do not know what our sickness is. The task is clarity. In the present time it is very hard to know how to respond to the terrorism that has attacked us, which is at once so horrible and such a mirror of the terror which we as a nation have unleashed against others—in our ignorance and pride.[229]

As is evident on the basis of Ostriker's lines, there was a need for slower responses and reactions that also analysed "us" instead of just blaming "them", the attackers. There surely were many poets addressing the questions Ostriker raised, from openly political to more nuanced critique of language.

8.3   New barbarism

"To write poetry after Auschwitz is an act of barbarism" – Adorno (1949)

Several holocaust poets have emphasized the death of poetic and lyric language, the death of metaphor, and the death of meaning. As a solution, they have turned to plain facts. This is how, as one of the firsts, Charles Olson saw the case with Buchenwald: "It is not obscure. We are the new born, and there are no flowers. / Document means there are no flowers / and no parenthesis."[230] The realm of facts was supposed to be the only escape from Buchenwald, compared to Altamira cave in Olson's poem. Imagination was not enough for comprehending the meaning of the holocaust, so the poet becomes a reporter.

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228   Collins 2001. Online:
         http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/2001-09-25-ncguest1.htm.
229   Ostriker 2001, online: http://itsaboutimewriters.homestead.com/ostrikerletter.html
230   Olson 1997, 46.

In Germany, the documentary style was taken to its extreme by Peter Weiss, and some years later in America by Charles Reznikoff. They both used only the words of others, derived from the post-war court statements. The only room left for the writer was the selection from the raw material. Jerome Rothenberg had a similar approach, although in a more nuanced manner. He derived material from witnesses, from the diaries and songs of locals. What Rothenberg seeks is the poetry of the dead, of the silent victims. Therefore he penetrates the landscapes, the mass graves, the ugliness of all that misery. His poems are echoes from the graves. The most the poet can do is to record the whispers. Poetry is in the scraps of language, in the faded memories.

Seen from a more general perspective, since early modernism, American poetry had followed basically two different sets of tracks: on one hand there was emphasis on poetical experience and speech, intuition, and natural language; on the other hand was poetry of language and alienation, artificiality, and experimental language. Both seemed to be at an impasse after WWII, and new combinations emerged. Post-holocaust poetry may be seen as a synthesis of experimental language and inner vision. Poetry turned towards subjectivism. Subjective analysis of factual reality and its kaleidoscopic composition was a nouvelle vogue of the 1950's poetry. War in Vietnam and "new generation" brought back, starting in the late 1950's, a turn towards public poetry especially among the so called beat poets, a poetry of speech and proclamation, and it in a sense re-politicized the poetry. For the new generation poetry was a place for public proclamations, criticism, and political judgment. As a reaction to this, what they saw as a naturalization of poetic language, a more nuanced version of avantgarde was born in the early 1970's, this time taking its inspiration from European deconstructive thinkers. Since then, the prevailing division has been between the torchbearers of beat poetry and the group of language poets.

From its beginning the so called language poetry was connected to the themes of the holocaust and especially to philosophical reactions to it. American poet Lyn Hejinian connects the development of language poetry to post-holocaust themes raised by Levinas and Derrida. To her, the holocaust meant a serious semantic crisis, and had to be faced by means of new critical analysis about the possibilities of creating meaning at the textual level. According to her analysis, Adorno's statement about the barbarism of poetry after Auschwitz could be interpreted two ways. First what happened in Auschwitz is and must remain, incomprehensible, and it is thus without "meaning"; it is not possible to create or discover meaning in the context of Auschwitz. "All possibilities for meaning have been suspended or crushed"[231].

However, Hejinian sees that Adorno's pronouncement may be read as an as a challenge and behest to write poetry. The word barbarism originally means something foreign such as "not speaking the same language" and such is precisely the task of poetry: "not to speak the same language as Auschwitz"[232]. The poet must assume the position of the barbarian and take a creative,

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231   Hejinian 2000, 325.
232   Ibid. 326.

analytic, and often oppositional stance, to occupy and be occupied by foreignness, and by the barbarism of strangeness. Poetry thus creates a new chance, a new path and links for building and creating linguistic and imaginary spaces for encounters, for heterogeneous *polis*. In this way of thought, while stepping outside the dominant discourse and emphasising the arbitrariness of every linguistic position, every textual link is in a sense arbitrary and thus an opening for politicization.

For language poetry, instead of direct participation suggested by the beat poets, the political stance was not a direct opposition played on the field of politics but outside its realm, in an imaginary space finding new openings at the level of text. Their challenge was not to go into the politics, but to politicize the language itself. As the poets set themselves in to the political landscape as an explorer and chart its foundations, they become, as Schelling proclaims, "unacknowledged legislators of the world".

9 FACING 9/11: CHARLES BERNSTEIN

Charles Bernstein, a language poet since the 1970's saw the task of poetry in a similar manner as Hejinian, and for Bernstein the question and quest of poetry is to grasp the un-representable and to make it understandable: "poetry is a necessary way to register the unrepresentable loss of the Second War"[233]. His 9/11 poetry echoes these themes of meaning and representation.

Bernstein reacted to 9/11 very rapidly, he wrote several online poems about the attack the very same day it happened, and in a form of poetic diary pondered its effects for several days; his style is similar to a report. His poem is written from a witness position; Bernstein was present in Manhattan at the time of the attacks.

Bernstein's first reactions are based on the visual effects and emphasize the silence in front of the despair and chaos. Questions of representation and meaning take the forefront: "What I can't describe is reality [--] This could have not happened. This hasn't happened. / This is happening / It's 8:23 in New York"[234]. Bernstein does not represent but tries to capture the presence of the event. His "happening" comes close to the Lyotard's idea of an event as break in the linearity of history, a moment which defines before and after but can only be judged post-event. It is also notable that timing and placing are central to the poem; it is not universal but "here and now". The event is without structured meaning, which could only be recreated via perspective and linkage, through post-event conceptualisation.

The next day Bernstein ponders more on the visuality:

> the image is greater than reality
> the image can't approach reality
> the reality has no image
> [--]
> our eyes are burning[235].

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233   Bernstein 1992, 217.
234   Bernstein 2006, 19.
235   Ibid. 22.

Space and perspective for creation of meaning disappears as the burning towers are merged with eyes, perceiving the subject becomes one with the event.

Paranoid feelings in Manhattan were present days after the attack, but Bernstein starts to decipher reactions, not the attack itself, on the very next day: "´It's a bit ominous,´ a friend writes, ´the way the politicos are speaking about talking with one voice´" / – I am just trying to get by talking with no voice"[236].

The situation post-9/11 challenged Bernstein to reconsider his earlier statements about generalizations: "The violence of every generalization crushes the hopes for a democracy of thoughts"[237]. Following his earlier ideas, he expressed an urgent need to dismantle the newly awaken flow of generalizations with their simplifying rhetoric of "us against them". "No voice" is one possible answer to this. However, in order to judge the event, one has suppress it, to conceptualize. Here is the ultimate paradox of decision and judgement: every generalization is violent to the event itself, but in order to judge, it is a necessity.

In a letter written on 22.11.01 which was also immediately published online and included in his 9/11 poems, Bernstein starts create distance from the immediate and emotional reactions and to change his witness positions towards the one of an analyst; he expresses the need to put the event into a perspective: "One has to fight ferociously with oneself to take the time our from 9-11 consciousness. But without taking break, there can't be any perspective."[238] His 2006 book *Girly Man* is one attempt to answer to the paradoxes of non-representability and conceptualizations.

Bernstein's later poetic responses became a form of discourse analysis, he tried to dismantle the overwhelming and hegemonic, Manichean discourse of war. Reiterating his earlier ideas, the most genuine form of opposition is to fight against the exhaustion, sedimentation of language to empty phrases. By juxtaposing its own statements, the empty rhetoric of hegemonic discourses can be unveiled. There is politics also between black and white. Bernstein refuses to make his ultimate judgement, but opens the prevailing ones.

Girly Man is a step towards a nuanced analysis of war and terrorism. In *Girly Man* Bernstein explores a range of alternate paths to the with-us-or-against-us rhetoric of the popular media as well as the anti-liberal tendencies of current politics. Liberal, "girly man", was doomed to disappear because liberals cannot fight. The title of the collection comes from Arnold Schwarzenegger's speech, given in 2004, in which he attacked liberals for their lack of the fighting spirit and honesty: "if they don't have the guts, I call them girlie men".[239] Bernstein's response was this:

> We girly men are not afraid
> Of uncertainty or reason or interdependence

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236 Ibid. 21.
237 Bernstein 2002, 113.
238 Bernstein 2006, 31.
239 Schwarzenegger has used the phrase several times, first time already in 1988. Connotations have been just about the same in all statements.

> We think before we fight, then think some more
> Proclaim our faith in listening, in art, in compromise.[240]

Reading *Girly Man* Tim Peterson sees an important shift in Bernstein's position after 9/11: "He accomplishes this by shifting the target of critique. Rather than the earlier poetry in which a monologic consumer Self appeared as chief symptom of cultural malaise, Bernstein's more recent writing is a battle cry against the monologic implications of Unilateralism."[241]

At a reading for the anthology "Enough!" in 2003, Bernstein expanded his criticism towards the overall structure of political language:

> "At these trying times we keep being hectored toward moral discourse, toward turning our work into digestible messages. This too is a casualty of the war machine, the undermining of the value of the projects of art, of the aesthetic... "Unilateralism" is not just the course the Executive branch is pursuing, with disastrous consequence, in foreign policy, but also the policy it pursues domestically, in its assault on our liberties, on the poor, and indeed on our aspirations for a democratic society."[242]

Bernstein's book takes this challenge seriously, and tries to find new paths out of simplistic "moral discourse". How it is possible to have a political position without "moral discourse" and direct, simplified communication?

To answer this, Bernstein goes back to the roots of American political poetry, starting from the problematics of subjectivism. Peterson summarizes the solution like this: "One answer is to celebrate one's own dividedness, emphasizing the parallels between provisionality, doubt, and dissent."

This answer is remarkably in unison with the ideas of Walt Whitman, who created his own version of dividedness and solution to the American paradox of *e pluribus unum* after the disaster of the Civil War, writing "my self I sing, yet utter the word democratic en-masse". The connection to Whitman is also obvious at the more general level, Bernstein's *Girly Man* has a strong pacifistic tendency and this links his text to Whitman's ideas about a "saner war of politics", where Whitman saw poetry as a continuation of politics, and as evasion of war.

Bernstein returns via Whitmanian contradictions to the writing, admits and celebrates contradictions, and expresses the physicality, or corporality, of the text: "Now I am getting weary of ideology and would like to give it up entirely but it seems the more I give it up the more it has me by the throat. I write so I can breathe."[243] Hints such as this were visible in his immediate responses to 9/11, when he wrote about "burning eyes"; but even this subjectivism is not on firm ground. Holding oneself as a starting point of perceptions is the position with the most contradiction: "Don't ask me to be frank. I don't even know if I can be myself."[244]

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240 Bernstein 2006, 180.
241 Peterson 2008.
242 Bernstein's statement was later published online:
http://www.arras.net/circulars/archives/000312.html
243 Bernstein 2006, 162.
244 Ibid. 162.

Bernstein re-examines subjectivism and extends that project to language itself: "Or let's say trying to re-imagine the possibilities of sentience through the material sentience of language." [245] This extension hints towards a phenomenological theory of perception. It was the ability to have perceptions and draw conclusions from them that first provoked Bernstein to analyse, even in his instant replies to 9/11 more deeply, so in this sense one may read the rest of his book as an attempt to decipher of his first reactions.

Whitman's position is a starting point for Bernstein. He charts the dead ends of Whitmanian style, one of the most central being Whitman's use of language as an unproblematic medium for communication. In his poem "Thank you for saying Thank you" Bernstein attacks the naïve conception of direct communication and natural language,

> There are no new
> concepts, no
> theories, no
> ideas to confuse
> you. This poem
> has no intellectual
> pretensions. It is
> purely emotional.
> It fully expresses
> the feelings of the
> author: *my feelings,*
> *the person speaking*
> *to you now.*
> It is all about
> communication.
> Heart to heart.[246]

The reader ought to challenge, interpret and open the text instead of placing it into a ready made chart, and Bernstein parodies the simplistic readings and writings: "A hundred / readers would each / read the poem / in an identical / manner & derive / the same message / from it"[247]

This is also a parody of Bernstein's first reaction to 9/11 and a sarcastic urge towards "slower reading", towards a more analytical style. Bernstein also refers to this perspective in the aforementioned poetical reports from the days of the attack. Bernstein follows the formalistic paths while seeing the purpose of art as a prolonged perception:

> The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important. [248]

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245   Ibid. 162.
246   Ibid. 7.
247   Ibid. 8.
248   Shklovsky 1965, 12.

The poems in *Girly Man* most charged with polemical and political topics are often deliberately clumsy, "bad poetry" filled with a direct message, like the leading poem of the book "Ballad of the Girly Man". Even the title of the poem is ironic, a ballad being an archaistic genre. Through the collection Bernstein plays with a situation where moral certainty is connected to an incapability to form an (aesthetic) judgment. It is only those girly men who understand and stand uncertainties, but the war is not for them:

> War is the extension of prose by other means.
>
> War is never having to say you're sorry.
>
> War is the logical outcome of moral certainty.
>
> War is conflict resolution for the aesthetically challenged.
>
> War is a slow boat to heaven and an express train to hell.
>
> War is the first resort of scoundrels.
>
> War is the legitimate right of the powerless to resist the violence of the powerful.
>
> War is delusion just as peace is imaginary.[249]

The poem is full of clichés, paraphrasing for example Clausewitz, and at its drippiest moments even the movie Love Story, using its line "Love means never having to say you're sorry."

"War is the extension of prose" is, as a starting line, the key to the whole poem. Bernstein paraphrases his own words written in 2002: "*Poetics is the continuation of poetry by other means.* Just as poetry is the continuation of politics by other means"[250]. I see this as one of the most important statements when considering politics in Bernstein's poetry. Poetry continues politics, it is itself not politics, but its mission is in re-charting and reconsidering it. "Poetics" is one step further, towards the comprehensive analysis of language and its foundations.

Bernstein's *Girly Man* plays with multiple styles. Bernstein uses parody and irony to show how some forms based on natural language fail to really oppose the regime because they use the same metaphors and/or the same language as the holders of power. Behind that use lies an assumption of a progressivity of certain forms, or a reactionary nature of others. Despite his play with styles and genres, Bernstein supposes a non-rhetorical connection between content and form, the connection is deeper, organic.

In his *A Poetics* Bernstein affirms this, new forms have more political and poetical value: "I care most for poetry as dissent, including formal dissent"[251]. A poet cannot rely on the forms of the past but must "invent new tools and forms

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249   Bernstein 2006, 149.
250   Bernstein 2002, 160. Italics by Bernstein.
251   Ibid. 2.

that begin to meet the challenges of the ever-changing present"[252]. Progressivity is thus an issue of "new tools", not new ideas or new configuration of the issues at hand. The implication is that these new tools can penetrate deeper to the hegemonic discourses, and in this his ideas are in unison with most of the writers defending the special nature of poetry in society. Specifically American is the obsession with the "new".

Basically Bernstein shares Plato's the suspicion of natural language, language that stems from intuition. Language based on non-reflective intuition hides the ideological assumption behind it, and it also hides the process from the premises to the conclusion, and is thus non-repeatable "truth" which one can only accept or reject. An open, democratic form of poetry discloses that naturalized language and shows the structure of discourse; shows how language works and deceives. However, it is not purely negative: unlocking the discourse shows its failures but also its possibilities, and also stops the sedimentation of language to ever-repeating patterns. From the political perspective it is interesting that Bernstein also sees a chance for compromise, which has been condemned as morally inferior by schwartzeneggers.

9.1   Facing 9/11: Amiri Baraka

Amiri Baraka has been among the most openly political poets in the USA since the 1960's. As a member of the Black Mountain College group of poets, and as a student of Charles Olson, Baraka joined the strand of poets of open form and speech. Baraka saw the speech as a progressive element in poetry, instead of the image-based compositions of politically reactionary high modernism, and a channel for newly awakened public poetry.

Baraka has been presenting positions of the civil rights movement since his early days and continues to struggle for more democratic society. One of his central themes has been reparations for the black and poor whites; the charge for the lacking reparations is the most central issue in his prose writing. According to Baraka, the promises given after the Civil War have not even yet been fulfilled.

The 9/11 poem Baraka is most well known for an enormous public reaction the poem created. It is a poem which challenged the orthodox responses to the attack. Baraka was accused of being an anti-Semite, because in his poem he hinted that Israel knew about the attack. Public condemnation resulted: after attempts to get Baraka resign from his position as a Poet Laureate of New Jersey failed, the title itself was abolished. Baraka's controversial poem was called "Somebody Blew Up America".

The controversial poem was dismissed due to five lines of his long poem, and unfortunately those are usually the only lines quoted. It is a provocation, and when taken out of the context, possibly a dangerous one:

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252   Ibid. 3.

> Who knew the World Trade center was gonna get
>> bombed
> who told 4000 Israeli workers at the Twin Towers
>> to stay home that day
>>> why did Sharon stay away?[253]

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL), among others, read Baraka's poem as a manifestation of anti-semitism; strange enough when considering, for example, these lines: "Who put the Jews in ovens, / And who helped them do it / Who said "America First"[254]. The ADL and others ignored the obvious distinction between the state of Israel and Jews as people. The poem's target is not Israel, not Jews, but wealthy conservative (white) America. One may also notice; it is not even black versus white but the whites of McCarthy, the KKK and Bush: Baraka asks also who killed blacklisted Dashiell Hammett, or Alliende, or Liebknecht.

Baraka's poem starts as an inquiry of simplistic and vague definitions surrounding the current discourse about the attack. There is always "they" who say this and that, and poem asks them to be more precise, "They say (who say? Who do the saying)"[255]. The critical point is the identification of the enemies, which were easily labelled by the power holders as barbarians: "some terrorists // barbaric // A Rab"[256].

After the prologue, the poem continues for pages with a long series of questions, always asking "who". One has to notice the double meaning of "who", it could be read as an interrogative or relative pronoun, and Baraka gives the reader no hints which is appropriate, but leaves it open, it is both a question and accusation.

Whereas Bernstein dismantles the hegemonic discourse through parody and satire, Amiri Baraka creates his own opposite discourses or representations to contest the existing ones, Baraka's poem is based on juxtapositions.

Baraka puts 9/11 into a long chain of oppressive acts, for him 9/11 is part of a long narrative of white man's hegemony. 9/11 is not unique but comparable to almost anything, provocatively even for such things as Reichstags fire, holocaust, Armenian genocide or the crucifixion of Jesus. Lists are important for Baraka as naming things, naming is the starting point of opposition, and calling things as they are is what has been lacking, as demonstrated in his poem "In Town": "I seen something and you seen it too. You just cant / call its name"[257]. The poem is about an oppressed black man going through his life without knowing what the problem is, never asking why

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253 Baraka 2003, 41.
254 Ibid. 48.
255 Ibid. 42. In the online version of the poem the parenthesis has been left open making the poems references even more ambiguous. See www.amiribaraka.com
256 Ibid. 41.
257 Ibid. 18. "Cant" without hyphenation in original. leaving the exact meaning ambivalent.

but blaming the gods and destiny. The black man is a target and an object, never a subject, because he has no vocabulary to present ones subject position, and thus is the outsider in his own country and life. He has always to play the role of a scapegoat, as these lines in his poem "Jungle Jim flunks his screen test" suggest: "At the flickering light of skyscraper teeth on fire again, / and some peepas say / God did it. Was either him or somebody else colored."[258].

In Bakara's poem "Somebody Blew Up America" the litany of "who's" remind one of the innocent question posed by an Auschwitz inmate, who was according to Primo Levi given as an answer that "hier ist kein warum", "here is no why". In Baraka's poem there are only questions, asked in a loud voice. In contrast to sophisticated elegies where what is left are only silent images of mass death, and like most poems after 9/11, such as Bernstein's, which focus their attention on the images rather than words, Baraka shouts his demands for answers. It is obviously a sound poem, using its ever repeating "whos" like an owl, ending with an echoing sound: "WHO (+) who who / Whoooo and whoooooOOOOOOooooOoooo!"

Like Baraka's earlier poetry, his 9/11 poems play with musicality and sometimes refer to jazz, or other tunes as a basis of the poems' composition. In "Somebody Blew Up America" one may also notice his speech-like phrasings, he constantly uses dialects, vernacular remarks, and the language of the streets. The poem is obviously a public poem, made to be performed, and Baraka also has performed it several times. The rhythmical accusations or questions are even more effective when spoken out aloud.

Basically the poem is not about the answers but about asking, one should not accept "they" vs. "we" scheme without ever asking what lies behind it. "All night, all day if you listen, Like an Owl / Exploding in fire. We hear the questions rise / In terrible flame like the whistle of a crazy dog"[259].

Baraka's poem has obvious connection to the so called "truthers" –group, who say 9/11 was a set up, done by the government, or the Israelis, or by some other group, but not as the official version tells us. "Truthers" are frequently connected to the, deniers of the holocaust. Lyotard's *Différand* discusses the French version of revisionism, especially about Robert Faurisson. For Lyotard, denial of the holocaust is the extreme example of difference, there is such a wide gap between the systems that it never could possibly be bridged. But Baraka's poem asks so many question, includes so many hoaxes and misdeeds, including: the invention of Aids, the framing Rosenberg, killing the Kennedys , putting germs in the Indian's blankets; that they become irrelevant as statements, more important is to keep asking.

There is still another level where Baraka meets the group of deniers: the question of victims and victimizations. It has been a common assertion among the holocaust deniers that the holocaust was hoax developed to put the Germans into the status of perpetrators and hence evil, and Jews in the position of the victims, the good ones, in order to raise the Jews above the criticism and

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258   Ibid. 25.
259   Ibid. 50.

also to get benefits from that position by raising them to a position of moral superiority. It is quite obvious that Baraka attacks this moral position which was created in the USA after the 9/11 attack. Baraka's position has its roots in the 1960's, when especially among some of the leaders of Black nationalism Jews were seen as claiming the status of the only real victims, and thus leaving the Black movement in its shadow.

Baraka also goes along the lines of classical public and political poetry, which is characterized, according to Brian McHale[260], by a direct and simplified message. Classical public and political poetry speaks from the specific subject position of the oppressed ones, and inscribes itself to a larger historical meta-narrative. Baraka uses simplistic catch phrases of political struggle, like "help unite and liberate oppressed people," "will struggle and be free".

In the 1960's Baraka joined the ranks of the Black nationalism and promulgated separatism but since the 1980's has emphasized his Americanness and turned his attention towards reconciliation and reparation, although he still advocates radical reforms and litigation. This radical compromise is also at the core of his 9/11 reactions: "We want to be paid, [--] for all / the killings the fraud, the / lynchings, the missing justice"[261], "all these are suits, / specific litigation, as / represent we be like we, for / reparations for damages paid / to the Afro-American nation."[262], "that's what / my we is askin"[263]. This is the context in which his 9/11 poems should be read. His poems are part of his political fight, and poetry is a rhetorical device to achieve those goals, or to at least put them back on the political agenda.

9.2   Two Barbarians

Both Bernstein and Baraka use parataxis as their style, they juxtapose phrases and sentences without any clear connection. After reading both poetic works more closely than just by phrasing the lines which made the news, they seem to be quite challenging reading and to ask more than they answer. Lexical research is left to the reader to construct whatever the reader wishes from the poem. This style, it may be noted, has been very often used in the holocaust poetry; one seeks to visualise or to listen to the event and leave aside the intrusion of the writers position, ending very often on a fragmentary or eclectic style like in Celan. Parataxis, as more "democratic" than "imperialistic metonymy", seems to be a master trope of political poetry.

The problem with the "Poets Against the War" which was born in 2003, and other similar movements, is that they are bound up using the dominant discourse. *Girly Man* is a protest and dispute against this; it consciously takes a position of a supposed and condemned weaker part in which active speech

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260   McHale 2004, 167.
261   Baraka 2003, 35.
262   Ibid. 36.
263   Ibid. 37.

protest is replaced by nuanced opposition of silent and structural protest. Baraka's position seems to take as given the division between hawks and pigeons, while Bernstein steps outside this constellation. Both share the idea of poetry as an inquiry and analysis of hegemonic languages and, as politics is basically a linguistic act, the new politics needs new language to be implemented. The difference between the two positions is that Baraka's position does not rule out *apriori* political engagements.

Paradoxically, it is Bernstein who finally ends up elevating the 9/11 and Iraq into a sublime symbol, for him it is the question of Lyotardian *différend*, beyond speculative thinking, but a still a question and quest for a new speculative opening. For Baraka it is just politics among other issues and as open to political judgement as any other event, and part of his project of reparations. To use Lyotard's terminology, Baraka sees the event as a question of litigation, as presently political politics, while for Bernstein it is only possibly political and only possibly in the sphere of judgment. For Baraka, with his underlying position as a speaker for the oppressed, the central issue is the difference between the oppressed and oppressor, which could be resolved via litigation; for Bernstein the way is also open for compromise, but it is more like an endless compromise or an ever continuing analysis and dismantling, raising always the new points of difference to solve.

The most peculiar thing in the reactions to 9/11 has been that the most openly political strand of poetry, language poetry, has refused to join in the poets' movements against the war. In a sense there is nothing strange about this; the cautious attitude stems directly from their philosophy of language. Due to Bernstein's commitment to the philosophical genre of seeking and analysing the differénd instead of making any final judgements, he refuses to judge or to give a final meaning to the "event" and in a sense thus also refuses to "make politics". Closure in a sense of judgement and taking political stance would for him mean totalitarianism. Any judgement, any politicking would mean injustice to victims.

10   CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study started from an observation that in American poetry there is still a division between the poetics of expression starting from poet, and poetry that starts from language, and this division also reflects differences in respect of their political engagement. This division between speech poetry and language poetry leads to differing politics as well, which was my initial hypothesis when I began studying the poetry of Charles Olson. In Olson's poetry, as I saw it, this division was unsolved, as his poetry seemed to include both aspects of poetry. From this observation I expanded my research to include four leading figures of American poetry, even though Olson is still perhaps the dominating figure, and saw here a circulation from speech to language and vice versa, depending on the era and its demands.

Concerning language and its relation to politics, one essential question is how poets move from questions of method and creation to the ideas on politics and their role as political poets. On the basis of this study, it seems that ideas about language and poetics go hand in hand, and it is thus difficult to see which came first and how this shifting between spheres works. Certain analogies or parallels are possible to ascertain: in language poetry, the idea about language as system and web reflects the idea about politics as power relations and hegemonic structures; in speech poetry the idea of man as the center of poetry is mirrored in the ideas of politics an action within a republican framework. It is of course possible to use different styles and genres on a purely rhetorical basis, but that seems not to be the case for the poets under scrutiny in this research.

From an historical perspective, I saw that there has been demand for poetical renewal and a quest for new language particularly after great upheavals and crises in society. In American history that coincides with the poetical works I have analyzed, such watersheds have been Civil War, two World Wars, the Vietnam War, and 9/11. The Great Depression also coincides with the work of Ezra Pound.

For the first poet of my study, Walt Whitman, the essential problem as a writer and as politician lies in the problematic of identity and difference. Even if he celebrates the multiplicity of reality and plurality of the United States, he

seems to seek after a collecting figure that could, despite inner dividedness, melt all these aspects to an aesthetic unity.

Although he occasionally sees Lincoln as a collective figure, Whitman uses fiction and poetic language to achieve this; through it he creates a model that exemplifies the "plurality in unity". This dividedness and struggle to overcome it is manifest in his "root metaphor", the United States. As a concept referring to the reality of plurality, it shifts to the sphere of fiction after the Civil War as it ceases to be plural and becomes singular, from "are" to "is". The states "are" plural only in the name, but the United States "is" the collective metaphor for the unity of a nation.

In accord with development from plurality and contestation towards unity and unanimity, Whitman's poet-politician turns from agitator-fighter to a didactic and educator. Alongside this development, Whitman increasingly turns his attention towards nature and its processes. Language, and the nation, became natural entities as the battle had ceased.

Ezra Pound turns the fictional unity of the States to his own unifying vision of circulation. Even though Pound stresses action and the mimetic relation to reality in his poetical manifestos, preferring things over words, his political ideas seem to drive him more and more towards the opposite: his distaste for representational democracy, authoritative politics, and support for theories of monetary circulation on the basis of money without interest, turn to poetry that is supported by non-referential signs, authoritarian selection, and signifiers that refer only to other signifiers in a language play that turns constantly towards itself as source of confirmation. Only in his last Cantos, when he lets language loose, is authority discharged and language takes its natural path.

The third poet analyzed was Charles Olson, the poet of the Gloucester *polis*, who in his work tried to correct mistakes he saw Pound making. In Olson's poetry, we are faced with the peculiar vocabulary of city-planning, fishing industry, local politics, and navigation. Olson's metaphorical network, or root metaphors, center on the concepts of "space" and "movement"; Olson's figures move on an open field, in space that is created in mans encounter with it, but which also makes man as its reflection. His epic poem is created at this level of root metaphor, and, movement and space is dispersed into the whole poem as its supporting structure. These aspects of movement and space are present also in his methodological writings, thus creating all-encompassing meta-level of his writing. Of the poets in this work, Olson is also the only one to fully develop typography as part of the movement of his poem; the typewriter is an extension of expression with the meandering lines accentuating the kinetics of poems and also forcing reader's eyes to wander around page as the poem proceeds. Even though Olson uses documentary material and a setting in Gloucester as its starting point, the openness of his text also includes fictional elements; author selects, cuts, inverts, juxtaposes, and, in the end it creates his own reality that is set loose from the reality of the outside world.

This study has extensively discussed language poetry and its ideas about the politics of referent. The language poets critique of earlier writers and schools focuses on the primacy of language instead of speaking subject, that language, before being a process or event, is a system. To this effect they draw heavily on the European structuralist and post-structuralist philosophy. Their first target of criticism was poetry based on expression and speech.

As expressivist poetry starts from the subject, the physicality of writer, it is unquestionable that the "world of text" is already directed outside of the text, towards reality that is projected through the writing subject, the subject that already is within political sphere. However, as writing is itself a political activity, praxis, the element of fiction, virtuality and possibilities it opens to the political interpretations, tends to be left aside. Because of these limitations, expressivist poetry tends to stay within given vocabulary and given frames for political activity, it does not go as far in the politicization of language as could be possible.

Focusing on language and its referent, language poetry and its politics of the referent seemed to provide an alternative to speech poets' "naturalization of language". In chapter 2 I discussed some problems related to this approach. More poignant problems became apparent when putting focus on their poetical works, that is, on how language poets succeed in the practice of their poetical ideas.

In Ricoeur's terminology, as a diagnosis of political language, language poetry aims at the explanation and disclosure of new possibilities in language. It is up to the reader to decide whether this has direct political impact, and the shift from explanation to understanding is not clearly elaborated. This renders language poetry as impotent as political text. However, as has been presented throughout this study, to put language poets strictly in the camp of "systematists" is an over-statement and such uncompromising positions where speech is discarded entirely as basis of poetry were more prevalent at the early stage of the language poetry movement in 1970's.

Especially Charles Bernstein has since moved to a more mediating position. This is, as I see it, partly due to the problems that system-thinking causes to possibilities of acting politically. It has been one of the paradoxes of language poetry that despite stressing the politicality of their poetry they have remained outside the major political demonstrations of poets, especially when it comes to the "Poets Against War" –movement.

As is manifest in Bernstein's *Girly Man*, language poetry does not escape, and in the end does not even seek to escape, the political reality and political activity. Ricoeur's duality of reference, split reference, is there at work: even though basically fictional text, *Girly Man* is still in dialogue with realities of the present. The language it plays with in an ironic tone is already given, even though during the writing process it is fragmented and deconstructed. His machinery does not work on language alone.

I have been building a bridge from speech poetry to language poetry, and this bridging is especially present in the cases of Charles Olson and Charles

Bernstein. One could say their projects of anti-totalitarianisms are two sides of the same coin: totalitarianism lies in the hegemonic discourses, and for Olson getting rid of it starts from a man naked to language, as an expressive entity that starts from breathing, whereas for language poetry dissolving this totalitarian language and opening every particle of it is the starting point. Both aim at the same target but from different perspectives. The solutions provided for battling totalitarianism are time-bound; for Olson the problem was the closure of modernism that left the individual outside and thus subjected individual to the system, but for the language poet it was exactly opposite: hegemonic discourses worked behind the celebrated ego of the subject without him/her being aware of it. Language can be politicized starting from man, his experience of language, but also from language itself. Speech poetry and language poetry are thus at the same axis, moving to politization and redescription from opposite directions, one from existential position, the other from epistemological.

11 PS: "POST-LANGUAGE POETRY": WHAT NEXT?

In American poetry the division between language-oriented poetry and speech poetry has prevailed to some extent for last 100 years, or even more. The post-language poetry, a vaguely defined group that got its start in the 1990's, has been trying to break this dichotomy. In order to bring the threads together, this last section evaluates the importance and achievement of their poetical progress, in order to illuminate the possible futures for American political poetry, and also in order to summarize the arguments presented in this work.

As was shown in chapters on 9/11 poetry, expectations for a major poetical change were high in the aftermath of the attacks. However, as the language poetry is already 40 years old movement, expectations for a new movement, new style formed even before 9/11. For example, in 1998 Marjorie Perloff outlined some possible new paths for "post-language poetry":

> What can we expect of American poetry as we come to the end of the century? Judging from the poems here, we can anticipate (1) a return to narrative–but a highly fractured variant; (2) much less resistance to the lyric "I" as operative principle, (3) enormous care for the materiality of words; the look of language as well as to the asyntactic, disjunctive modes we have learned to expect from language poetry, and (4) a return to literary allusion, scorned in the seventies and eighties as too well-bred, together with a new interest in Beauty, the aesthetic, the pleasure of the text. It is an exciting moment for lyric poetry.[264]

It can be seen, that what Perloff anticipates, has been realized in many ways. The use of appropriative techniques is interesting also in the context of this work, and raises again the questions of subjectivity that were present in the schisms between Olson and the language poets. Of particular interest for this study are the ideas about new subjectivity. However, as can be seen when analyzing post-language poetry, much of the work had its seeds in the ruptures of language poetry and other earlier schools of poetry. In this the post-language poets do not differ from a trend mentioned earlier in this work, i.e. that new

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264   Perloff 1998, 182. Online version:
       http://marjorieperloff.com/articles/young-american-poets/

poetics seem to begin with what they see as a weak spot in their predecessors' work.

According to an essay written in 2008, Jennifer Ashton says that there are two trends in American poetry during past decade: "1) the popularity of appropriative techniques (e.g., collage, cross-outs, or—particularly relevant to this context—transcription) and 2) new imperatives to construct poems that appear to resist artifice, whether in the form of a commitment to sincerity, a lack of irony, a childlike innocence or wonder, artlessness, etc."[265].

The first point Ashton presents is familiar from the works discussed here. Re-creating texts from text, using different texts as tools for a new enactment on the basis of the older text, is specific for Olson. To some extent this would also apply to Pound, as his poetry consists partly of material he, as an orchestrator, gathers from multiple sources.

Mark Wallace has been one of the central figures in defining the "post-language poetry". The novelty of Wallace's endeavor lies still in theory, and is not much shown in his artistic work. His poetical work resembles Charles Bernstein's latest poetry, or vice-versa, as Wallace suggests. Wallace uses repetition, parody, irony and other means familiar for example from Bernstein's *Girly Man*. Just to take one example, an excerpt of his poem "Future" shows it would fit seamlessly in Girly Man:

In the future there will be less deadlines and they'll be easier to meet.

In the future, all pollution will contain its own self-cleaning element.

In the future, if your house burns down, you'll have another house by the time you get home.

In the future, your insurance policy will actually pay.

In the future, your friends won't talk so constantly about everything they think they should already have.

In the future, no good deed will go unrewarded.

In the future people will like you just for who you are.

In the future, everyone will have their own sky marshal.

In the future, fires and floods made worse by ecologically damaging overpopulation will lead to photo-ops for everyone.[266]

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265   Ashton 2008.
266   Online poem: http://www.openlettersmonthly.com/future-poem-mark-wallace/

It is not then surprising that Wallace sees post-language poetry as a continuation of the project of language poetry. In his view, even though language poetry and post-language poetry share many theoretical ideas about the politics of grammar and the production of language, the specific novelty in post-language poetry is its disrespect of any boundaries. Post-language poetry does not see any literary form as not worth trying, and the importance of this lies in "the extension of key questions asked by the language poets into areas that the language poets were not interested in"[267].

When using elements which language poets rejected, post-language poetry becomes a "hybrid", it has no defined form, and it resists all definitions as well, moving from genre to genre, and even using lyric elements. Wallace argues that "in both this hybridity and resistance to definition, postlanguage poetry also remains a consciously critical poetry, one unwilling to accept either the norms of the surrounding culture or of previous generations of poets."[268] This evasion of any definition makes it practically impossible to put the post-language poets under the same umbrella. [269] Post-language poetry is more characterized by what it is not than what it is; and it becomes, as Wallace puts it, "dangerously close to being an oxymoron".

Post-language poetry could be seen as an example of what Harold Bloom once called "the anxiety of influence". This tendency to define ones poetry in terms of its difference from its predecessors has been, as I have shown in this study, prevalent in American poetry, and very often the definition has been made on political grounds. This was obviously the case with the Pound-Olson axis, but it can be seen also in the arguments between language poets and speech poets, as in the heated conversation between Amiri Baraka and Barret Watten referred to earlier in section 2.4.

As one of the post-language poets, Kenneth Goldsmith bases his poetry on his own bodily actions, his work is a recording or copying of material without residual, or even creativity.[270] What Goldsmith does is to retype a newspaper in its entirety. This is paradoxical in a sense that the work he does is put his self to work, work is his actions, but it is done without any creativity, emotions of the self are completely irrelevant to the work. This effort echoes the themes presented by Olson in which the typewriter is as an extension of working poet, but it also is reminiscent of language poets' criticism of the commodification of language.

From the epistemological point of view, post-language poetry is going back to Olson and Whitman. In a constructive sense for the post-language poets, the poet is the measure and source of all things, both as an organizer and

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267 Interview of Mark Wallace. Online: http://www.flashpointmag.com/postlang.htm
268 Ibid.
269 Multiplicity of styles in post-language poetry can be noted for example in poems by Rod Smith, a collection of which can be found online at: http://www.sibila.com.br/index.php/sibila-english/1321-poems-by-and-an-interview-with-rod-smith . Smith uses often physical elements of language, but occasionally they change shape and lyrical images unfold.
270 Goldsmith 2000.

collector of information and as a spectator of an artwork. In this sense they also open new possibilities for more politically active poetry, in that they bring back the political subject necessary to act politically, but do this without reference to natural language or the assumption of one's own, privately owned language.

The play of subjectivity is at work also in what has been termed "Google-based poetry" by Ashton, where randomly selected search results are used as material for poetry. The phrases used to find material are personal, based, as for example in the case of Katie Degentesh, on psychological evaluation tools. The material selected is itself also personal, but it is not identified and is not the poets' self-expression, except by way of selection. When compared to language poetry, one essential thing lacking in both "Google poetry" and work done by Goldsmith is the idea of an audience or reader participation. Degentesh collects material that seems based on overhearing Goldsmith as he urges us "imagine a book that is written with the intention not to be read". In that sense, as Ashton puts it, as poetic techniques these are aiming at the "purest form of Romantic unselfconsciousness", a technique that eliminates the possibility of insincerity.

For both Degentesh and Goldsmith the process of poetry is, in their representation of it, not an act of creation but doing. Poetry is what a poet does, and it does not necessitate a creative part but claims that "this is poetry". It is not surprising that Goldsmith has been especially interested in the work of Marcel Duchamp. For Goldmith, Duchamp's ready-mades and urinals represent an urge towards art that generates thinking that proceed outside the object, in opposition to absorptive art that keeps the viewers' focus on the artwork.

As Goldsmith via his strange projects presents, it is the body beyond language that writes. According to Goldsmith, his use of transcription is designed to make creative or innovative acts indistinguishable from the most mechanical and commonplace. He writes: "On Friday, September 1, 2000 I began retyping the day's New York Times, word for word, letter for letter, from the upper left hand corner to the lower right hand corner, page by page. Today, November 10, 2000, I am approximately half way through the project. I intend to finish by New Year's Day". The aim of his project of "extreme process writing," is "recording every move my body has made in a day, recording every word I spoke over the course of a week, recording every sound I heard ending in the sound of 'r' for almost four years,", and thus, "to be as uncreative in the process as possible."[271]

What is especially noteworthy when analyzing post-language poetry is that it is, like politics, a time bound phenomenon. Like Whitman, Pound, Olson, Bernstein and Baraka, post-language poets try in their poetics and politics to answer the specific questions of their own time. Basically the problems they see are often similar to those of their predecessors, but that does not necessary mean their answer would be anything similar. How they see the position of the subject in their poetics also reveals a lot of their politics; adherents of

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271   Kenneth Goldsmith (undated): "Uncreativity as Creative Practice". Online:
      http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/goldsmith/uncreativity.html

participatory democracy set reader participation at the center of their poetics; whereas in the Poundian sphere that relies on authority both in politics and poetics, the reader is left entirely outside the circles of language. What hybrid nature of post-language poetry may diagnose is the hybrid nature of present day political subjectivity.

In terms of political participation, we may perhaps witness a new beginning for political poetry. Even though post 9/11 poetry has been judged to concentrate on the private self, private mourning, its newly put stress on authorship, the writing subject, may lead poetry out of the ivory towers created by language poets. Symptomatic of this is that as much as language poets have disagreed with speech poets, they have not refrained from showing their contempt for post-language poets either. Ron Silliman, for example, has called one strand of post-language poetry in a purposefully irksome manner as "school of quietism"[272].

What is perhaps most interesting, and I would argue politically the aspect with the most potential for "new" in post-language poetry, besides its take on subjectivity, is in its declination of "new". In Kenneth Goldsmith's peculiar formulation: "Like kids at a touch table, we're delighted to feel language again, to roll in it, to get our hands dirty. With so much available language, does anyone really need to write more? Instead, let's just process what exists. Language as matter; language as material."[273]

As presented also in this work, the tendency in the American poetic canon has been writing against instead of in support of poet predecessors, and especially in the modernist era the "newness" became a slogan-like expression. New was programmatic and often connected with nationalistic ideas of Americanism and its "new" configurations, new forms or an urge for new forms appearing especially after a major crisis in society. Although often manifestly against binary oppositions, the dividing line between "new" and "old" seems to be the basis of poetry also in both the canon of creating and of literary criticism. This ontological assumption of the primacy of "new" is prevalent also in language poetry, so a shift to "post" of it may indeed mean a poetical change.

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272 Ron Silliman, in his blog in 22.4.2009:
http://ronsilliman.blogspot.com/2009/04/note-that-appeared-in-my-comments.html
273 Goldsmith 2009.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Poliittinen runous on ilmiönä monitahoinen: se ulottuu suorasukaisista hallitsi-joiden ylistysrunoista aina monimutkaisiin kirjallisiin pohdintoihin kielen ole-muksesta. Runoudella on kielen perustaa luotaavana ilmiönä väistämättä intii-mi suhde politiikkaan, joka on pohjimmiltaan kielellinen ilmiö. Percy Shelley totesikin jo 1800-luvulla runoilijoiden olevan "maailman tunnustamattomia lainsäätäjiä".

Tässä tutkimuksessa ilmiötä on tarkasteltu Yhdysvaltalaisen poliittisen runouden kautta. Tutkimuksen kohteena olevat runoilijat, Walt Whitman, Ezra Pound, Charles Olson ja Charles Bernstein edustavat taiteellisesti korkeatasoista ja haasteellista runoutta. Poliittisuus heidän runoudessaan on luettavissa esiin sekä kielellisistä strategioista, että sisällön tasolla.

Kielellisenä ilmiönä poliittinen runous pelaa runoudelle ominaisilla kei-noilla luoden jännitteisen suhteen runon kielen ja kielen viittaussuhteiden välil-le. Runon suhde todellisuuteen on yksi pohdinnan lähtökohdista tarkasteltaessa runouden mahdollista poliittisuutta. Tässä tutkimuksessa on teoreettisena läh-tökohtana käytetty Paul Ricoeurin huomioita kielen ja sen figuurien suhteesta todellisuuteen. Hänen näkemyksensä mukaan runokuvilla, esimerkiksi metafo-rilla on "kahdentunut" referenssi. Tällöin kieli viittaa kahdentuneesti ensin me-taforan kirjalliseen luentaan, ja tämän kautta merkin suhteeseen todellisuuteen. Siten runollinen kieli ei ole vapaa referentiaalisuudesta, vaikka itseensä viittaa-vuutta onkin pidetty eräänä runokielen ominaislaatuna, tai jopa sen määritel-mänä. Kahdentuminen mahdollistaa kielellä pelaamisen, ja todellisuussuhteen ollessa "höllentynyt" kahdentumisen kautta se avaa myös mahdollisuuksia va-paammin tutkia sekä kielen että siinä luodun todellisuuskuvan eri ulottuvuuk-sia.

Huomattavaa on myös, että vaikka katsottaisiinkin runokielen olevan pel-kästään itseensä viittaavaa, ei tämä tee siitä poliittisessakaan mielessä merki-tyksetöntä: nostaessaan esille uusia näkökulmia kieleen ja siten muuttaessaan käsityksiämme siitä, runous muokkaa samalla myös sitä miten ympäröivä maa-ilma käsitteellistetään ja esitetään kielessä.

Työssä käsitellyt runoilijat voidaan jakaa karkeasti kahteen ryhmään: ru-noutta kielen kautta lähestyviin, ja heihin joille lähtökohta on ilmaisu ja pu-heenomaisuus. Tällä jaottelulla on myös poliittiset implikaationsa.

Kiinnittäessään huomionsa toimijaan ja kielen toimintaan, puhuntaan, puherunouden luonnollinen väylä on kohden poliittista osallistumista ja tämä tyyli onkin tavannut kiinnittyä poliittiselta kannaltaan republikanistisiin näke-myksiin poliittisesta toiminnasta. Kansalaisten poliittinen osallistuminen on sille usein itsestäänselvyys, ja erilaisten protestiliikkeiden kautta tämän koulu-kunnan runoilijat ovat usein myös voimakkaasti poliittisesti sitoutuneita. Ru-nouden ja poliittisen sitoutumisen välillä ei heille ole väistämätöntä ristiriitaa.

Kielirunouden kohdentaessa huomionsa kielen rakenteisiin ja siihen miten kieli ohjaa lukijaa ja kirjoittajaa, jää se poliittisen toimijuuden suhteen etäiseksi

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systeemin kritiikiksi, osallistuminen poliittiseen prosessiin esimerkiksi sodan vastaisissa protestiliikkeissä on sen näkökulmasta jo lähtökohtaisesti virhe, sillä tällöin on jo väistämättä tehty kompromisseja sen suhteen kenen vokabulaaria käytetään ja miten ilmaisu rakentuu. Oleellisempaa on kielen ja sen rakenteiden diagnoosi.

Työssä todetaan, että runokieli ja muutokset siinä, ovat aikaan sidottuja. Käsiteltyjen runoilijoiden työssä heijastuu paitsi se, mikä on poliittinen tilanne ja millaisten ongelmien kanssa poliittinen järjestelmä painiskelee, myös se, miten edeltäjät ovat hahmottaneet tilanteen. Pyrkiessään luomaan omaa runokieltään, tässä käsitellyt runoilijat ovat suurelta osin lähteneet liikkeelle siitä, mitkä ovat olleet edeltävän koulukunnan keskeisimmät ongelmat: Pound pyrki eroon Whitmanin naturalismista kohti modernimpaa, kuvakieleen perustuvaa ilmaisua; Olson Poundin totalitaarisesta ajattelusta ja kielestä kohti demokraattisempaa ilmaisua; ja Bernstein muiden kielirunoilijoiden tapaan puherunouden kielellisestä "naivismista" kielen rakenteiden ja siihen piilotettujen hegemonisten suhteiden diagnoosiin ja purkamiseen.

Huomionarvoista on myös se, että suurten yhteiskunnallisten kriisien keskellä tarve uuden ilmaisutavan kehittämiseen näyttäisi kasvavan, ja tämä näyttäytyy vaatimuksena uuden runokielen luomiseksi. Ilmiö näyttäisi olleen yhdysvaltalaisessa runoudessa esillä myös 9/11 – terrori-iskujen jälkeen. 2000-luvun runoudessa on uutena ilmiönä noussut esille myös Internetin ja tietotekniikan käyttö ilmaisun välineenä. Välineellinen muutos lienee toistaiseksi ilmaisun murroksista keskeisin. Puherunouden ja kielirunouden välinen ristiriita sitä vastoin on tässä tutkittujen toimijoiden osalta, esimerkiksi Bernsteinin runoudessa, sitä vastoin liudentunut, ja vaikka suhde poliittiseen toimijuuteen onkin säilynyt kriittisenä, on havaittavissa kasvava kiinnostus siihen miten runouden kieli on paitsi diagnostisoivaa, myös ilmaisumuotojen perustaa luova ilmiö ja siten politiikan suhteen vähintään proto-poliittista. Runous ei ole poliittisen toiminnan muoto, vaan "poliittisen ajattelun edellytys", "runous on politiikan alku", kuten Bernstein toteaa.

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